My Father's Story by Crissandra L. Turner

October 17, 2010

From School Of hard knocks to State, and City government, and the private world of providing professional, and technical service, Edward Turner Jr. continues to set goals, and challenges for himself, his 13 children, 35 grandchildren and 36 great grandchildren.

Edward Turner Jr, a senior has been active in the St. Louis community college Continued Education program since he retired in 1996, and may be the most consistent senior to do so.

He retired as Chief Central Plant Engineer from Simon Corporation, the developers of the old St .Louis Centre in downtown St. Louis. He was also Project Engineer during construction of St. Louis Centre, and was involved with many other Simon projects, Mall of America in Bloomington MN, Pentagon City in Arlington VA, and Caesars Palace in Las Vegas NV.

He got the idea to be a power plant engineer from his grandfather Uzi Alexander Cade, a Highball Engineer for the Missouri Pacific Railroad Company, and his aunt Mable Banister who worked as a custodian for the Roxy, and Ivanhoe theaters in south St. Louis; his grandfather drove steam locomotives into a repair shade called a roundhouse across a revolving set of tracks called the round table.

His aunt cleaned the theater and operated the boiler and air-conditioning system.

In 1953 he sneaked off and joined the army Airborne using a cousin’s name at the age of 14, making him the youngest Korean War Veteran from the State of Missouri.

After being tracked by his dad and returned home, he made two more attempts, the army 6th Armored Tank Division in 1955, and finally the US Navy in June of 1955. The Navy decided if he wanted in that bad they would keep him with his dad’s consent, who at the time was a U.S. Police Sgt, and later a U.S. uniformed Special agent, another interest of Turner’s, (law enforcement).

Turner’s leadership started at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center. At age 15 he was the youngest recruit on the base, and was selected as his company’s Master at Arms, because of his prior service in the army when he was 14 years old.

After basic training, he was assigned to Destroyer Duty aboard the USS Fred T. Berry DDE 858 as a Boiler Technician 3rd Class Petty Officer. He participated in training exercises with the Under Water Demolition Team, (today known as Navy Seals) and the Navy Seabees. He served aboard one of three exchanged U.S. Navy Destroyers with the Argentine Navy for engineering and anti-submarine warfare in Bueno Aires, Argentina, and participated in the shakedown cruise of the Navy’s first nuclear powered Destroyer Leader.

He completed high school and received 2 years Equivalency College courses aboard ship; other courses included Diesel Mechanic, Electrician, Refrigeration and Air-Conditioning, Fire and Damage Control, and Electronics. He also completed Advanced Propulsion Plant Operation, Maintenance and Supervision at the Deslant Afloat school of Engineering while based in Newport Rhode Island.

When Turner was discharged from the Navy in 1958, he found it was not easy for a black man to find work in the power plant engineering trade.

In 1962 he learned about an opening for Stationary Engineer at the St. Louis State Hospital power plant at 5400 Arsenal Street.

He was hired, and learned that he was the first of his race to get appointed Stationary engineer in the State of Missouri’s largest on site steam and electric generating plant. During probation he was required to obtain a state license and eventually a City of St. Louis class I stationary engineer’s license. He received both.

In 1963 Turner applied at Rankin Technical Institute for the two year Stationary Engineering course under the G.I. Bill. After taking the entrance exam, he was told he needed tutoring in math, which of course cost more, he was also aware, that a friend who is white took the entry exam had fewer questions on math than Turner.

He took his concerns about the test to the NAACP, where he learned Black veterans across the country was having similar experiences. Math was Father’s best subject, and he did not believe he failed.

The Government announced that school policies apply to all veterans equally, or loose current and future VA enrollments. Soon afterwards he received word that an error had occurred, something about the wrong template was used during the scoring, and my father in fact scored 100 % on the exam.

 He enrolled at ICS (International Correspondence School) where he studied stationary engineering for two years, and later enrolled in BIT (Basic Institute of Technology) where he studied Advance Air-conditioning, Refrigeration, Heating, Electronics, and Electrical Drawing for 2 years.

Turner vowed to never set foot inside Rankin again. He did however extend his studies at ICS that included stationary nuclear power plants.

He was promoted to Power Plant Supervisor Engineer at State Hospital, but the States monthly salary made maintaining the family budget difficult, so in 1968 he applied and received appointment to the City of St. Louis Department of Public Utilities, where he was promoted to Chief Engineer over the Civil Courts, Soldiers Memorial and eventually St. Louis Medium Security Institution.

Turner was inducted into the National Association of Power Engineers in 1979, that was also a first for his race, and he wrote articles for the “Practical Ideas” section for Power Magazine. He designed electrical control circuits, and submitted mechanical drawings that were also featured in the magazine.

Turner found time to serve the city of St. Louis police department as a police reserve supervisor, and served on the ADHOC committee board as liaison between the reserve unit and the board of police commissioners.

He received many letters of appreciation, and accommodations from judges, State representatives, and over a dozen Departmental Award of Excellence for exceptional performance of duty. What Turner considers the best honor from anyone came from his dear friend the Honorable Judge Gary M. Gaertner Sr. and Martin M. Mathew of Mathew Dickey Boys and Girls Club.

He also received an award from the Lt. Governor of the State of Missouri for outstanding Police work. He worked in all nine districts, CIA, IA, and the Inspectors divisions.

Turner helped to improve the city workhouse in-house jobs program by creating a technical training program that included power plant maintenance mechanic, electrical, and gas welding, of which St. Louis American newspaper did an article following its success.

After upgrading power plant equipment at the work house, Turner applied for and received appointment to the Department of Public Safety, Building Division, as Mechanical Equipment Inspector I, where he performed approximately 8200 mechanical inspections annually, including carnival rides and elevator inspections.

His area covered equipment north to Delmar, east to the river, west to Grand Ave., and South to Anheuser Bush.

His immediate Supervisor said of Turner, “He writes a good objective report, and has done a fine job training temporary operators of high pressure boilers. Is a self starter and is keenly aware of safety Hazards.”

In the 1970’s Turner enrolled at St. Louis Community College at Flo Valley, Mechanical, and Industrial Engineering, but being on call 24 hours as Chief Engineer for the City caused him to withdraw from 9 courses, and two courses he forgot to withdraw from, earth science, ( he never had a chance to attend classes ) , and Intermediate Algebra (he missed the semi and final exams), he received an F, and a D.

He was determined to stick with it. His job may have prevented him from attending most of his classes but He stayed with the books at home, in libraries, and anywhere he could find free time. Before the setbacks, he was an A B student, and still found time for six children, of which he provided extra home schooling, as he made sure each of his children learned from material one grade higher than current level.

Turner, being certified as a fire sprinkler system mechanic, also worked closely with Fire Marshall Inspectors with inspections of exhaust range ventilating hoods equipped with fire suppression systems.

He also received an offer from Melvin Simon & Associates , they needed a Project Engineer to oversee the entire urban project plus manage the St. Louis Centre Central Plant, in association with its two anchors, Famous Barr and Stix, Baer, and Fuller. He accepted Simon’s offer.

Turner resigned his position with the city, and took over as project engineer during the construction of St. Louis Centre. When construction was completed he became the Central Plant Chief Engineer.

Simon Corporation had their own design engineers, from architect to Mechanical, and Electrical; and to stay updated it was sometime necessary to follow up with attending manufacturer’s schools, which also included the Chief Engineer, whose input to change, or modify the design of mechanical equipment was the Chief Engineer’s responsibility.

Turner attended the Manufacturers’ school, the testing lab, Milwaukee School of Engineering, Johnson Controls laboratory in Milwaukee Wisconsin, and the Trane Centra Vac Centrifugal Air-Conditioning Headquarters School in Lacrosse Wisconsin.

He also worked as a Special Process Server for himself and as an independent contractor for Cotton’s Investigations, where he served papers of process, and investigated special cases, civil and criminal for Cotton.

He worked with Metropolitan Protection agency, whose soul function was celebrity protection; their clients included Ashford & Simpson, Bobby Brown, and Whitney Houston.

When he retired from Simon he worked as a St. Louis Deputy Sherriff, D & D Security, and Barnes Jewish Hospital; after which time he started his own company, “Turner’s Investigation”, and later owner of Baxley Security, a company he and his cousin founded together.

While he was busy multitasking these various jobs, he found time to enrolled in Continued Education in Junior College, and studied Mechanical Engineering Technology, and other subjects from Business, Food, Computers, Tours and Flight Training(Aviation ground School) , as well as Self Help and Physical Education classes.

Turner donated free radio and TV repair service and appliances that needed fixing to those who could not afford to pay, as he does to this day.

At 71 years old he is still setting examples, still attending classes at St. Louis Jr. Colleges, He holds more than two dozen certifications, awards, and licenses.

He is currently working as a volunteer Court Room Bailiff with the Moline Acres police Department headed by Police Chief David Dorn, who worked with Turner when they worked for the St. Louis Police Department. Chief Dorn was his Captain. Thanks to Computer Instructor Robert Lewis, Turner is studying for his A+ certification in Computer Engineering Technology. He plans to write a paper on a solution for a computer error code he discovered that involves far less steps than is recommended by Microsoft, and Geeks.

 Martin Mathews of Mathew-Dickey Boys Club, who has known Turner since 1969; once worked with Judge Lackland Bloom, who is also a good friend of Turner’s commended him for his consistent volunteer services to sports programs, and his help to identify in-kind donation possibilities for the club.

He received a lot of help and support from the community college staff like Gay McGuire and other Flo valley book store employees. The Flo valley campus librarians Mary Tucker and Carolyn Gorline helped with material for flight training, and told him about the Meramec Campus ground school, and today he is a recreational pilot of single engine aircraft. He learned to fly aircraft using Microsoft’s popular “Flight Simulator”

It may not be possible to show that he is the oldest consistent CE student, but there is reason to believe that with 51 CE courses since 1996 till present should be duly noted by the Jr. college Community. My father accomplished a lot with a lot of hard work.

This is my father’s story/by Crissandra L. Turner

 turnersolutions.viviti.com