

Jury awards fired banker \$7.8 million in damages

By ALAN ACHKAR
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

AKRON

Moments after being awarded \$7.8 million by a jury, Edward Turner still called himself a suit salesman. After all, it was the job the former Bank One of Akron executive had been relegated to after being stripped of his reputation.

"Right now, I'm just a suit salesman," Turner said as he wiped tears of joy from his eyes. "I take things one day at a time."

Turner has spent the last seven years trying to vindicate himself after being implicated in a fraud and racketeering case filed by Bank One. Yesterday, a Summit County Common Pleas jury backed Turner's claim that he was an honest banker who was maliciously pursued by a powerful bank.

"Nothing can give me back the last few years of real frustration," Turner said yesterday. "I'm just very pleased that my name's been cleared."

Turner was fired as vice president of consumer loans for Bank One of Akron in 1983, when the bank began to suspect it had been the victim of fraud. Turner had worked in banking for 30 years.

In 1985, Bank One named Turner as a defendant in a federal racketeering lawsuit.

SEE BANKER/6-A

Banker

FROM/1-A

He was dismissed from the case four years later.

But Turner argued in court this week that while he may have been freed from legal liability when he was dropped from the case, the damage to his career and life was already done.

Unless the award is overturned on appeal, Turner is likely to see the entire \$7.8 million, his lawyer said.

"They're a very collectible company," lawyer Timothy Scanlon said of Bank One. "They've got the money, let's put it that way."

Lawrence Bach, Bank One's lawyer, said yesterday that the bank would probably appeal. He called the verdict excessive and speculated that the jury was swayed by Turner's tearful testimony.

"We felt we discredited him," Bach said. "But based on (Turner's testimony) that they heard, I don't think anything the bank said would have worked."

Turner testified about how the racketeering and fraud allegations had ruined his life. He said he was squeezed out of the banking field,

suffered from severe depression and lost his home.

He now lives in a one-bedroom apartment.

"I'm just very pleased that my name's been cleared, that the things that I've done in my 30-year banking career have been reaffirmed," Turner said yesterday. "I always conducted myself in an honest, businesslike manner."

Turner was implicated in Bank One's federal racketeering case because of three loans, totaling about \$120,000, that he made to a woman who was later convicted of fraud.

Bank One tried to convince jurors that it had ample reason to be suspicious of Turner's role in the loans and that it did nothing more than exercise its legal rights by naming him in the federal racketeering suit.

But the jurors, based on interrogatories they wrote after reaching the verdict, decided that Bank One acted recklessly and implicated Turner with no evidence to substantiate the claim. An interrogatory is a series of written questions that a jury is asked to answer in light of a verdict.

The jury awarded Turner \$4.6 million in punitive damages and \$3.2 million in compensatory damages.