

Tech comments

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

October 1998

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Ginny Collins-Llope
President STC/SM

Many Paths To Technical Communication

All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are.

—Paul Neruda

Many of us learned our trade outside the university. This is changing, but the lessons we learned on our own can add much to the education new technical communicators receive.

One Story

When I went to college, I never considered a career in technical communication. I had never even heard of technical writing. The truth is, I had no idea what work I would pursue when I graduated. However, I loved writing, I loved technology and science, and I liked to share information and teach. When I graduated, I worked for a while in a job that was, well, my first opportunity. It was money, but it wasn't a career. In other words, I still hadn't figured out what I wanted to *do*.

Fortunately, before too long I was approached by two friends who had graduated as engineers and started their own machine vision company. They asked me to help them write a manual describing how to use a machine vision system they had created to inspect, of all things, adult incontinent pads. I was paid \$6 an hour, but I loved it, and more important, I was on my way to a career. I've been writing technical documents ever since. I had found a way to combine my love of writing, technology, and teaching.

Two Questions

How did you become a technical communicator? The answer to this question is often interesting because those who are experienced technical communicators today often come from richly varied backgrounds; some from academia, some from engineering, some from journalism, some from science . . . As a group, we have quite a knowledge base!

With more and more colleges and universities offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in technical communication, I believe the

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Fall Means Back To Everything

For some odd reason, even though, for the most part, we are long past our formal school days, early fall seems to represent an unofficial beginning or resurgence of standard operations, whether they be tied to paying jobs or organizations. September is usually when monthly STC meetings start after a summer hiatus, for example. Of course, your chapter leaders worked very hard all summer to make sure the STC program year began with all the ducks lined up and a great series of monthly meetings to whet your interest.

Shortly, you should all be receiving information about the 1998 Region 4 Conference—or maybe you already have. It all depends upon when your newsletter editor runs this column. The Conference this year, called Creativity and Innovation, also includes a Career Fair. It takes place in Columbus, Ohio, at Columbus State. The Central Ohio Chapter is promising a very productive and useful conference for all of you. STC Past President JoAnn Hackos, an expert in the field of usability, among other subjects, will deliver the keynote address.

Thanks To Chapter Leaders

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the chapter leaders in Region 4 for the outstanding job they do. It's not always an easy job, but I know that I found that the more I became involved with an organization, the more I got from it. Sometimes the paybacks are obvious, such as when chapter members are able to vouch for my capabilities when I discuss opportunities for me to provide writing and editing services with their bosses. Sometimes the returns are more subtle, but often more rewarding, such as when we develop a network of professional colleagues and support across the country and beyond.

It is also particularly exciting to work on chapter projects that encourage and promote the profession along with others similarly motivated. We all work for various employers, whether they be corporations, small businesses, contract houses, or, as in my case, ourselves. But we also work in a profession. And, in working to



Thea Teich
Region 4 Director-

But we also work in a profession. And, in working to promote the profession, we also develop, support, and

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Fall Means Back to Everything

promote the profession, we also develop, support, and promote ourselves.

Dates To Remember

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you of several important upcoming dates on the STC calendar:

- > October 15: due date for the submission of the first of three issues for the STC Newsletter Competition.
- > October 16: due date for the submission of Sigma Tau Chi nomination forms, recommendations, transcripts, and résumés to the Sigma Tau Chi Nominating Committee.
- > October 24: due date for the submission of recommendations to the Associate Fellows Nominating Committee (All chapters should send the names of 10-year members who have served STC and the chapter outstandingly to this committee; backup material and letters of recommendation will have to be collected by the chapter.).
- > November 15: due date for submission of nominations for Distinguished Chapter Service Award to the regional director-sponsor. I hope all chapters will take this opportunity to recognize *unsung heroes*. All chapters, no matter what size, can nominate at least one member to receive this award. Chapters with more than one hundred members can nominate one member for each one hundred. All members who are not currently officers are eligible.

Check the STC website, click on Publications, then click on Guidelines to find the official forms for submitting nominations for any STC award or recognition program. ¶

You can reach Thea Teich at:

Phone: 513.521.8102

Fax: 513.521.8139

TeichTMC@aol.com

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Many Paths To Technical Communication

question of “how we became technical communicators” may disappear. After all, we don’t ask a teacher, “How did you become a teacher?” But we might ask why. Why did you become a technical communicator? I’ll wager that many of our answers will be the same. For many of us, at least one element of the decision to become a technical communicator is to fulfill a desire to teach.

Three Possibilities

To those of you with experience: The way I see it, you have three choices regarding your wisdom, experience, and talents.

- > You can keep them to yourself. While I understand the thinking behind keeping trade secrets just that, I hope some gentle prodding can coax a few gems out of you if a novice to our profession approaches you with questions.
- > Share them with a few people on an as-needed basis.
- > Share them with many in a more public fashion. Perhaps this is one of the motivations behind the foundation of our professional society.

For Posterity

If we don’t take opportunities to share, we lose the chance to influence the new breed of technical communicators who are being trained by our colleges and universities. The education they receive is no doubt accurate, no doubt state-of-the-art, and certainly valuable. I wish such a program had been available to me! However, no class can substitute for the knowledge that comes from our richly varied experiences, skill sets, and approaches to our work. Many of us learned our trade outside the university. We have much to offer. We have much to teach and also much to learn. ¶

Back To School?

Have you considered a graduate degree in technical communications? What are the benefits of an advanced degree? Are there any drawbacks? What programs are local universities offering?

You'll learn the answers to your questions at the October 21 STC/SM program meeting. Our presenters will be:

- > Ann Blakeslee of Eastern Michigan University
- > Gary Heba of Bowling Green University
- > Leslie Olsen of the University of Michigan
- > Frances J. Ranney of Wayne State University.

This meeting will be at the Holiday Inn, Livonia, I275 and 6 mile. Special rate for members' dinner/program is only \$10!

For more information, contact

Ruth Blough
Program Director
ruth_open_door@msn.com
248.305.9362

PR Competition Manager Needed

Ann Blankinship needs a public relations competition manager. Sandra Giles resigned from the managership of the STC Public Relations Competition. However, she is leaving the competition in excellent shape. There is time for a new manager to become familiar with the competition before much more work on it starts.

This is one of the smaller competitions; it receives about 10 entries a year. Coming into the position now, the manager would need to arrange for a local judging event in February, recruit three local non-STC judges, hold the event, report the competition results, and prepare the winning entries for the annual conference. It would be good if the manager wrote an article or two for *Tieline* this fall. The job requires meeting critical deadlines, but the work load is not extreme.

If you know someone who would be good for this position, please contact Ann at 281.999.8779 or annblank@msn.com. r

Welcome, New Members!

*Michael E. Barker
Mark A. Berrens
Andrea L. Bradbury
Susan J. Donswell
Victoria M. Henry
LuAnne S. Holder*

*Ann M. Kitalong-Will
James A. Lovat
Monique K. Scott
Michael J. Tolinski
David C. Woomer*

And Transferring In

*Melissa M. Bachand
Victoria J. Crenshaw
Paul J. Sisler
Thomas R. Weimer*

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

Current Job Postings

Note: The Employment Referral Service (ERS) has received very few job postings over the past several months. Most employers learn of our free job posting service only by word of mouth from STC members in the workforce. Please inform your employers about the ERS if they are looking to fill a position. For more information, contact our ERS manager, Frances Mueller Roach, at 734.764.5211 or fmroach@umich.edu.

Permanent Full-Time

Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan is looking for an analyst/instructional developer to develop on-line and hard copy documentation for use by operational areas, and to develop general specifications for training and documentation.

Requirements include: bachelor's degree in instructional technology, technical communications, or related discipline; demonstrated oral and written communication skills; demonstrated PC skills.

Submit letter of interest including salary requirements and résumé to:

Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan
600 Lafayette East
Mailcode 0109-RLJ
Detroit, MI 48226
Fax: 313.225.5629
Email: recruiting@bcbsm.com

Project manager sought by expanding west Michigan firm specializing in computer- and Web-based training, and online help.

Requires BS degree, strong communication and management skills, knowledge of Microsoft Office suite, and experience in multimedia training or instructional design.

Full time position with benefits.

Send résumé to:

Project Team Leader
Attn: Luanne
Media 1 Technicom, Inc.
11335 Apple Dr., P.O. Box 185
Nunica, MI 49448
Phone: 616.837.6119
Fax: 616.836.1974

Email questions to Chris Willis
cfwillis@m1tech.com.

Contract

Arbortext/Adept taggers needed by large corporation to convert existing documents and tag new ones in a custom DTD. Two-week paid training session provided. May work from home or from a corporate office.

Requirements: experience and training in Arbortext Adept, including use of DTDs, tagging, and troubleshooting; excellent typing and proofreading skills; knowledge of MS Windows.

Salary \$14-\$18 per hour; 12-month contract.

Doreen Kephart
Professional Resource Associates, Inc.
201 Broadway
Marine City, MI 48039
Fax: 810.765.1182
Email: prainfo@pra-usa.com
Web site: www.pra-usa.com

Quote Of The Month

The most important thing in communication is to hear what *isn't* being said.

—Peter Drucker

Fall 1998 STC Board Meeting Summary

by Thea Teich, STC Region 4 Director-Sponsor

The STC Board met all day on September 17 to conduct a great deal of business. Director-sponsors met afterward to discuss a number of upcoming milestone dates concerning nominations for Distinguished Chapter Service Awards, Associate Fellows, and Chapter Achievement Awards. I have talked about these upcoming opportunities to recognize your members in previous articles and hope to see many submissions from you for DCSAs in my mailbox soon. Associate Fellows' nominations go directly to that STC committee.

Actions taken at the September board meeting:

- The 1999 balanced budget was passed—after much effort both before the meeting and during; Treasurer Martha Collins deserves an award just for keeping everything on track.
- The site for the 2004 annual conference changed from New York to Philadelphia. New York sources were estimating \$400 per night hotel costs, which would have made that venue beyond many members' means.
- Richard Wrye (First Coast chapter) was appointed Conference Support Manager for the Orlando conference in 2000.
- The STC Strategic Plan for 1998-2003 was approved. For information about this, contact Annette Reilly, strategic planning committee manager, through the STC office.
- The *STC Ethical Principles for Technical Communicators* (previously named the *STC Ethical Guidelines for Technical Communicators*) was approved.
- This statement in the policy on election campaigning: "Campaigning by candidates for Society level office is not forbidden by the Society Bylaws, but should be discouraged; if done, the candidates should be ethical in their methods. (9/88)" will be replaced with: "Candidates for Society-level office who conduct campaigns for office should be ethical in their methods." In other words, campaigning for STC offices is no longer discouraged, provided it is done in an ethical manner.
- The Front Range (Utah) and Columbia River (Oregon) student chapters were dissolved. The needs of the members will be served by regular chapters in the area (Intermountain and Willamette Valley).
- The San Diego State University student chapter was dissolved. The needs of the members will be served by the San Diego chapter.

Additional Notes

The *Quick Reference to Resources* publication for 1998-99 was completed and placed on the STC office Web site under Administrative Guidelines, where the *Chapter Handbook* and other key guidelines are located. This brochure is also available in hard copy through the STC office.

One service some of you may find very useful: your chapter's mailing lists and membership lists are now available in electronic format via email by contacting the STC office. Provided your purpose is STC business, the office will send you a mailing list as a comma-delimited ASCII file that you can download into spreadsheet software by denoting it as file type "dBase." Then you can generate labels from there. Larger chapters have such electronic files sent directly to mailing houses that handle their newsletter or meeting notice distribution. Smaller chapters may find it more efficient to handle generating labels themselves, although the STC office will continue to send out prepared hard-copy labels to chapters regularly.

Chapters are encouraged to send copies of public relations materials to both their

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Board Meeting Summary

Director-Sponsor and the STC office for archiving. This includes chapter brochures, published articles, and other promotional materials.

Chapters planning a regional conference should consider consulting with the STC Regional and Chapter Conference Committee, a resource that reports to Lory Hawkes, assistant to the president for conferences. This committee, managed by George Hoerter, provides advice and assistance on all facets of organizing and running regional conferences, including help with determining budgets and programs, identifying necessary services, and recruiting volunteers. Contact the committee through the STC office. r

Ken Caird Student Article Competition

STC invites eligible students to participate in the 1998/99 Ken Caird Student Article Competition. This competition recognizes excellence in technical communication articles written by college students.

Awards will be presented in both undergraduate and graduate categories, and winning entries will be honored and displayed at STC's annual conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, May 16-19, 1999.

Entries must be received by January 15, 1999. A submitter does not need to be a member of STC to enter the competition.

For more information, contact::

Bonnie Fink
bfink@bgnet.bgsu.edu.

STC/SM Senior Members

We proudly present our newest senior members:

Karen Gilbert
Daniel Masee
Frances Mueller Roach

A senior member must belong to STC for five years. Our senior members bring valuable experience to our chapter. q

October 21, 1998

Program Meeting

Back to School?

Ann Blakeslee
Eastern Michigan University

Gary Heba
Bowling Green State University

Leslie Olsen
University of Michigan

Frances J. Ranney
Wayne State University

Holiday Inn Livonia West
17123 N. Laurel Park Drive
Livonia, Michigan

Cash Bar 6:30

Dinner 7:00

Presentation 8:00

Dinner and Meeting:

Members – \$10.00

Nonmembers – \$30.00

Meeting Only:

Members – \$5.00

Nonmembers – \$10.00

Entrée Choices:

Sage Stuffed Chicken

Pasta Primavera

RSVP: Ruth Blough

248.305.9362

ruth_open_door@msn.com

Calendar Of Events

October 21 (Wednesday)

Program Meeting

Back to School?
Holiday Inn
I-275 & 6 Mile Rd.
Livonia

October 22 (Thursday)

Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon

Gourmet Garden, 2255 W. Stadium Blvd.
Begins between 11:30 and noon

November 2 (Monday)

Board of Directors Meeting

Catherine Titta's office
6:30 p.m.

November 18 (Wednesday)

Dinner Meeting

Machine Translation
Holiday Inn North Campus
Ann Arbor

December 17 (Thursday)

Holiday Gathering

Longacre House
Farmington Hills

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. We accept manuscripts in both hardcopy and electronic format with 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.

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