

City's secret defense weapon: A guy named Joe

BY STEVEN VERBURG
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Joseph M. Turner labored for nearly 20 years as an assistant in the city assessor's office, helping describe the value of individual parcels.

In May, Turner's boss told him to work part-time on economic development projects — trying to increase the value of property.

Turner's first assignment was to write a long-shot application for a U.S. Department of Defense accounting center that seemed destined for a larger city.

Others might have considered the work an exercise in paper-chasing futility. Turner, by all accounts,

attacked the project with gusto.

"He's a very enthusiastic person," said City Councilman Michael J. Hanley.

Turner said he got the 75-page submission postmarked 15 minutes ahead of the deadline.

"We worked almost non-stop for three weeks," Turner recalled. "At the end we had people running around here like crazy."

Tuesday, city officials got word that Turner's debut in the world of economic development was unexpectedly successful. The city is one of 20 finalists chosen from 216 applications.

Turner says about 25 individuals and organizations are responsible for the initial success.

"It was just very inspiring," he said.

Nonetheless, Jon W. Bayless, city fiscal services manager, says Turner should get most of the credit.

"Give Joe most of the credit for doing the legwork. He did 90 percent," Bayless said.

Turner, 44, was born in Saginaw, attended Webber Junior High School and graduated from St. Mary Cathedral High School, Delta College and Saginaw Valley State University. He lives at 423 N. Granger with his wife, Janet, and daughter Lisa, a senior at Arthur Hill High School. Another daughter, Paula, is a journalism student at Michigan State University.

Turner said he walks across the Holland Street Bridge to work almost every day "because I'm full of vim, vinegar and body fat."

For years he's volunteered with the Red Cross, ham radio groups and the Friendship Games.

This year he decided to drop the volunteer activities and put all his energy into his career.

He slipped up once, finding himself one Saturday helping preservationists dig burned debris from the Potter Street Railway Station.

If Saginaw doesn't get an accounting center, Turner vows he'll lose none of his effervescence.

"I'm just pleased to make the final cut," he said.

A Turner for the good

Past embarrassments were quickly forgotten at Saginaw's City Hall as the Pentagon's finance-center bonanza bid put leaders, on the job and in the air, on a boomtown high. We just hope those seven City Council members don't claim they did it all at the New Orleans convention.

In truth, they and Saginaw need to thank someone who didn't quite make the travel roster: Joseph M. Turner.

He's the city's property and economic development specialist, although he toiled for nearly 20 years as an assistant in the city assessor's office.

Preparing the Department of

Defense proposal — with its potential billion-dollar payoff — was Turner's first big assignment. Our assessment is that he came through, big.

Turner gives due credit to others who helped. But the 75-page plan came mostly from his work, and from the sound of it, from his enthusiasm. What others saw as an almost surely futile effort, he treated as an opportunity.

Now Turner's home town might score the economic coup of the century, worth 4,000 or more jobs.

We'll reflect further on that Sunday, but right now let's make sure the record reflects the name of the real hero at City Hall.