

Expert predicts jump in fed contracts for state

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Michigan, eighth largest state in population, ranks 20th in getting federal contracts.

"You're going to see this turn around," said Bruce W. Sweet Jr., whose full-time job at Schoolcraft College is to help suburban companies do business with the United States government.

"I went through the Dun & Bradstreet listings and found 5,670 area businesses that could have a market in government. Less than 80 were doing any government work. Government really is an untapped source of revenue.

"Businesses can really diversify their revenue so they're not so subject to the ups and downs of the auto market," Sweet said. His rule of thumb:

Don't have more than 40 percent of your revenue from government contracts. Few area firms are in danger of hitting that limit.

SWEET'S OFFICE is easy to find. You park in the visitor's lot on campus at 18500 Haggerty, Livonia, and look at the closest building — the Bradner Library. The sign over the nearest door says "Business Development Center."

Apparently the first community college to set up such a service, Schoolcraft has made outreach to business a top priority under President Richard McDowell. Said Conway Jeffries, vice president for instruction: "We're feeling a strong need to provide service to the industrial community."

Sweet's elaborate job description says he is to "provide direct technical assistance to local firms in the re-

search of operations, processes and procedures, rules and regulations in bid document preparation involved in contracting with federal agencies and prime contractors."

Sweet's shop — in plain English: "He helps companies compete for access to federal and state agency bids. Some of those documents are difficult for a Ph.D. to interpret."

Sweet's shop — himself, a secretary, federal documents and microfilms — opened for business this month under a contract with the Wayne County Private Industry Corp. PIC's funds are 6 percent of the money in the Job Training and Partnership Act.

"When Government wants to buy," Sweet began, "it goes to a warehouse. The warehouse goes to the buying office, which develops a bid package."

"They must advertise in 1) the bidders' mailing list, 2) the Commerce Business Daily (CBD), which is the government's want ads, and 3) in their own lobby. Contractors are supposed to go to one of these sources and bid."

How does he help?

"We enroll the business on the bidders' mailing list. We subscribe to the CBD and send them (local firms) sec-

tions. And we subscribe to newsletters."

Suppose your firm has received a bid package — what then?

"We'll sit down and see that they've bid properly. We can tell them the procurement history of that product so they'll know what the competitive bid process is," he answered. For example, if you find a Texas company using migrant labor in producing a product, you can figure your chances of being low bidder are minimal.

FEDERAL SPECIFICATIONS can be complicated — there are 10 pages of specs for the common marshmallow. "Sweet has the resources to get the specs."

"The contract you sign doesn't contain all the specs. It just refers to the specification numbers," he said. "A six-story building in Philadelphia has all the federal specifications for contracts. It would take you 12 weeks to get the specs from Philadelphia. By that time, your bidding deadline has passed."

How then does the little local businessperson get bid specifications in

time to submit an intelligent bid?

Sweet pointed to a cabinet-sized file of microfilses. "That," he said, "contains all the specs that are in that six-story building in Philadelphia. We can look up the specs they need and put it on the screen. The company can review it. We can make them copies for a charge."

IN THE BRIEF time he has been the Business Development Center, Sweet has helped a few local firms.

He found a heat treating company in Livonia wasn't in contact with the right federal people. He aided an architectural firm seeking to become a subcontractor.

"I know how the bureaucracy works. We function like the contracting department for a large company," he said. Experience tells him a firm isn't often low bidder on the first try. Often it takes six months to get your first contract.

Festival tennis tournament set

The Farmington Hills Recreation Division, in cooperation with Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge Community College, is sponsoring the 10th annual Founder's Festival Tennis Tournament July 17-21.

Registration for the tournament is being accepted at the Parks and Recreation office. Deadline for registration is Friday, July 12.

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