



# TECH comments

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

December 1997

Volume 27, Issue 4



## President's Message:

### Happy Holidays from the STC/SM

*by Karen Gilbert President, STC/SM*

I'd like to begin by wishing everyone a happy holiday season. Yes, that's right, the holidays are quickly approaching, and 1997 is drawing to a close. As I reflect back on the year, I realize I have many reasons to be thankful. First, I once again must thank all the STC/SM volunteers for their efforts and hard work this year. Our chapter is off to a great start—volunteerism is high, and due to everyone's efforts, participation in monthly programs is rising. In case I don't say it enough, you're a terrific group of volunteers, and I admire your dedication and commitment to our chapter.

Second, I would like to thank all members for taking the time to attend our monthly program meetings, we're experiencing the best turnout in years! Additionally, I appreciate everyone who has taken the time to commend the STC/SM volunteers. It means a lot to them, and to me, when you take time to attend one of our functions and then take additional time to say thanks for a job well done. If there is anything our chapter can do for you, please don't hesitate to contact me or one of the board members listed on page 2 of this newsletter. We are here to serve you.

Third, I want to thank everyone who has offered me encouragement and support throughout the year. Your kind words and guidance make my job enjoyable and rewarding. Likewise, I have met and made many new friends—friendships that I will cherish for years to come. This is one of the primary reasons I volunteer, to meet fellow practitioners in the technical communications field.

Last, I'd like to invite everyone to join us—the STC/SM Board, committee managers, volunteers, and all chapter members, at our annual STC/SM Holiday

Gathering. The gathering is a relaxed, informal celebration. It offers you the opportunity to begin the holiday season by renewing old and making new friendships. Refreshments and a variety of treats will be served. Although not required, feel free to bring your favorite holiday goodie to share. Join us in front of a rolling fire at the Longacre House in Farmington Hills. Hope to see you there!

I wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season. □

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## A Toast to the Holidays!

STC/SM is excited to continue the tradition begun last year when we held our annual holiday celebration at the Longacre House in Farmington Hills. The Longacre House is a beautiful Victorian house, built in 1869. We hope you and your guest will join us there for an evening of holiday cheer, sumptuous appetizers, and the good company of your friends in STC/SM.

As we did last year, we will be drawing for poinsettias and other prizes. Bring a plate of your favorite holiday confections and help us toast to the holidays.



Look for the announcement, and be certain to RSVP to Ginny Collins-Llope (248.546.0754) by

Monday, December 1. We look forward to seeing you there! □

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<http://stc.org/region4/smc>**Director-Sponsor Message:  
Report on STC's Fall Board of Directors Meeting***by Nancy Hoffman, Region 4 Director-Sponsor**phone: 313.663.8118, fax: 313.663.8778*

The STC Board of Directors held their fall meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, at the invitation of the Des Moines chapter. The chapter extended a warm welcome to the board, and several chapter members attended parts of the three-day meeting. The chapter hosted the board at an Iowa picnic among the lush green fields of the Living History Farms, an open-air agricultural museum in nearby Urbandale.

**STC Annual Budget and  
Strategic Plan in Place**

During the meeting, STC's 1998 budget was approved. The STC 1998-2002 Strategic Plan was also approved. This rolling, five-year plan contains objectives, strategies, and scheduled tactics designed to support the Society's mission and goals. The plan covers such objectives as monitoring worldwide trends in technical communication, promoting the effective performance of technical communicators, increasing STC's visibility and enhancing its image, and structuring the Society's operations to meet our members' needs. The Strategic Planning Committee, which reports to the Society's 1st Vice President, annually recommends updates to the plan after studying input from strategic planning workshops held with the board, as well as input from other sources.

**STC Grants Fund  
Innovative Chapter Programs**

Through grants and loans to chapters, the Society supports and encourages special chapter activities that further the goals of the Society.

The STC board approved a \$3,000 seed money grant to the Bowling Green State University (BGSU) student chapter to help start the Kirk Foster Memorial Fund. This is a scholarship fund that supports student chapter members in the undergraduate and graduate technical communication program at BGSU in attending STC Annual Conferences. The fund is being developed in memory of Kirk Foster, a very active student member of the BGSU student chapter, strong supporter of STC, and attendee and presenter at every STC Annual Conference during his membership.

A \$600 Merit Grant for the Iowa State University student chapter was approved to support a day-long seminar at Iowa State

University this fall. The topic of the planned seminar is Latin American Technical Communication, and its purpose is to raise awareness of cross-cultural issues encountered in technical communication outside the United States, specifically in Latin America. The chapter will produce a videotape of the seminar that will be available to other chapters interested in this topic.

**STC Supports Teachers/Students  
of Technical Communication**

The board approved sponsorship of a session at the 25th anniversary conference of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, which will be held in Chicago in April, 1998. The session will be organized and conducted by Ken Rainey and Ginny Redish.

The amount of the 14 STC Della Whittaker Scholarships for promising graduate and undergraduate students of technical communication was increased from \$2,000 to \$2,500 each. The Scholarship Committee recommended this increase to reflect increasing educational costs.

**STC Plans for Future  
Conference Success**

The success and size of the STC Annual Conferences necessitates long-range planning by the Conference Advisory Committee (CAC). At the fall meeting, the board authorized the CAC to annually establish an upper limit on conference registrations, based on the seating capacity of each year's conference facility. This limitation will allow more orderly planning, while avoiding overcrowded conference

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## Report on STC's Fall Board of Directors Meeting

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facilities and disappointed conference attendees.

Not only does the CAC arrange facilities years ahead, but also appoints the two most important volunteer jobs for conference planning and management several years in advance. Once appointed, the technical program manager and the conference support manager (formerly know as the special events manager) can recruit their committees and begin their conference planning.

The board approved the appointment of Thea Teich, of the Southwestern Ohio chapter, as the conference support manager for the 46th Annual Conference, to be held in Cincinnati in 1999. Tony Caruso, of the Metro Baltimore chapter, was appointed technical program manager for the 48th Annual Conference, to be held in Chicago in 2001.

### STC Strengthens Group for Visual Communicators

STC's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) provide special focus and support for a wide diversity of professions, interests, and industries within the broad field of technical communication.

At the fall meeting, the board approved merging of the Multimedia SIG and the Visual Communication SIG. The newly merged group will be called the Illustrators and Visual Designers SIG. This change was made to create a stronger SIG by combining resources for providing member services and to create an effective forum for visual communicators within STC.

This strengthened SIG and the newly expanded International Technical Art Competition, which will include online art for the first time this year, provide benefits for visual communicators who are—or might become—Society members. Invite illustrators and designers you work with to attend your STC chapter meetings and tell them about these activities. Both your chapter and the Society will benefit. □

## 1997 PCOC in Review

*by Sarah Ann Margulies, STC/SM Member*

STC's East Tennessee chapter's Practical Conference on Communication (the PCOC – pronounced “peacock”), held in Knoxville in late October of this year, lived up to its advanced billing.

A good variety of break-out sessions on useful topics were filled with friendly and enthusiastic people. The leader of a discussion of editing tools told how much she had learned in an advanced grammar course.

Other sessions demonstrated the essentials of RoboHELP, discussed the advantages and difficulties of FrameMaker, and taught the difference between Java and Java Script. There were sections on producing newsletters, building Web sites, communicating scientific information, using inexpensive marketing strategies, avoiding the pitfalls of consulting, and managing stress. John Hedtke urged everyone

to “Become an Author at Home in Your Spare Time and Earn Big Bucks (Writing for Periodicals)!” as he claims to have done.

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encouraged the formation of friendships and the frank exchange of ideas and concerns. Just plain fun was planned also. Door prizes were awarded every day, the most sought after being four Dilbert t-shirts, and organized after-hours activities included dinner and a tour of the nearby Ijams Nature Center, an evening at the Art Museum and its weekly Jazz Alive After Five, and a walking tour in the Smokies. □

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### Publication and Reprint Policies

*TECH comments* is published monthly September through June for members and friends of the Southeast Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. We welcome feature articles; letters to the editor; and information about meetings, courses, and workshops. Manuscripts are accepted in both hardcopy and electronic format using MS Word or ASCII text. Submissions will be edited.

Reprints from *TECH Comments* are permitted if credit is given and a copy is sent to the managing editor.

Send submissions to:

Jill Bornemeier  
Managing Editor  
P.O. Box 1289  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106  
jbornemeier@nei.com



### Scholarship Applications Available

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Fourteen awards of \$2,500 each will be granted for the 1998-99 academic year.

Application deadline is February 15, 1998.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1854

Phone: 703.522.4114

## Current Job Postings

### Permanent Positions

10/30/97

Prakken Publications of Ann Arbor (puts out mostly technical journals) seeks managing editor for one of its publications. Good benefits, \$35-\$40K. Candidate needs good management skills, writing and editing skills, and ability to work with advertisers.

Susanne Peckham

Phone: 313.975.2800, ext. 206

Email: tdbooks@cyberzone-inc.com

10/30/97

Variation Systems Analysis, Inc., a fast-growing, prominent, software firm seeks talented technical communicators to join our product development teams.

Responsibilities:

- > Develop online and hardcopy software documentation.
- > Develop training materials.
- > Provide input on product design/assist in UI design requirements.

Qualifications:

- > Outstanding communications skills.
- > Technical writing experience.
- > Engineering background/mechanical aptitude.
- > Organizational/project management skills.

Highly desirable qualifications:

- > Technical writing or mechanical engineering degree.
- > CAE experience.
- > Math/statistics background.
- > Working knowledge of FrameMaker.
- > Ability to create and work with graphics in various PC formats.

Top pay and benefits, including stock ownership. Please send résumé to:

Documentation Manager  
Variation Systems Analysis, Inc.  
300 Maple Park Blvd.  
St. Clair Shores, MI 48081  
Email: jforkin@vsa.com  
Fax: 810.778.6470

### Contract Positions

10/31/97

Contract and contract-to-hire (Troy, Flint, Pontiac, and Warren).

Automotive Technical Writer

Skills:

- > Knowledge of automotive systems.
- > Automotive repair experience.

Responsibilities:

- > Developing automotive service procedures including system description, troubleshooting.
- > Providing readiness engineering support for vehicle components (must have automotive repair and knowledge of automotive systems).

Electrical Technical Writer

Skills:

- > Read/develop electrical schematics.
- > Experience developing electrical diagnostics.

Responsibilities:

- > Developing schematics, circuit operations, and module-based diagnostics.
- > Providing service-readiness engineering support for vehicle components.

For both positions, please forward résumés to:

Volt Technical Services  
3000 Town Center  
Suite 1440  
Southfield, MI 48076  
Fax: 248.358.2368  
Phone: 248.358.3180

*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.* □

## November Program Meeting

by Catherine Titta, Senior  
STC/SM Member

What did you miss at the last chapter meeting?

If you weren't one of the 55 attendees, you missed an excellent introduction on how to use multimedia as an instructional tool.

David Galvin, an account manager at the National Education Training Group (NETg) and Barbara Zitzewitz, a manager at Walsh College's Center for Instructional Design gave STC/SM members a lot of useful information to take home.

What is multimedia, anyway? According to David, it's both a set of technology and a set of functions technical communicators can use for CD-ROM or Internet and Intranet training delivery.

If you're anxious to try your hand at multimedia and looking for a way to convince your management, David suggested that you try getting the green light for a multimedia training project when you have mission-critical information to impart to your audience.

David described three essential elements for a successful multimedia project:

*Be Consistent.* Make sure every topic in your project is consistent. Use the same delivery method for the same type of information throughout.

*Design for Competence.* Design the project so that trainees gain competence in the skills you're teaching. Build in a review session and tests that assess student skills.

*Include Current Information.* Work toward a quick turnaround when you need to incorporate new information, it's a sure way to guarantee project success.

While instructor-led training still works best when teaching analytical skills or hands-on activities, a multimedia course can augment traditional courses by:

- > Allowing students to prepare for an instructor-led course; for example, if some students need basic Windows 95 skills before learning your product.

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**November Program Meeting**

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- > Acting as a set of reference material after the instructor-led course is over. Covering course content ahead of time, so the instructor becomes a subject matter expert available to answer more detailed questions.
- > Following up an instructor-led course as a post-test with review sessions to go over weak points.

Barbara pointed out that computer skills and procedural tasks work better as multimedia courses than instructor-led training.

One of the strengths of multimedia is its ability to simulate a computer environment so trainees can apply their skills in a real-world setting.

When a company uses multimedia to its best advantage alongside traditional instructor-led courses, it can:

- > Reduce training time by 50 percent.
- > Increase employee and customer loyalty.
- > Increase profits and sales.

Although multimedia is more costly to develop than instructor-led training, over the long-term it is actually more cost-effective.

**Did You Know . . .**

- > When Einstein died he gave his brain to scientists, and they are still studying it today to search for signs of a genius.
- > The yo-yo was originally a weapon in the Philippines. 
- > 1/100 of a second is called a *jiffy*.
- > The little hole in the sink that lets the water drain out, instead of flowing over the side, is called a *porcelator*.
- > Mailing an entire building has been illegal in the U.S. since 1916 when a man mailed a 40,000-ton brick house across Utah to avoid high freight rates. 

**Help Us Plan a Competition Program**

The STC/SM needs your help to plan a competition program for Fall of 1998. The planning committee will consist of several subcommittees, including the following:

- > Publicity – Plans publicity activities
  - > Judging – Plans the logistics of judging entries
  - > Budget – Plans the entry fees and expected expenses
  - > Logistics – Plans how entries will be logged and turned over to the judges and how those who submit entries will be notified
  - > Banquet – Plans the Award banquet
- We need staff for each of these committees and members with strong project management skills who are willing to co-chair the competition program or one of the above committees.
- Please fill out this form to let us know how you would like to help.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (W) \_\_\_\_\_

Subcommittee you would like to help:  Banquet  
 Budget  Judging  
 Logistics  Publicity

How many hours each month can you spend on this activity?  
 1-3  4-6  7-9

Would you like to co-chair the program?  Yes  No

Would you like to co-chair a subcommittee?  Yes  No

Send to:  
 Ruth Blough  
 44727 Midway Drive  
 Novi, MI 48375

**Welcome, New Members!**

*David L. Dickason Walter J. Mrozek  
 Zena A. Ochmanek Anthony Viviano  
 Patricia K. York*

We also welcome the following members who have transferred into our chapter:

*Margaret J. Matheson Michele M. McLaughlin  
 Joyce L. States Daria J. Wilchivsky*

We look forward to seeing you at future STC/SM functions!

## Calendar of Events

### December 1 (Monday)

#### STC/SM Board of Directors Meeting

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

### December 10 (Wednesday)

#### Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon

Weber's Restaurant  
Begins between 11:30 and 12 noon

### December 10 (Wednesday)

#### STC/SM Holiday Celebration

Longacre House  
Farmington Road  
Farmington Hills  
7:00 p.m.



### January 15 (Thursday)

#### Deadline for the following:

STC 1997/98 Ken Caird Student  
Article Competition  
STC International Technical Video  
Competition

### January 21 (Wednesday)

#### STC/SM Program Meeting

Speaker: Jack DeLand  
Topic: Internet/Shminternet:  
What am I Supposed To Do Now?  
Holiday Inn Livonia West  
Cash Bar 6:30 p.m.  
Dinner 7:00 p.m.  
Program 8:00 p.m.  
Contact Ellen Burgett  
313.913.3074  
Email: ellen\_burgett@medstat.com

# Happy Holidays!

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# TECH comments

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