Written by JOE LoTEMPLIO, Staff Writer
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PLATTSBURGH — A new chamberlain has been hired for the City of Plattsburgh.Richard A. Marks, 55, was appointed at Thursday night's Common Council meeting to replace Cynthia Lasher-Graham, who retired last month.

"I'm originally from Pittsburgh, Pa., but I've been in Plattsburgh since 1973, and this is my home, and I want to do a good job for the city," Marks told the council after his appointment.

Marks comes to the city from Northern Parts and Service. He also worked for 16 years at Graymont Materials Inc., and before that, at the former Harris Corp. in Champlain.

He worked for the U.S. Olympic Committee in Lake Placid from 1977 to 1980 in preparation for the 1980 Winter Olympic Games.

Marks initially came to Plattsburgh as a member of the U.S. Air Force stationed at Plattsburgh Air Force Base. He has two degrees from Plattsburgh State.

"A lot of people suggested I get involved when the position came open, and I thought the least I could do is help reduce property taxes, including my own, by organizing the finance office and making it more efficient," Marks said.

He officially started his new job Friday. His salary was set at $92,800.

The city is in the midst of financial hard times, with a deficit of about $1 million in the fund balance.

Taxpayers were forced to absorb a 35-percent tax-levy increase in 2006 and were facing a similar increase for 2007.

Councilors trimmed about $1 million from the 2007 budget proposal to reduce the tax-levy increase to 14.35 percent.

A lot of focus is expected to be on the chamberlain's position as the city continues to try to straighten out its finances.

Marks was confident, saying that although he hails from the private sector, municipal accounting basically follows the same principles.

"In the private sector, you work for the owners of the company; here, the owners are the taxpayers, but you still want to serve the owners by making sure things are done properly, reported properly and accurately."

Marks was one of three finalists who were interviewed for the job. He was chosen by a committee that included Mayor Donald Kasprzak, City Clerk Keith Herkalo and Councilor Amy Valentine (D-Ward 5). A total of 12 people applied initially.

"I am confident that you will do a good job, and I expect the department heads and the staff will work well with you," the mayor told Marks.