



TECH *comments*

November-December 2002 Vol. 32 No. 1

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Letter from the President

What Kind of Face is on Your Pumpkin?

By Catherine Titta Buerkle

Wow, I can't believe it's pumpkin carving time already. Can anyone else? The summer just flew by... and here we are, at the beginning of another STC/SM program season.

In the last year we've seen a lot of change. From September 11, 2001, to now the tech industry (and the world) has been reeling from the economic impact. I'm sure many of you are struggling to find work, or are hoping that your employer is really as solid as management says they are.

So, in light of the changes in the last year, what kind of face are you carving on your pumpkin? (This is my version of the age-old question, "What color is your parachute?")

I guess I'd have to say that I'm carving a cautiously optimistic face (if you can imagine such a face). I'm certainly cautious about the state of the economy, but optimistic that things will get better.

The State of the Chapter

I've definitely seen a positive upswing in our chapter lately. There are many new faces at chapter meetings, and lots of new, enthusiastic, talented volunteers. It sure makes this job a breeze!

With new faces and new hands come new ideas. You'll see some changes in the chapter newsletter, and notice a spirit of fun at the chapter program meetings (with door prizes and icebreakers), among other things.

Responding to a Need

Last year, our Programs team put together a two-part series on job hunting and interviewing. This year, the team will build on those ideas and explore the impact of higher education or certification on your resumé in the job market at the November 14 program meeting. (See page 5 for a list of other upcoming topics.)

Continued on page 3

Lanette's Lines:

TECH comments goes High(er) Tech!

Greetings and welcome to our revived STC/SM chapter newsletter! Having somehow volunteered for the job of Managing Editor, I've been sharpening my project management skills with a lot of help from a lot of really great chapter members. Jennifer Regal had already assembled a cadre of volunteers, and the Board, especially former editor Mike Dailey, have been great sources of information and help as well. We got a late start, but we're running hard to catch up and excited about what's ahead.

At least for this program year, we plan to publish bimonthly, thus the "November-December" designation. My goal is to have the newsletter in your hands by the beginning of the first month of each two-month span.

And that's where the title above starts to make sense. In order to encourage greater participation in our chapter listserv, get the newsletter to you faster, and save the chapter a LOT of money, *we have decided to publish the newsletter in electronic format only, after the first two issues.* Beginning with the March-April issue, the newsletter will no longer be printed and mailed in hard copy. It will be distributed as a PDF file downloadable from the STC/SM web site, as it has been for some time now. When each issue is ready, and has been posted to the web site, our new Webmaster, Shannon Everhart, will send a message to the listserv announcing its availability.

We're hoping this will encourage you to join the listserv, if you haven't done so already. Instructions are on the web site and printed in this issue (it's so easy!). We'd like to have *all* chapter members on the listserv, but that's a subject for another article.

For now, I'd like to thank all who have made this first issue so much fun, and invite you to contact me with suggestions and feedback about the newsletter. We know it's a work in progress, and we really want to hear from you.

Lanette Cornwell
Managing Editor
Lanette.Cornwell@buckeye-express.com
(Yes, that's "buckeye," as in "Ohio"!)

March 2003

TECH comments
goes to PDF
Join the Listserv
now!

Deadline December 2

January-February issue
TECH comments
E-mail:
Lanette.Cornwell@
buckeye-express.com

How To Join the STC/SM Listserv

1. Go to the Listserv web site at: <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcsemc-l>
2. Click **Join stcsemc-l**
3. Type your e-mail address in the appropriate field. Your e-mail address is required for participation in the Listserv.
4. If you are not specifying optional information, go to Step 9.

Optional information:

5. Type your full name in the appropriate field.
6. Select the type and frequency of e-mail messages you would like to receive.
7. Select the *option you prefer for viewing your own postings.*
8. Select the *option you prefer for confirming your own postings.*
9. Click Save. Your submission will be confirmed.

TECH comments

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

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While I think we all realize there's no such thing in this world as "job security," I like to think of our STC chapter as "career security." By that, I mean that the contacts and friends you make over the years in STC will serve you far better over the long run than that recruiter's business card. The investment you make in STC – whether you're volunteering, taking advantage of professional development, or networking – will last your whole career. You can't say that about too many things these days, can you?

Our Community

In addition to "career security," one of the themes you'll hear from me this year is our "community of technical communicators." I have a group of friends (yes, they're geeky technical communicators) who send around a Word of the Day, just for fun. If it were my turn, I'd choose "community," and pick this ecological definition of the word to describe our chapter:

A group of plants and animals living and interacting with one another in a specific region under relatively similar environmental conditions. The region occupied by a group of interacting organisms.

The terms that I like in this definition are *specific region*, *similar environmental conditions*, and *interacting organisms*. Doesn't that sound like our STC Southeastern Michigan chapter?? I think so.

Well, I guess that's about all, for this newsletter issue. I'd love to hear from you about anything you like. For starters, send me an e-mail and tell me what kind of face you carved on your pumpkin this year! You can reach me at ctittabuerkle@yahoo.com. Thanks for listening.



STC@50

STC/SM History Update

By Mary Jo David

What can I tell you about the history of the Southeastern Michigan chapter? Well, for starters, I can tell you that it's older than I am (but not by much)! According to records at the International office of the STC, the Southeastern Michigan chapter of the STC was formed on February 1, 1957. That means our chapter is almost as old as the STC itself, which is celebrating its 50th year this year.

I don't know about you, but I think it's phenomenal that a bunch of technical writers in southeastern Michigan even managed to find each other in 1957...let alone organize to form a chapter of the fledgling STC! I say that because, when I first started out as a technical writer it was 1984, and I hadn't even heard of the profession. I happened upon my first technical writing job quite by accident, and from talking to people over the years, I know I'm not the only one. I just can't imagine how few and far between the practitioners were in 1957.

But I can imagine that once they did find one another, they were probably quick to recognize the benefits of organizing and getting together to network and solve problems they were faced with on the job. Still, it couldn't have been easy. It's not like they could just log on to the web and search for one another!

I've been a member of our chapter since 1986, the year the Detroit chapter hosted the national (or was it International by then?) conference at the Renaissance Center in downtown Detroit. As I mentioned in a recent listserv posting, I had to begin weaning my month-old son so I could attend the conference! Well, now I can tell you that I'm very glad I did, considering that was the last time Detroit hosted the conference.

This past September I volunteered to do what I can to "dig up" some of our chapter's history. Since then, I've posted to the chapter listserv and put out the word at Board meetings and chapter programs. I'm looking to share information with people regarding their history with the STC in general, and specifically our chapter. I've already heard back from a few of you, and I'd like to encourage you to keep those stories and anecdotes coming. I'm compiling them and will be writing about them in upcoming issues of this newsletter.

Next on my list, I tackle the "Tales from the Crypt," or rather tales from the storage facility that currently houses all of our old chapter records. Stay tuned...and regardless of whether you are a long-time member or a fairly new member, I'd love to hear from you. Don't be a stranger! Call me at 734-392-0019 or e-mail me: maryjo@writeawayent.com.

This is the first of a series of articles about our chapter's history, being run to help celebrate the 50th Anniversary year of the Society for Technical Communication.



Member Profile

Bill Peters

By Debbie Merz

Bill Peters is a Business Processing Analyst at the American Automobile Association (AAA) in southeastern Michigan, but he has the opportunity to do a little bit of everything. His daily activities include technical writing; Microsoft Outlook forms development; and web design, development, and management. After two years as a sales and service agent in AAA Michigan's call center, Bill moved into his current position four years ago. Bill is happy to be working for AAA because he enjoys his colleagues and because the insurance industry is relatively stable and promising for technical writers and information developers.

A contractor working at AAA Michigan introduced Bill to STC about two years ago, and Bill has been involved in our chapter ever since. Bill is best known in the Southeastern Michigan chapter for his assistance in hosting various events at AAA in Dearborn. In turn, he appreciates the networking opportunities and wealth of knowledge that STC offers through seminars, meetings, and national conventions.

Bill grew up in Milan, MI and attended the University of Michigan. He graduated with a B.A. in Management and Communications in 1995. He currently lives in Ypsilanti with a roommate and two cats, Cody and Sable. Bill is an avid fan of University of Michigan football.

Monthly Program Meetings Offer Variety and Fun

By Lynnette Pryce

September: Mixer

We had quite a turnout at our September kick-off program meeting, with a mix of students, members, and prospective members attending. The meeting started with a talent scavenger hunt—members had to find out the talents of others. It was a great opening activity for the networking meeting because everyone got involved and found potential resources.

The new program committee members were introduced (see the STC/SM web site for a list of the current board members). Remaining committee openings were announced at the beginning of the meeting, and by the end of the meeting we had rounded up volunteers to tackle those positions. Way to recruit!

The program meetings were announced for the upcoming year. Fantastic programs are on the horizon! Please come out and join us for at least one of them.

Mary Jo David, board Vice-president, requested any historical or anecdotal information about the STC/SM chapter for the 50th anniversary celebration. If you have anything to contribute, please forward it to her. (You can email her at: maryjo@writeawayent.com)

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SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

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

Four awards of \$1,000 each will be granted for academic year 2003-2004.

Application deadline is February 15, 2003.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
703-522-4114
www.stc.org



Continued from page 4

October: Tools, Tips, and Techniques

Congratulations to Catherine Titta (now Catherine Titta Buerkle), Chapter President, who got married and still showed up at our October meeting!

There is a vast amount of knowledge and experience among the members of the STC/SM chapter, and we all shared it at the October Tools, Tips, and Techniques roundtable. The program had a large turnout, and everyone seemed pleased that they learned a little and got to share some of their own experiences. There were some heavy discussions, but Cecilia Lorenz (Program Chair) kept us on track with the bell.

The locations and schedule for networking lunches for the Oakland/Wayne counties area were distributed. Thanks to Bill Peters for hosting another meeting at AAA. We greatly appreciate it!

Preview: 2003 Meetings

December: no meeting

Tuesday, January 21

The Business of Freelancing

A panel of freelance technical writers discuss advantages and pitfalls of working as an independent contractor. Also tips on managing your business (taxes, project management, marketing, etc.) with recommendations for small business owner resources (books, organizations, etc.).

Wednesday, February 19

Technical Writing in the Medical Profession

Discussion of medical writing requirements and opportunities in this field.

STC/SM Networking Lunches

STC/SM members gather for lunch each month to meet other technical communicators for professional networking and job sharing information. All interested technical communicators are welcome to attend in addition to STC/SM members. RSVPs are appreciated in order to secure sufficient table space.

Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County

Gatherings start at 11:30 a.m., but arrivals are welcome at any time. Contact Kathy Carter at 734-475-5865 (bluehoo@comcast.net) for more information or to be added to the e-mail reminder list. Networking lunch information is also available on the STC/SM web site. *Note that dates and locations are subject to last-minute change.*

2003 schedule to date:

January 23	Café Zola
February 26	Gourmet Garden
March 27	Café Marie
April 30	Red Robin
May 22	Seva
June 25	Olive Garden
July 24	Rio Bravo
August 27	Real Seafood

Oakland and Wayne County Area

Lunches will take place on the scheduled day beginning at 11:45 a.m. and ending not later than 1:00 p.m. If you would like to host a lunch (send out reminders, call the restaurant, welcome people to the table), contact Lynnette Pryce at 248-737-7300 ext. 22004. For more information or to reserve a spot, e-mail Lynnette at lynnette.pryce@compuware.com by 5:00 p.m. the day before.

2003 schedule to date:

February 5	Big Fish II (Stephenson Hwy, Troy/Madison Hts.)
March 12	Big Buck Brewery (Opdyke Rd., Auburn Hills)
May 7	Bonfire Bistro (Hagerty/7 Mi., Livonia)
June 12	Chili's (Ford Rd., Dearborn)
July 9	Mr. B's (Main St., Royal Oak)
August 14	Pegasus (Monroe St., Detroit)

Congratulations, Senior Members!

The following members of our chapter have achieved the status of Senior Member in the Society for Technical Communication:

Erica B. Ackerman
Jacqueline M. DiGiovanni
Mary Claire Morris

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to STC Members**

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Region 4 Director-Sponsor

Remember your first meeting?

By Mike Bates

Hello,

I remember my first STC meeting as a professional. Sure, I had been an active member of the Bowling Green State University chapter while in school, but now I was out on my own and interested in finding out what the rest of the technical communication practitioners were up to. I walked into my first meeting in Northeast Ohio and didn't know anyone. I no sooner stuck my name badge to my shirt and someone was there to introduce himself to me. From there, the person took me around the room and introduced me to others. I left that night feeling as though I had met 20 new professionals in my field. I couldn't wait to go to the next meeting.

Since then, I have moved four times and been a member of four different STC chapters. Each experience has been different. Each chapter has had something unique to offer me. From Bowling Green to Cleveland; to Jacksonville, Florida; to Raleigh, North Carolina; and back to Cleveland, one thing is certain. I have established an incredible network of friends and colleagues through STC that I will never forget.

What does this have to do with you? Consider the times. Think about the unfamiliar faces at your next STC meeting. Think about the people you may not have seen in a while.

This fall, many of you and your chapter leaders will be running formal membership drives. You will be looking for new members and trying to identify ways to retain your current membership. You don't have to be the Membership Drive Chairperson or on the committee to help. Here are a few suggestions.

Meet one new person at your next meeting. Take an opportunity to seek out one person at a meeting who is new or whom you have not met before. Make an effort to get to know them. Consider what it was like when you first started in STC. You didn't know anyone and you weren't sure what value the Society could have for you. Listen to what the individual is looking for from the meeting and focus on how you can help them.

Contact a member that you haven't seen in a while. Many people become busy with other parts of their lives or move into positions outside the field of technical communication. Ask your membership chairperson for the name of one person who is no longer an STC member or whom you haven't seen in a while. Contact that person. Let them know what has happened lately at the chapter and Society levels. Invite them to the next meeting and, most importantly, find out why they stopped coming or are no longer members. It's important to listen to what our members want out of the Society, but it is equally important to learn why folks have stopped participating.

Promote services at the chapter and Society levels. Many of you are involved in chapters that are very active. You have excellent programs that keep you coming back for more. Think about the services that your chapter and the Society have to offer. Consider the employment banks, mentoring opportunities, listservs, and other services that you use within your own chapter. Also, consider services like the Special Interest Groups (SIGs), employment bank, research opportunities, and award programs that the Society offers.

Take a proactive role in keeping your chapter and the Society alive and well. It is your responsibility. Even if you are not sure where to start, think back to your first meeting. Remember what kept you coming back. Then think about why you are still attending meetings today. You suddenly have two stories to get you started.

Mike Bates is the Manager of Information Architecture at Rockwell Automation and Region 4 Director-Sponsor. He can be reached at mpbates@software.rockwell.com.

STC/SM
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TECH *comments*

November-December 2002

Conferences and Meetings of Interest

December 3-6, 2002

International Conference on
Computers in Education
Auckland, New Zealand
icce2002.massey.ac.nz/

December 5-6, 2002

Digital Leadership Education
Conversation
San Diego, CA
[www.convergemag.com/events/
conference.phtml?confid=84.0](http://www.convergemag.com/events/conference.phtml?confid=84.0)

December 9-13, 2002

Usability Week 2002
San Jose, CA
[www.nngroup.com/events/
uw2002/silicon_valley/
agenda.html](http://www.nngroup.com/events/uw2002/silicon_valley/agenda.html)
*Strategies to enhance the user's
experience*

December 12-13, 2002

Learning at a Distance in the 21st
Century
Fort Lauderdale, FL
[www.fdla.com/
fdla_2002_conference.htm](http://www.fdla.com/fdla_2002_conference.htm)

February 26-28, 2003

USITS '03
Seattle, WA
www.usenix.org/events/usits03/
*To bring together a diverse
collection of researchers and
engineers to help define the
future of Internet applications,
technologies, and systems*

March 19, 2003

Conference of Association of
Teachers of Technical Writing
New York, NY

www.attw.org/default.asp

*In conjunction with the College
Composition and Communica-
tion Conference*

April 11, 2003

Spectrum 2003
Rochester, NY
Kathryn Wise
hhkwise@frontiernet.net
*Annual conference of the
Rochester STC chapter*

May 18-21, 2003 STC@50

Dallas, TX

www.stc.org/conferences.asp
*50th Annual Conference of the
Society for Technical
Communication*
