IS A CITY MANAGER WORTH $800,000?

Bell isn’t a big town, or a wealthy one. But some of its top officials are paid two or three times as much as their counterparts elsewhere.

Jeff Gottlieb and Ruben Vives

Bell, one of the poorest cities in Los Angeles County, pays its top officials some of the highest salaries in the nation, including nearly $800,000 annually for its city manager, according to documents reviewed by The Times.

In addition to the $110,637 salary of Chief Administrative Officer Robert Rizzo, Bell pays Police Chief Randy Adams $475,000 a year, about 50% more than Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck or Los Angeles County Sheriff Lee Baca and more than double New York City’s police commissioner. Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia makes $319,358 annually, more than most city managers.

Top officials have routinely received hefty annual raises in recent years. Rizzo’s contract calls for 12% raises each July; the same as his top deputy, according to documents obtained under the California Public Records Act.

Rizzo, who has run Bell’s day-to-day civic affairs since 1990, was unapologetic about his salary.

“Hike that a number... people choke on, maybe I’m in the wrong business,” he said. “I could go into private business and make that money. This council has compensated me for the job I’ve done.”

Spaccia agreed, adding: “I would have to argue you get what you pay for.”

Bell Mayor Oscar Hernandez defended the salaries. “Our city is one of the best in the area. That is the result of the city manager. It’s not because I say it. It’s because my community says it.”

Source: Contracts between Rizzo and Bell

Robert Rizzo’s salary history as Bell’s chief administrative officer

- 1998: $156,000
- 1999: $173,000
- 2000: $179,200
- 2001: $184,000
- 2002: $249,900
- 2003: $256,000
- 2004: $262,000
- 2005: $442,000
- 2006: $475,000
- 2007: $540,000
- 2008: $558,000
- 2009: $577,637
- 2010: $787,637
Hernandez and other council members said the city was near bankruptcy when Rizzo came aboard 17 years ago. Since then, they said, he has put Bell on sound financial footing, with its general fund nearly tripling to about $35 million.

"Our streets are cleaner, we have lowly parks, better lighting throughout the area, our community is better," Hernandez said. "These things just don't happen, they happen because he had a vision and made it happen."

Bell made headlines in recent weeks when the city of $7,000 agreed to take over operations of the neighboring city of Maywood, which fired most of its employees and disbanded its police department when it could not obtain insurance.

Located about 10 miles southeast of downtown Los Angeles, Bell has a population that is about 96% Latino and 6% foreign-born. Its per capita income is about half that for the U.S.

Experts in city government said they were amazed at the salaries the city pays, particularly Rizzo's. "I have not heard anything close to that number in terms of compensation or salary," said Dave Mora, West Coast regional director of the International City/County Management Assn., and a retired city manager.

By comparison, Manhattan Beach, a far wealthier city with about 7,000 fewer people, pays its most recent city manager $207,484 a year. The city manager of Long Beach, with a population close to 396,000, earns $205,000 annually. Los Angeles County Chief Executive Officer William T. Fujioka makes $338,648.

The salaries do not appear to violate any laws, said Dave Demerjian, head of the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Public Integrity Division.

State law governs how much city council members can be paid, but not the amounts that council members decide to pay administrators, Demerjian said.

The district attorney is investigating Bell over the hefty compensation of its City Council members — about $36,000 a year for part-time positions. Normally, council members in a city the size of Bell would be paid about $400 a month, Demerjian said.

The council has increased its compensation by paying members for serving on a variety of city agencies, including the Community Redevelopment Agency, the Community Housing Authority, the Planning Commission, the Public Financing Authority, the Surplus Property Authority and the Solid Waste and Recycling Authority.

Demerjian said city records show each council member receives $7,873.55 per month for sitting on those boards.

Records indicate the boards of those agencies perform little work and that board meetings take place during council meetings, though the names of some of the agencies seldom appear.

In some years, the council would hold separate meetings for those agencies, and they would sometimes last no more than a minute. On July 21, 2004, four agencies each met for one minute. On March 3, 2008, the redevelopment agency meeting was called to order at 7:21 p.m. and adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

Councilman Luis Artiga, who was appointed to the council 10 months ago to fill an unexpired term, said he had no idea how much he would be paid. When he received his first check, he thought it was "a miracle from God."

Artiga, who is pastor of Bell Community Church, said he uses about half his salary to pay the church's mortgage.

Rizzo received his bachelor's degree from UC Berkeley and a master's in public administration from Cal State East Bay.

Council members hired Rizzo in 1995 from the High Desert city of Hesperia as an interim chief administrative officer with a starting salary of $72,000 a year. By September 2004, he was being paid $106,000 a year. Ten months later, his salary jumped 47% to $142,000.

His salary continued climbing to $126,000 a year until July 1, 2008, when Rizzo received his usual salary increase and signed an addendum to his contract that gave him a 9% raise in September and guaranteed 12% increases each July.

His last raise was $84,381.36. Next July, he will receive a $40,581 pay hike.

Rizzo defended his salary and that of his staff and the
Mayor Oscar Hernandez says Bell’s finances and general livability have turned around since Robert Rizzo took over as city administrator in 2003.

However, according to their contracts, Rizzo, Spacca and Adams can be reimbursed for their expenses. Bell council members are also eligible for reimbursements as board members of several city commissions, according to city resolutions.

Adams, who said he spent $6,000 of his own money to buy furniture for his office, was hired after retiring as the police chief in Glendale. His salary of $238,304 more than doubled when he took the job in Bell.

Spacca was hired July 1, 2003, at $91,393. A year later, she was making $230,003. She currently earns $276,853 and gets the same 15% annual increases as Rizzo.

Spacca has been on leave since February while serving as acting city manager for Bell’s troubled neighbor Maywood, with her salary being paid by Bell’s taxpayers.

“We have a neighbor in trouble,” said Rizzo, a short heavy-set man with reddish-brown hair. “If your neighbor’s yard is messed up, it brings down your property values. Is it a unique situation? Definitely.”

On top of his salary, Rizzo recently received an added boost — the council voted to give him an extra week’s vacation. He now gets five weeks.

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### A look at Bell

- **Population**: 36,567
- **Area**: 2.55 square miles
- **Ethnicity**: Latino 90.7%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Data</th>
<th>Bell</th>
<th>L.A. Co.</th>
<th>Calif.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Foreign-born residents</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents 25+ with less than high school diploma</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: U.S. Census, 2000; U.S. Census estimates 2004-2008

Graphics reporting by Barbara Pannofino

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### Police officials’ salaries

- **Bell Police Chief Randy Adams** $457,000
- **Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck** $307,000
- **L.A. County Sheriff Lee Baca** $294,183
- **New York Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly** $265,940
- **Manhattan Beach Police Chief Red Uyeda** $178,398

### Government officials’ salaries

- **Bell City Manager Robert Rizzo** $787,037
- **President Barack Obama** $400,000
- **Los Angeles County Chief Executive William T Fujioka** $338,458
- **Los Angeles City Administrative Officer Miguel Santana** $254,803
- **Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa** $232,425
- **Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi** $223,500
- **Dana Point City Manager Douglas Chorkey** $201,483
- **Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger** $173,997
- **Speaker of the Assembly John A. Pérez** $203,564

Source: Times reporting
LOOKING FOR PAYBACK

A special meeting of the Bell City Council got off to a rocky start Thursday. Danny Garcia, one of the city’s resident council members, was told that the City Council’s meeting on the controversial issue of city salaries would be closed to the public.

336 voters opened Bell’s wallet

Tiny turnout approved change allowing city to avoid state salary limits.

JEFF GOTTLIEB

The highly paid members of the Bell City Council were able to avoid state salary caps by placing a city charter on the ballot in a little-noticed special election that attracted fewer than 400 voters.

Since passage of the measure, salaries for council members — part-time employees — have jumped more than 80%, from $86,992 a year to at least $89,996. The Los Angeles County district attorney has opened an inquiry into whether the salaries are lawful.

A state law enacted in 2009 limits the pay of council members in “general law” cities, a category that includes most cities in Southern California. That law was passed in reaction to the high salaries that leaders in South Gate had bestowed on themselves earlier in the decade.

But the year that law passed, the Bell City Council authorized a special election with only one item on the ballot — a measure calling for Bell to convert to a “charter” city.

The move was billed as one that would give the city more local control. The ballot language included no mention of the effect the change would have on council members’ salaries.

All five council members signed the ballot statement...
CITY HALL: Angie Rivers walks with nephew Nikolai De Anda near Bell City Hall. Many residents of the city of 40,000 people are angry about the high salaries paid to City Council members and city officials.

The salaries paid by Bell have prompted growing scrutiny after The Times last week revealed that top city administrators were receiving high compensation. In addition to Rioz, the assistant city manager and the police chief both earn far more than their counterparts in most other cities.

The charter measure, passed in 1993, with the vote in favor amounting to less than 1% of the city's population of roughly 40,000. The majority of the ballots, 259, were absentee votes. The special election cost Bell $410,000 to $60,000, city officials said.

Some council members insisted that the ballot measure was not motivated by a desire to increase salaries— but did not cite any other ways the charter changed how Bell did business.

"The idea of a charter is to give it some independence," said then-Mayor and current Councilman George Mirabal. "It enabled us to create our own vision for the future. That was the line on it then and now."

David DeMerjian, who heads the D.A.'s Public Integrity Division, expressed skepticism about that position. "What explanation is there for why the city becomes a charter city?" he asked. "Becoming a charter certainly would give them the opportunity not to comply with that statute."

Former Councilman Belo said, "The way I understood it, we would have better control of governing ourselves. We were told we would make a little more money, but I didn't know we were going to get that much money."

Records show that Bell, who resigned from the council last year, has continued to be paid for sitting on four city boards. According to resolutions the council approved in June 2008, commissioners must be council members.

Assemblyman Hector De La Torre (D-South Gate), who wrote the state law limiting council members' pay, said he did so because of the surreptitious pay raises he had seen in his city.

"Then to go ahead and find out, once a month, I find out a couple months later, Bell is doing an end run around it," he said. "The timing of this is clearly suspect." De La Torre's bill was signed into law by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Sept. 6, 2005, and it became law Jan. 1, 2006.

State law sets the limit on council pay for a city with Bell's population at $400 a month and limits the amount of money council members can receive for sitting on boards and commissions to $100 a month for each board.

Bell's charter says its City Council members are to receive the same salaries as their counterparts in general-law cities of the same for serving on the council.

But the City Charter bypasses the limits that state law would impose on pay for boards and commissions. Bell council members receive the bulk of their salaries as payments for sitting on the Planning Commission, the Burplus Property Authority, the Public Finance Authority, and the Solid Waste and Recycling Authority, at least $7,751.50 monthly.

City minutes indicate that those boards do little work.

Board meetings in Bell are supposed to take place during council meetings, although their names seldom appear in council minutes. When the boards held separate meetings, they sometimes lasted a minute.

"That's why I wanted to limit it," De La Torre said. "That whole point of it was to say you couldn't pay ridiculous sums of money for going in and saying 'aye' and leaving."

De La Torre estimated that if Bell were not a charter city, its council members would be paid $30,000 to $35,000 a year. In a letter responding to questions from DeMerjian, Bell Assistant City Attorney William Priest, of the firm Best, Best and Krieger, said the city was following its charter requiring council pay.

"The charter imposes no such limits with respect to their compensation for their service as members of the city's other commissions and boards," Priest wrote.

The council members said in their arguments in favor of Measure A that the state had taken $80 million in tax revenues from Bell over the previous 15 years.

Jeff Gottlieb at latimes.com Times staff writer Roben Viven contributed to this report.
BELL’S MONEY FLOWED UPHILL

While top officials drew big checks, the city cut jobs and spending on police and other services.

KIM CHRISTENSEN, SCOTT GOLDE AND HECTOR RECERRA

At the same time that top Bell officials were receiving salaries, receiving the largest municipal salaries in the nation, the city cut spending on police, social services and parks and recreation, according to interviews and records reviewed by The Times.

While City Manager Robert Rizzo was receiving more than $1 million a year, Rosario Torres was laid off from her $40-an-hour job preparing children for kindergarten.

“They tell you they don’t have the money to pay you, and you think ‘OK, I understand, they just don’t have the money,’” Torres said. “But I never imagined they were making so much money themselves. It’s incredible.”

The cuts underscored the way Bell handled its finances in recent years. City officials have defended high salaries, saying his leadership allowed Bell to avoid many of the cuts and financial problems faced amid the recession.

Rizzo told The Times earlier this month that Police Chief Randy Adams was brought in to turn around a department riddled with problems. The city had enough money to pay Adams $407,000 a year, yet it had earlier reduced funding for officer training, such as quarterly sessions at the firing range.

Details of the cuts came from interviews from Bell’s Comprehensive Financial Report for fiscal year 2009, the latest available.

The report shows that community services, including social services and recreation programs, were cut by 29%, or $953,438, while public safety was cut by $238,409. Police training was whittled by 69%.

The salaries of Rizzo, Adams and Assistant City Manager Angela Sporita are equal to about 3% of Bell’s $15.6-million general fund budget.

The report provides a less rosy picture of Bell’s finances than the one city officials have offered in recent weeks. While Bell has a balanced budget, it has also faced significant belt-tightening.

Mayor Oscar Hernandez has defended Rizzo’s salary, citing “15 years of balanced budgets” and the transformation of Bell into a “model of financial prudence.”

Earlier this month, in an interview before the recall broke, Hernandez, Rizzo and Councilman Luis Artiga boasted about the city’s services, parks and sound financial footing. Rizzo said that half-time employees had been laid off and that there were no furloughs.

Gilbert Jara, head of the Bell Police Officers Assn., said the budget cuts included layoffs of some nonsworn employees, and have had other ill effects.

“Every year we are supposed to update our training,” Jara said. “It has now gotten down to where they give us a CD to watch and say, ‘OK, that’s your training. We watch a CD for three or four hours and that’s it.’

Officers are supposed to get quarterly firing-range training but ‘we’re lucky to get there once a year,’ he said.

Many of the department’s 24 authorized positions are left permanently vacant, he said, and officers drive patrol cars with ‘like 200,000 miles on them.’

Jara said Adams seemed more interested in forming a multi-city police authority in southeastern Los Angeles County than in fixing the department he was hired to run last July.

Bell officials’ high salaries, which include $525,000 a year for Sporita and about $800,000 each for all but one of the part-time City Council members, shocked city workers and just about everyone else in town when The Times reported the figures earlier this month.

The ensuing public outcry prompted the resignations last week of Rizzo, Adams and Sporita, and sparked calls for the ouster of Hernandez and three of his fellow council members.

Only Councilman Lorenzo Velásquez, who is paid a fraction of what his colleagues get, has clueded public scorn.

Rosario Torres said she wasn’t surprised when she was laid off in December 2008. The city had been axing workers and cutting programs for children and adults, she said.

“Torrés had been working in a Parks and Recreation program preparing children for kindergarten for about a year when she and several other part-timers were laid off,” he said.

“Se she said they just didn’t have the money to pay us,” Torres said. “There was no other explanation.”

Miguel Sanchez, 33, worked for Parks and Recreation from September 2004 to December 2008, when he and more than a dozen other workers were laid off due to budget cuts, he said.

Sanchez said he earned about $18.50 per hour. He bused kids to and from school, taught basic computer classes and worked at the Bell Community Center on Pine Avenue. Most days, he ran a youth soccer program at Woodlawn Elementary School.

Between 20 and 79 children attended the program depending on the time of year, he said, and were offered a variety of programs, including help with homework and arts and crafts.

Just before Christmas 2008, City Hall eliminated the program and two others. A supervisor asked Sanchez to return to Woodlawn after the holidays to break the news to the children.

“I refused,” he said. “I didn’t have the heart to tell the kids.”

In 2005, at the age of 80, Del Villanueva accepted a job at Bell City Hall to do maintenance at city parks and help run the after-school program at Woodlawn.

The job paid a little over $9 an hour, but “there was a lot of satisfaction” and “parts of the job that were worth a lot more than money,” he said.

“It was very greatly needed,” he said. “You have to understand the basics. It’s a very important thing in a kid’s life.”

Like Sanchez, Villanueva lost his job when the program was cut.

About the same time, the city scaled back other recreation programs, including a baseball league and city-sponsored cheerleading program.

Carlos Parra, 43, said he took a squad of about 10 girls and turned it into a thriving cheerleading program of 40. The Bell Sapphireas traveled from San Diego to Los Vegas and won championships for the city, Parra said.

On Christmas Day in 2008, Parra learned that he was to be laid off.

“It makes me sad, and mad,” he said. “I live alone, a single person, I have to pay my rent. I’m barely making it through life — and they’re sitting on their butt making all that money.”

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Times staff writer Jeff Ochtimb and Paloma Rodriguez contributed to this report.

Bell’s budget

Change in Bell general fund expenditures and Robert Rizzo’s salary from fiscal year 2007-08 to fiscal year 2008-09:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
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<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
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<tr>
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<td>$15.6M</td>
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* Includes general government expenses and expenses for public safety, community services and public works. Includes capital outlay and debt service.

Source: Bell annual financial report, PT 2008-09

** $822,880

** $1,000,000

** $407,000

** $525,000
Rizzo’s horse had come in

Some who worked with him in Bell and elsewhere over the years came to know him as a calculating risk-taker.

**Paul Pfeiffer, Corina Knoll**

**AND KIM MURPHY**

The lifestyle that Robert Rizzo enjoyed during his run as Bell city manager included a stable full of thoroughbreds, among them a gelding named Depenser Calderf — French for "spend money." And Rizzo had plenty to spend, with an annual compensation package that swelled to $1.3 million in one of Los Angeles County’s poorest cities.

Rizzo, who resigned last month after The Times disclosed his base salary of nearly $800,000, had field title to about three dozen horses since his pay began soaring, according to thoroughbred industry databases.

He conducted his racing business through at least three firms he launched and bought a $900,000 ranch in 2004 in Auburn, Wash., southeast of Seattle, a getaway from his similarly valued horse in Huntington Beach, state and county records show.

Today, his devotion to the pari-mutuel game helps bring into focus the man people say they came to know — the calculating risk-taker who has become a poster boy for government excesses.

Rizzo himself remains defiant, saying he did nothing wrong. On a recent morning at his ranch, he sought to justify his salary — the subject of civil and criminal investigations — by remarking that although it might look astounding, it wasn’t so dramatic, considering the length of service.

"Yeah, the money went bad," he said. "But when you think about it, the 17 years I been there, that’s $250,000 a year."

Some former and current Bell officials and business leaders, many of whom had heard only rumors about Rizzo’s equine sideline, say he increasingly displayed the manner and habits of a high-rolling horse player, with a weakness for Cadillacs, expensive cigars and alcohol.

"I always thought he was living beyond his means the last two or three years," said Bell Chamber of Commerce President Ricardo Gonzalez. "All of a sudden, this was a person I didn’t know."

Bell was the second posting that ended under a cloud for Rizzo. He left his previous job managing Hesperia after City Council members accused him of funneling city improvement funds to salaries, according to a former city official who requested anonymity for fear of alienating ex-colleagues. Local news reports also said he and other officials might have abused their city credit cards.

But that was 11 years ago and Rizzo, who had denied the allegations in Hesperia, began to maintain a lower profile in Bell. Colleagues say he was shy to the point of reclusiveness, hugging the wall at business mixers and avoiding speaking engagements.

Over time, by providing large salaries and other perquisites to his allies, Rizzo gambled that his huge paydays would never come under harsh scrutiny, said people who have worked with him.

With Rizzo at the helm, four of the five current City Council members were paid just under $300,000 a year for part-time duties; Police Chief Randy Adams made $452,000; and Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia pulled down $375,000.

Rizzo’s attorney, James Spertus, said finding his client for the salaries and perks that he and the others received is unfair because the council approved them.

"This wasn’t a Rob Rizzo fad," Spertus said.

Like Rizzo, Adams and Spaccia had lucrative benefits packages. In addition, Rizzo signed city documents that authorized loans to Spaccia and dozens of other employees, in amounts that exceeded $300,000 in some cases.

Interim Bell City Atty. Jamie Chase said his office is investigating the legality of the loans. He said he has yet to find any records that verify that the council had approved the loans or the salaries.

Under Rizzo’s leadership, in circumstances that are unclear, the city bought property owned by Mayor cree Hernandez and a social services organization headed by former Councilman George Cole, who is known as the political "go-between" of Bell, city and county records show.

Bell also paid $4.6 million last year for an auto parts store owned by another ex-councilman and power broker, Pete Wurdell, who said the city got a good price, based on offers he received from retail developers.

In 2006, Bell spent more than $1 million on a law firm that employed Rizzo’s soon-to-be-second wife, attorney Eugenia Chang, during three months of that year, city records show. And he had a horse-owning partnership with Dennis Torrano, a private contractor who serves as Bell’s planning director, according to racetrack filings.

Torrano did not return calls from The Times.

In short and round, the 66-year-old Rizzo took to quoting tough-guy lines from "The Sopranos," and tolerated no challenges to his
HUNTINGTON BEACH: Rizzo owns this home, in Mureh, he was arrested in the city on suspicion of drunk driving. Police say he had a blood-alcohol level of 0.26%. He has pleaded not guilty.

AUBURN, WASH.: Rizzo also owns this 30-acre horse ranch outside Seattle, which he bought in 1994 for $500,000. The property has an elegant main house and well-groomed paddocks.

expanding authority at City Hall, Bell insiders say.

"He likes to be in control," said former Councilman Victor Belo, who told of quarreling with Rizzo over the Werfien deal and other matters before stepping down last year.

"You don't talk back to him — that's the way it goes," Belo said. People acquainted with him through racing, however, describe a very different Rizzo. They say he is a friendly and unassuming man who cherishes his horses more than he does the modest purse they win.

"He impressed me as being a very caring person," said Mac Lou Griffin, a Buckley, Wash., thoroughbred breeder who took on one of Rizzo's mares, Peter's Jewel, for foaling and raised a couple of its offspring.

Washington horse trainer Mike Chambers said Rizzo is "not flamboyant in any direction." "The two had just been out to dinner, and Chambers added.

"You'd never know he had a cent," Chambers said.

Bell workers say Rizzo often was kind to his subordinates, inquiring after their families, granting them leaves to tend to sick relatives and extending them city reimbursements for tuition. "He could act like he was your father," said one employee, who requested anonymity because she does not want to be associated with Rizzo.

Others say they feel betrayed. George Bass was one of the former Bell council members who hired Rizzo in 1991, at a salary of $75,000, which the city considered a bargain.

"I don't know what happened to the Bob Rizzo I knew," Bass said. "I am angry."

He said their relationship soured after Rizzo shrugged off Bass' objections to a pending property deal by bragging that he had the other four council members in his corner.

Tenant between them worsened after he cast the loss vote against a rate for Rizzo, Bass said.

Over the ensuing years, Rizzo spent less and less time on the job and grew guarded about city finances, holding fewer meetings on the budget, say Gonzales and Werfien.

"In retrospect, you start seeing that everything was a secret," Gonzales said.

Rizzo's trips to the secluded, 10-acre ranch in Washington become more frequent, city employees and his neighbors say. The spread unfolds around a simple but elegant main house and has well-groomed paddocks and an elaborate exercise circle for the horses. It's a short ride from Emerald Downs, where Rizzo's steeds compete when they're not running at Golden Gate Fields in Berkeley and occasionally elsewhere.

After a reporter knocked on the front door of the ranch house on a recent morning, Rizzo initially refused to answer, staying behind closed shutters. Then he emerged and barked, "You're trespassing."

A moment later, he apologized and said he had not realized any interviewers.

Standing barefoot, in black shorts and T-shirt, near a horse-high jockey statue with "Rizzo" painted on it, he complained of be-
until his salary became public, Rizzo continued to dominate his city. As ex-Councilman Cole's former employer, current or former employees, Rizzo helped the city stage a successful election — barely 400 of Rizzo’s 400,000 voters voted — to transform the town from a general law municipality into a charter city. The election was scheduled soon after a 2003 state Senate investigation led a grand jury to recommend to him to stay away from Bruce McLennan. Rizzo said.

Malleshworth, who has pleaded not guilty, said in an interview that he had not talked to Rizzo much in the last four years or so. "When do you judge?" he said when asked about the criticism of Rizzo's pay. He said that the two mainly saw each other at golf tournaments and that Rizzo had not sought an interview on Bruce McLennan's finances. "Bobby had his own ideas as to what to do," Malleshworth said.

Brain, a retired Virginia fire chief who had collected along with Malleshworth over labor politics there, said he did not like it that Rizzo paid with his fellow city council. "I was still in the city as a lobbyist in those days. He had the recommendation to him to be too weak about Bruce McLennan," Brain said.

In March of this year, Rizzo's life away from Bell City Hall took a bad turn. He was arrested in Huntington Beach on suspicion of drunk driving. Police say he had a blood alcohol level of 0.28%, 3 times the legal limit. He has pleaded not guilty, and a counselor informed the court that he was in treatment for alcohol abuse.

The pending DUI case charted a downward trajectory. Four months later, after his salary made headlines, Rizzo announced his retirement in the face of a public outcry. Investigators soon were seizing records at City Hall. A former Bell police sergeant sued the city around the same time alleging he was forced out for complaining about election fraud and other official misconduct.

In his suit, James Concoro, former city attorney, alleged that he said he had been sexually assaulted by a city employee. The suit cited the calmer of sexual harassment.

Spurrier said Rizzo wanted to put the uproar in Bel behind him and spend his retirement with the city. He said his client should be cleared of the pending investigations.

"He's in jail?!" That's because he was the only one who thought that Rizzo was in jail.

Paul Prigentia at the Times and Bob Pepper of the Daily News. Rizzo was accused of being a “deadbeat” and of being a “deadbeat.” Spurrier reported from Los Angeles, Murfreesboro, USDA, and Hector Becerra contributed to this report.

I could not determine how much he has spent on his lost estate because some sales are private. From 2004, through the help of Mr. Smith, who made more than $60,000 in 2006 as an Equibase figures show, the horses run by Rizzo’s named administrator and has been charged on charges of misappropriation of public funds.

Folk who know him from the pastures of Auburn and the races at Emerald Downs say he knows his own business and dotes on his horses like a father does on his sons. He has said that he is in a very nice race that puts his family in a position of importance.

In March of this year, Rizzo's life away from Bell City Hall took a bad turn. He was arrested in Huntington Beach on suspicion of drunk driving. Police say he had a blood alcohol level of 0.28%, 3 times the legal limit. He has pleaded not guilty, and a counselor informed the court that he was in treatment for alcohol abuse.

The pending DUI case charted a downward trajectory. Four months later, after his salary made headlines, Rizzo announced his retirement in the face of a public outcry. Investigators soon were seizing records at City Hall. A former Bell police sergeant sued the city around the same time alleging he was forced out for complaining about election fraud and other official misconduct.

In his suit, James Concoro, former city attorney, alleged that he said he had been sexually assaulted by a city employee. The suit cited the calmer of sexual harassment.

Spurrier said Rizzo wanted to put the uproar in Bel behind him and spend his retirement with the city. He said his client should be cleared of the pending investigations.

"He's in jail?!" That's because he was the only one who thought that Rizzo was in jail.

Paul Prigentia at the Times and Bob Pepper of the Daily News. Rizzo was accused of being a “deadbeat” and of being a “deadbeat.” Spurrier reported from Los Angeles, Murfreesboro, USDA, and Hector Becerra contributed to this report.

I could not determine how much he has spent on his lost estate because some sales are private. From 2004, through the help of Mr. Smith, who made more than $60,000 in 2006 as an Equibase figures show, the horses run by Rizzo’s named administrator and has been charged on charges of misappropriation of public funds.

Folk who know him from the pastures of Auburn and the races at Emerald Downs say he knows his own business and dotes on his horses like a father does on his sons. He has said that he is in a very nice race that puts his family in a position of importance.
Bell leaders hauled off in cuffs
Eight are held in scandal the D.A. calls ‘corruption on steroids’

ARREST: Former Bell City Manager Robert Rizzo is taken into custody at his Huntington Beach home before being booked into L.A. County Jail. He had an annual salary and benefits package of more than $1.5 million.

ROBERT RIZZO
Former city manager
Charges: 37 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds, conflict of interest and falsification of documents. Bail set at $3.2 million.

ANGELA SPACCIA
Former assistant city manager
Charges: Four felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $377,000.

OSCAR HERNANDEZ
Mayor
Charges: 21 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $236,800.

LUIS ARTIGA
Council member
Charges: 21 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $54,000.

TERESA JACOBO
Council member
Charges: 20 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $266,000.

GEORGE MIRABAL
Council member
Charges: 20 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $250,000.

GEORGE COLE
Former council member
Charges: 21 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $130,000.

Victor Bello
Former council member
Charges: 21 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds. Bail set at $130,000.

JEFF GOTTLISTER, RUSS YV texture & JACK LEONARD

Eight current and former Bell city leaders were arrested Tuesday on charges of misappropriating more than $5.5 million from the small, working-class community as prosecutors accused them of treating the city's coffers as their personal piggy bank. The charges follow months of nationwide outrage and renewed debate over public employee compensation since The Times reported in July that the city's leaders were among the nation's highest paid municipal officials.

Among those charged was former City Manager Robert Rizzo, who led the way with an annual salary and benefits package of more than $1.5 million. Prosecutors accused him of illegally writing his own employment contracts and steering nearly $1 million in unauthorized city loans to himself and others. He was booked into Los Angeles County Jail and was being held on $1.6 million bail.

"This, needless to say, is corruption on steroids," said Los Angeles Dist. Atty. River Cooley in announcing the charges.

Cooley described Rizzo as the "unleashed and uncountable crusade" of Bell, accusing him of going to "the entire length to keep his salary secret. Prosecutors alleged that Rizzo gave himself huge pay raises without the City Council's approval.

"This was calculated greed and theft accomplished by deceit and secrecy," Cooley said.

Rizzo's attorney, James W. Sperti, said the charges came as no surprise and were politically motivated by Cooley, who is running for California attorney general.

"The allegations are mistaken," Sperti said. "They are factually untrue in every readily provable way."

Cooley denied that his campaign played any part in the decision to file charges.

In a news conference, Cooley accused City Council members of failing to oversee Rizzo's actions, saying...
that they instead had collected more than $1.2 million in total pay since 2006 for presiding over city agency meetings that never occurred or lasted just a few minutes.

Many city residents greeted news of the charges with joy.

"Finally the crooks are going to suffer what the city suffered for many years," said Carmen Bello, a long-time Bell activist.

About two dozen Bell residents gathered outside City Hall to celebrate. One man used a bullhorn to broadcast the Queen rock song, "Another One Bit the Dust," while others laughed, cheered and applauded.

But at least one resident wondered what would happen to his embattled city.

"Who's going to collect the shots?" asked Hassan Mouled, 32. "That's the most important thing right now."

The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted Tuesday to urge state Atty. Gen. Jerry Brown to ask a judge to hand over day-to-day management of the city to a court-appointed official.

Last week, Brown filed a lawsuit against the city that accused Bell leaders of secretly plotting to enrich themselves and conceal their lucrative compensations. The suit seeks to remove three City Council members from office and force city officials to refund hundreds of thousands of dollars in back salaries.

The only person named in Brown's suit who was not arrested Tuesday was Bell's former police chief, Randy Adams. Asked why Adams' large salary did not lead to his arrest, Cooley said, "Being paid excessive salaries is not a crime ... to illegally obtain those salaries is a crime."

Cooley said Tuesday morning's arrests were without incident, except that district attorney's investigators used a battering ram to enter Mayor Oscar Hernandez's home in Bell when he was slow to open the front door.

Investigators led a handcuffed Rizzo, 56, from his Huntington Beach home about 3:35 a.m. Wearing a dark blue polo shirt and black slacks, Rizzo declined to comment to a reporter about the charges.

The other city officials arrested were council members Teresa Jacobs, Luis Arce, and George Mirabal; former council members George Cole and Victor Belo; and former Assistant City Manager Angela Spaadia.

Hernandez's attorney, Stanley I. Feldman, said his client is innocent. Attorneys for the others could not be reached for comment.

The deficiencies are expected to appear in court Wednesday to enter pleas. Cooley said prosecutors plan to ask a judge to ensure that the origin of any bail money does not come from illegal activity.

Interim Bell City Manager Pedro Carillo released a statement Tuesday saying that the changes marked a new day for the city and showed that Rizzo and Spaadia "were at the root of the cancer that had afflicted the City of Bell."
CASE: Rizzo, center, illegally wrote his own employment contracts and steered nearly $13 million in unauthorized city loans to himself and others, the D.A. says.

In a tearful interview the day before his arrest, Artiga said he accepted blame and put too much trust in Rizzo. Speaking at his office at Bells Community Church, where he is pastor, Artiga said he was delighted when he first learned how much his salary as a councilman was going to be.

"I thought God had answered my prayers, but it was a trap from the devil," he said.

According to the criminal complaint, a district attorney's investigator interviewed Bello, the former councilman, in March and learned that the city paid council members nearly $500,000 for the part-time jobs.

The district attorney's office submitted a request to Rizzo for documents showing pay for council members but received incomplete records, the criminal complaint said. Prosecutors said they used grand jury subpoenas to collect 60,000 pages of city council records as part of their investigation.

Rizzo and other top city officials stepped down soon after The Times reported the resignations. As city officials were resigning a financial bonanza, Bell property owners were paying one of the highest tax rates in the county. The Times found a state audit concluded that the city illegally overcharged residents and businesses by $5.6 million in taxes and fees.

And, The Times reported, Rizzo gave city loans to more than 50 city officials, including himself.

Rizzo also used nearly $500,000 in city funds to repay loans taken from his personal retirement account before authorization from the City Council, according to a draft report from the state controller.

"Cooley compared the investigation to "peeling layers of an onion. Each time a piece is pulled away, another piece is uncovered.""

Bell's woes became a symbol of government excess at a time of increasing unemployment, budget deficits and electoral disenchantment. Rizzo, who cut a larger-than-life figure outside Bell as well as inside, stood at the center of the scandal.

His lifestyle included owning a stable of thoroughbreds, among them a gelding named Imperious Target — French for "speed money." In the face of public criticism, Rizzo remained defiant, defending his salary by citing his years as city manager since 1990.

Amid widespread outrage, City Council members significantly slashed their pay. State lawmakers passed a law of measures aimed at curtailing pay and pension increases that now await Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's signature.

Federal prosecutors are investigating whether the city violated the civil rights of its predominantly Latino immigrant population with selective enforcement of traffic laws and code violations.

County prosecutors said their investigation is continuing.

"We have finished the first leg of what will likely be a marathon to try to restore the integrity of government in Bell," said Jennifer Lentz Snyder, assistant head deputy of the district attorney's Public Integrity Division.

If convicted, the current City Council members would be forced to give up their seats. Cooley said they could also face substantial prison time.

Rizzo is charged with spending city funds to cover legal fees and other expenses. A separate case alleges he committed perjury.

Cooley said several factors allowed corruption to flourish in Bell, including a lack of civic participation by residents and little scrutiny from the media or the county.

"The electorates of these cities have to be involved if they truly care about their city," he said. "That wasn't the case in this instance."

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Bringing down the heat

Three local and state law enforcement agencies have taken action against Bell’s leaders. Their investigations have led to tax rollbacks, a lawsuit to recover improper loans and blasted salaries, and — to the most dramatic step yet — the filing of dozens of felony charges against four of the five council members, two former council members and two former administrations. Here’s a look at the steps taken by the agencies so far:

Los Angeles County

- Former City Manager Robert Rizzo, 56, arrested on 53 felony counts of misappropriation of public funds, conflict of interest and fabrication of documents, including allegations that he wrote his employment contract without council approval. Of those counts, 44 involve alleged misappropriation of more than $2.5 million in public funds, including awarding $1.9 million in unauthorized loans to himself, city employees and two council members. Bail is set at $3.2 million.
-Former Assistant City Manager Angela Spaccia, 52, arrested on four counts involving misappropriation of more than $1.3 million in public funds, including taking more than $200,000 in illegal loans from the city. Bail is set at $277,500.
- Mayor Oscar Hernandez, 62, arrested on 21 counts of misappropriation of public funds, mostly related to alleged fake meetings of city boards that inflated council members’ pay to nearly $6,000 a month between January 2006 and July 2010. Hernandez allegedly misappropriated $262,848. One of the felony counts relates to $20,000 he received from the city, a loan approved by Rizzo. Bail is set at $385,000.
-Councilwoman Teresa Jacobo, 52, arrested on 20 counts of misappropriation of public funds related to alleged fake meetings of city boards. Jacobo allegedly misappropriated $262,848. Bail is set at $260,000.
-Councilman George Mirabal, 61, arrested on 20 counts of misappropriation of public funds related to alleged fake meetings of city boards. Mirabal allegedly misappropriated $262,848. Bail is set at $260,000.
-Councilman Luis Artiga, 49, arrested on 13 counts of misappropriation of public funds related to alleged fake meetings of city boards. Artiga allegedly misappropriated $229,272 and obtained a $20,000 loan from the city. Bail is set at $145,000.
-Councilman George Cole, 60, arrested on 12 counts of misappropriation of public funds related to alleged fake meetings of city boards. Cole allegedly misappropriated $33,376. Bail is set at $105,000.

State Att’y Gen.

Jerry Brown

- Rizzo, Spaccia, Hernandez, Jacobo, Mirabal, Bello, Cole and former Police Chief Randy Adams are named in a lawsuit Brown filed Sept. 15, accusing them of secretly plotting to enrich themselves and conceal lucrative compensation.
- Artiga agreed to cooperate with authorities and is not named in the lawsuit, which seeks to recoup money from excessive salaries and illegal loans.
- Adams, the former police chief of Glendale who earned $450,000 a year in Bell, is not charged with a crime.

- The attorney general’s lawsuit cites an e-mail from Spaccia to Adams in which she wrote: “We have crafted our agreements carefully so we do not draw attention to our pay. The word Pay Period is used and not defined in order to protect you from someone taking the time to add up your pay.”
- The suit seeks to require the officials to make restitution for excessive compensation, as well as limit their retirements, which are based on salary. It also asks a judge to order that the council members, Rizzo and Spaccia be barred from public office for life. It also asks a judge to appoint a receiver to run the city.

State Controller

John Chiang

- Concluded that Bell leaders illegally raised city business taxes by more than 50% over the last decade. Chiang estimated that more than 1,500 businesses were affected and more than $21 million was collected illegally.
- Concluded that city leaders illegally raised a “retirement tax” to fund pensions, costing taxpayers $29 million.
- Concluded that city leaders assessed improper sewer fees of more than $600,000.
- Bell’s interim city administrator is working with Chiang on a relief plan to pay back taxes and roll back the illegal fees.
- Chiang said in July, Bell city officials levied $5.6 million in improper taxes and fees on residents and businesses, more than one-third of the city’s $13.5 million general fund.

Source: Times staff writers Jessica Kleinmann, Richard Nigrovic and Corky Reilly.