

# TECH comments

The newsletter of the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

April 1997

Volume 26, Issue 11

## President's Message

Dear Membership:

By the time you read this message, local and national elections of STC officers will have drawn to a close. I hope you exercised your right and privilege to vote. Your vote of confidence is important, even when candidates run unopposed.

In our chapter the slate of candidates and those volunteers waiting in the wings have demonstrated personal commitment to our organization and profession. Although you might not recognize every name and face, I can assure you that these chapter members have the best interest of our organization in mind. What's more, they are fun to work with, and I am deeply indebted to them for their service this year. They include Karen, Ruth, Ginny, Eileen, Jill, Martha, Frances, Kathy, Shirley, Catherine, Nancy, Mary, Don, Ann, Mary, Barbara, Rachael, Scott, and John; thank you so much for getting us through this year.

To those of you in the outer circles of chapter activity, take a moment to get to know some of the professionals who *inhabit* our organization.

One item on my agenda for this year remains untapped. I'd like to

focus my volunteer requests in two areas, one ongoing and the other new.

First, we really need two or three people to help with meeting programs to ensure success in the upcoming year.

Second, I'd like to see a committee form that would plan new ways to reach tech writers in Detroit, Troy, and points in between. We represent a large geographic area, and some members have mentioned that they would be more active if events took place in locations closer to them. If you cannot attend regular meetings because

you work or live far away from chapter events, then take this opportunity to become more involved. As a member of this new committee you could organize a subchapter, start a networking lunch group, or plan other activities. With publicity (provided by committee members), this bodes to be a popular addition to our chapter's activities.

I'll collect input via email at [m2morgan@mail.oeonline.com](mailto:m2morgan@mail.oeonline.com) or by traditional means.

Thanks for reading. Enjoy our Michigan spring, folks!

*Jim Anastasiow*  
*President*  
*STC/SM*

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STC/SM 1996-1997 Board of Directors  
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

**President**

**Jim Anastasiow**  
810.443.1540  
m2morgan@mail.oeonline.com

**Vice President**

**Martha Swidersky**  
313.995.7994  
marthas@ncms.org

**Treasurer**

**Karen Gilbert**  
313.995.6187  
gilbert@ann-arbor.applicon.com

**Secretary**

**Elizabeth Mack (Interim)**  
810.349.7854  
lm@mack.agn.net

**Past President**

**John Brus**  
810.986.0162  
jbrus@cmsa.gmr.com

**COMMITTEE MANAGERS****Directory**

**Jim Anastasiow (interim)**  
(see President above)

**Employment Referral Service**

**Frances Mueller Roach**  
313.764.5211  
fmroach@umich.edu

**Membership**

**Eileen Wilkinson**  
313.663.9494  
ewtw@aol.com

**Newsletter**

**Jill Bornemeier**  
313.332.5571  
jbornemeier@nei.com

**Nominations**

**Ruth Blough**  
810.305.9362  
Ruth\_Open\_Door@msn.com

**Program Director**

**Martha Swidersky**  
(see Vice President above)

**Publicity**

**Shirley Willard**  
810.737.7300 X-8039  
shirley\_willard@compuware.com

**Professional Liaison**

**Ginny Collins**  
810.546.0754  
ginny\_collins@compuserve.com

**Web Master**

**Catherine M. Juon**  
313.944.0358  
cjuon@pobox.com

**STC/SM Information/Web Page**

313.332.9371  
<http://stc.org/region4/smc>

**Research from Western Canada Reveals Tech Com Paradox**

*by Jack McFadden, Associate Fellow, Southwestern Ontario Chapter  
Reprinted with Permission from STC*

Research confirms it: technical communicators in Canada have a credibility problem. After surveying 300 companies that required technical writing, results showed that 56 percent were either skeptical of the qualifications of technical communicators, or they didn't know whether the ones they employed or used were qualified. This crucial finding is only one of many found in the report on the Technical Communication in Western Canada (TeCiWeC) Project.

Initiated by the Manitoba chapter of STC and assisted by the Alberta and Canada West Coast chapters, the TeCiWeC Project investigated the Western Canadian market for technical communication. It was jointly funded by the Canadian government (\$90,000) and STC (\$10,000) and carried out in 1993 by KPMG Peat Marwick Stevenson & Kellogg of Winnipeg. The three chapters also provided 2,000 hours of volunteer time. The Canadian Interests Committee (CIC) believes the research is so relevant that many of the report's recommendations form the basis of a long-range CIC plan to create a more positive image of Canada's technical communicators.

Besides surveying 300 companies by telephone, the research company also led seven focus groups consisting of technical communicators and industry representatives. The three-volume report describes the western Canadian market for technical communication services, identifies current and desirable standards for technical communication, and provides a detailed workshop to show business how clear communication provides them with a competitive edge.

Here are a few more of the study findings:

- > Most companies believed that quality documentation adds significant value to base business and contributes to profitability. Seventy-four percent agreed that good documentation lowered their service costs.
- > Future requirements for technical communication services would stay the same or decline slightly for software

manuals, brochures, product documentation, training guides, policy and procedures manuals and technical reports.

- > There will be an increased demand for online documentation and multimedia.
- > Technical communicators are not well known as a profession. The level of awareness of STC among the companies was only 23 percent. There was also a fairly wide opinion on what technical writing and communication was.
- > Fully 67 percent of the companies admitted to being price-sensitive when it came to hiring technical communicators.
- > On the other hand, 52 percent agreed that using a professional writer gave them a competitive advantage in selling products and services to customers.

To create a more positive image, the report, in general, states that STC chapters should focus on the market, education and the media. As just one example of its detailed helpfulness, it suggests that every chapter form an awareness-building team and then describes how this team will do its job. The report also suggests that a certification program would be a powerful and positive influence.

To sum up, the TeCiWeC Project report reveals an apparent paradox where a market sees value in technical communication, yet places a generally low regard on technical communicators. More positively, however, the report also reveals some things we can do about our credibility as professional communicators. Every technical communicator needs to review this research in its entirety.

You can order copies of the report from:  
STC Manitoba  
135 Lawnsdale Ave.  
Winnipeg, MB, R1H 1T2  
204.237.0747 ☐

## Society to Develop Ethics Case Book

by Barbara Epp  
Member of the Professional Development Committee on Ethics

Readers of *Intercom* who look forward to reading or responding to the Ethics Case column by John Bryan, will be excited to learn of the STC Professional Development Committee on Ethics' effort to develop an Ethics Case Book. This effort will encompass collecting real-life ethical dilemmas in technical communication and compiling them into a case book for use by both Society chapters and individuals.

To ensure that the documented ethics cases are useful, input from the membership is essential. Therefore, the committee is gathering ideas from the membership over the next few months. Whether you have read about a situation surrounded by questionable ethics, or have been a participant in one, this is an endeavor in which all members can make a contribution.

Barbara Epp of the STC Ethics Committee is spearheading this effort. You may contact her at:

BEA Systems, Inc.  
385 Moffett Park Drive  
Sunnyvale, CA 94089  
Voice: 408.542.4163  
Fax: 408.744.0775  
Email: barbara.epp@beasys.com

Due to the sensitive nature of many ethics-related topics, origins of all case studies will remain confidential.

Supporting this effort are:

Connie Kiernan  
Chairperson of the Professional Development Committee on Ethics  
Email: connie.kiernan@comtech-serv.com

Larry Kunz  
Assistant to the President for Professional Development  
Email: ldkunz@vnet.ibm.com

Larry, Connie and Barbara will be a part of the panel "Handling Ethical Dilemmas on the Job" at the 44th Society for Technical Communication International Conference in Toronto. □

### Welcome, New Members!

We welcome the following new members who have joined our chapter:

*Anthony F. Ambrogio*

*Theodora Mazza*

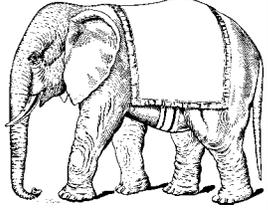
*Monica E. Milla*

*Dennis P. Pierce*

*Lucy M. Quinn*

*Scott H. Wettlaufer*

### Did You Know?

- > Lincoln Logs were invented by Frank Lloyd Wright's son.
- > Murphy's Oil Soap is the chemical most commonly used to clean elephants. 
- > Leonardo Da Vinci invented scissors.
- > The name Wendy was made up for the book *Peter Pan*.
- > The Eisenhower interstate system requires that one mile in every five must be straight. These straight sections are usable as airstrips in times of war or other emergencies.

## Current Job Postings

### Permanent Positions:

**3/14/97**

Michigan Technological University - Person needed to assist Program Manager in managing the activities of the Local Technical Assistance Program (LTAP). Salary range \$25,095 - \$40,151.

#### Duties and responsibilities:

- > Manage daily activities of LTAP.
- > Coordinate projects with Center staff including monthly travel within Michigan.
- > Create, design, and package newsletters, brochures, and training materials.
- > Write and edit articles, research reports, etc.
- > Coordinate and lead workshops at a variety of locations throughout Michigan.
- > Perform special projects, including job guides, work-zone safety guides, conference displays, and presentations.
- > Participate on committees, councils, and task forces of related public and private entities.
- > Coordinate statewide conferences at locations throughout Michigan.

#### Required qualifications:

- > Bachelors in civil engineering, technical communications, or related field, or equivalent combination of education and experience.

- > One year experience in writing, editing and layout of publications.
- > One year experience using personal computers and basic software packages.
- > Experience with desktop publishing software.
- > Portfolio of writing, editing, and publication layout.
- > Superior written/oral communication, interpersonal, and organizational skills.
- > Demonstrated ability and willingness to devote 25 to 40 percent of time to travel.
- > Demonstrated ability to speak before large groups of people.

#### Desired Qualifications:

- > Experience with graphic design.
- > Multimedia production experience.
- > Computer software documentation experience (written and on-line).

#### Contact:

Human Resources Office  
906.487.2280

**3/15/97**

Creative Solutions, a leading provider of tax, accounting, and office management software to more than 18,000 accounting firms nationwide, seeks additional technical writers.

#### Required qualifications:

- > Degree in technical communications (or related field).
- > Mastery of technical communications, researching, and interviewing principles.
- > Ability to work on multiple projects and meet tight deadlines.
- > Experience working in Windows and/or DOS environments.

#### Desired qualifications:

- > Experience in software industry.
- > Knowledge of accounting principles.
- > Experience using Ventura Publisher, WordPerfect, MS Word, RoboHelp.
- > Experience developing on-line help for Windows.

Excellent benefits, profit-sharing, and teamwork.

#### Contact:

Nancy Dow  
Manager  
Technical Communications  
Creative Solutions, Inc.  
7322 Newman Blvd.  
Dexter, MI 48130

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*Note: If you know of employers seeking technical writers or editors for contract, free-lance, or permanent positions, please have them contact our ERS manager. This service is free to employers and benefits our fellow STC members who are seeking new job opportunities. □*



## Program Meeting

# Interactive Distance Learning

**Steve Ricketts  
and  
Martha Reesman**

Holiday Inn North Campus  
3600 Plymouth Road  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Cash Bar 6:30  
Dinner 7:00  
Presentation 8:00

Members: \$20.00  
Nonmembers: \$25.00  
Presentation Only: \$5.00

Entree choices:

Chicken Chesapeake with Crab  
& Shrimp Sauce  
Baked Vegetarian Lasagna

RSVP  
Karen Gilbert  
313.995.6187  
gilbert@ann-arbor.applicon.com



## Meet the Speakers

interactive distance learning (IDL) is becoming prevalent as the costs and understanding of the technology makes it more available and affordable to a broader scope of users. IDL allows for immediate, ongoing interactivity between instructor and students, in contrast to historical distance learning, which has included correspondence courses, radio, and video. The featured speakers, Steve Ricketts and Martha Reesman of The IDL Group, will share their expertise in interactive distance learning, covering such areas as:

- > What IDL is and how it works.
- > IDL course development.
- > Instructional design guidelines: the how-to book.
- > Benefits and disadvantages of this learning method.
- > Examples of IDL broadcast development and implementation.

The IDL Group is an outgrowth of a two-year project conducted by the National Center for Manufacturing Sciences (NCMS). Steve Ricketts, president of The IDL Group, was NCMS Vice President of Technology when he played an integral role in forming the new company. He has more than 25 years of experience with the creation and implementation of advanced manufacturing systems and innovative software development environments.

Martha Reesman, vice-president of the IDL Group, has more than 20 years experience as an instructional designer, instructor, strategic planner, and manager of training. While at NCMS, she was the Program Manager for the NCMS IDL project, providing management support for the planning and execution of the entire project from its inception to its result, The IDL Group. □

## Submitting Articles

Do you have valuable information to share with other technical communicators? Write it down in article format! The *STC/SM TECH comments* staff welcomes article submissions. Any topic relevant to our field would be appreciated.

Send your articles to:  
Jill Bornemeier  
Managing Editor  
jbornemeier@nei.com

## Calendar of Events

### April 10 (Thursday) Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon

Cooker's (Plymouth Rd.)  
Begins between 11:30 and 12 noon.

### April 16 (Wednesday)

Program Meeting  
Speakers: Steve Ricketts and Martha Reesman

Topic: Interactive Distance Learning  
Holiday Inn North Campus  
Ann Arbor

Cash bar begins at 6:30 p.m.  
Contact: Martha Swidersky  
313.995.7994

Email: marthas@ncms.org

### May 5 (Monday) STC/SM Board of Directors Meeting

Kerby's Coney Island  
Haggerty just north of Eight Mile Road  
6:30 p.m.

### May 11-14 44th Annual STC Conference

Sheraton Centre Toronto  
Toronto, Ontario  
For information, contact:  
National STC Office 703.522.4114

### May 13 (Tuesday) Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon

Red Lobster, Carpenter Rd.  
Begins between 11:30 and 12 noon.

### May 14 (Wednesday) Program Meeting

Speaker: Ray Poshadlo  
Topic: Entrepreneurial Nightmares and  
Miscellanea

Holiday Inn - Livonia West  
I-275 and 6 Mile Road  
Cash bar begins at 6:30 p.m.  
Contact: Martha Swidersky  
313.995.7994  
Email: marthas@ncms.org

## Unclassifieds

### WANTED: ERS Postings

Is your company trying to fill a technical communication position? If so, why not post the position with our Employment Referral Service? The service is free of charge and benefits chapter members who are seeking employment. For information, contact our ERS manager, Frances Mueller Roach.

313.764.5211  
fmroach@umich.edu.

### WANTED: Tantalizing Topics

Is there an area of technical communications that you'd like to learn more about? If so, contact Catherine Titta. She's gathering topic ideas for future Program Meetings and would appreciate your input.

313.996.9006

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STC/SM  
P.O. Box 1289  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Address Correction Requested

