



In This Issue

- Presidential Remarks 1
- Networking Over Lunch 4
- Community Comments 5
- October Program:
 - Fearless Speaking 6
- Book Report: Writing a
 - Professional Life 7
- November Program:
 - Flash Tutorials 9
- Networking & Learning
 - Opportunities 10
- CoolTools: PrimoPDF 11
- Letter from the Editor 12
- Member Profile: Karen Minto 13
- Student Spotlight:
 - Holly Helterhoff 16
- Student Spotlight: Maureen
 - E.C. Moyer 18
- A Matter of Degrees 20

Teaser: What member probably wouldn't be a member if she hadn't managed to straighten out the canopy lines tangled around her neck during a skydiving experience? Look inside for the answer!



Presidential Remarks

*by Natalie Roelant
STC/SM Chapter President*

As we near the end of the year, businesses throughout Southeastern Michigan are beginning to measure their strengths and weaknesses and plan how they will invest their budget dollars next year. Whether you are an employee of a firm, or an entrepreneur, now is a good time to begin your own measurement analysis and strategic planning for 2005.

Just as companies do, you should look at your life as a whole—not just at your relationships, your career, or your finances. After all, a change in finances could impact your relationships with others or your career. The same is true for changes (expected or unexpected) in your career. Take stock of your assets, identify your weaknesses, and put together a set of goals for turning your weaknesses into strengths. As technical writers, this could mean expanding your tools knowledge, learning a new skill set such as content management, or broadening your writing repertoire to include marketing or public relations writing.

Whew. What a sermon! Well, maybe I should leave the pulpit to people more experienced and knowledgeable in this arena. However, in a few weeks, you will receive your STC 2005 Dues Notice in your mail or your e-mail. When you have that Dues Notice in front of you, you may





SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

“Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.”

www.stc.org

TECHcomments

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

Managing Editor: Mary Jo David, newsletter@stc-sm.org • Assistant Editor: Emily Eisbruch • Layout & Design: Doug Howell • Reporters: Cynthia Leet, Maureen Moyer, Elaine Wisniewski, and the above

TECHcomments is published bimonthly, five times a year. Publication dates are the first of September, November, January, March, and May. The deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month preceding publication.

Reprints are permitted, provided you give credit and send a copy of your publication to the Managing Editor. Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors.

**Deadline for submissions:
December 18, 2004**

**January-February
issue of TECHcomments**

Please e-mail submissions to
maryjo@writeawayent.com

STC/SM Leadership 2004–2005

Executive Council

President **Natalie Roelant**
president@stc-sm.org

Vice-President **Lanette Cornwell**
vicepresident@stc-sm.org

Treasurer **Leslie Hipp**
treasurer@stc-sm.org

Secretary **Kendra Moe**
secretary@stc-sm.org

Immediate Past President **Mary Jo David**
pastpresident@stc-sm.org

Administrative Council

Job Board/Listserv **Chris Pellar-Kosbar**
jobboard@stc-sm.org
listserv@stc-sm.org

Membership **Barry Matthews**
membership@stc-sm.org

Newsletter **Mary Jo David**
newsletter@stc-sm.org

Professional Liaison **Laura Allen**
profliaison@stc-sm.org

Programs **Dunrie Greiling**
programs@stc-sm.org

Webmaster **Kathy Belanger**
webmaster@stc-sm.org

Educational Liaison **Andrea Frazier**
educliaison@stc-sm.org

Nominations nominations@stc-sm.org

Presidential Remarks

« continued from page 1

decide “on the fly” whether to renew your membership or not. This is the worst way to make such a decision. I know this, because I have to make the same decision, and it is a tough decision for me for several reasons, which I know you will respect as being private.

However, my point is, once I sat down and began to analyze the pros and cons of renewing my membership, I realized that my STC membership is a tool that helps me turn my own weaknesses into strengths. For example, the ability to tap into the knowledge of my peers and the exposure to the job market here in Southeastern Michigan (and across the world) are not found elsewhere.

I hope that when your Dues Notice arrives, you will already understand its value to your future as a technical writer and you will continue to take advantage of this professional organization. I haven't seen the 2005 Notice myself, but based on the information on the STC website, you'll see that there are some changes to how you enroll in a chapter and the special interest groups. These changes, which resulted from the STC Transformation initiative, were designed to make your membership in the STC more relative to your individual needs.

Wishing you and your family a safe and happy holiday.

— *Natalie*

For the latest in
STC/SM
job postings
go to
www.stc-sm.org

[Click Employment]

TECHcomments Team Welcomes Your Contributions

The TECHcomments team welcomes you! Do you have an experience with a process, tool, or educational program you'd like to write about? Would you like to contribute a review of a recent book you've read that might be of special interest to others in our field? Are you willing to share the story of how you became a technical writer and the various paths your career has taken? Please contact editor Mary Jo David at (734) 392-0019 or e-mail her at: maryjo@writeawayent.com or newsletter@stc-sm.org. We look forward to your involvement with the TECHcomments newsletter.

STC Scholarships Available!

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

Four awards of \$1000 each will be granted for academic year 2005-2006.

The application deadline is February 15, 2005.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office. You can also look online at: http://www.stc.org/scholarshipInfo_national.asp

STC Office

901 N. Stuart Street, Ste. 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

Phone: 703-522-4114

Networking Over Lunch

by Doug Howell

September

The September edition of the Ann Arbor Networking Lunch convened at Gourmet Garden on Tuesday, 26 September, 2004. The meeting was hosted by Kathy Carter, with Doug Howell and Kathryn Kopich also in attendance.

Kathryn was network lunching for the first time. She has been a tech writer for over 10 years and was recently let go from a position where she wrote training documentation. She's also written computer manuals, how-to's, and online help. She had quite a tale to tell about her last position, which included months of ups and downs. Her story rang all too familiar.

I brought the group up to speed on the last STC/SM program, which featured reports from 2004 STC international conference attendees. One of the topics that came up at the program was the ongoing debate about STC certification. That inspired Kathy Carter to mention the certification courses offered by the American Medical Writers Association (amwa.org), of which Kathy is a member. There are eight courses, including medical writing and editing, freelance writing, public relations and a multi-specialty. Courses are one-half day and are normally held at national and regional conferences. This can cause logistical problems, so many members find it easiest to plan ahead and take two or three courses at a single conference. Members may take up to six years to complete a course. The courses often prove an invigorating experience and open up a whole new set of contacts.

We also talked about STC's networking opportunities. We agreed that in comparison to AMWA, the broadness of the STC organization can make it difficult to connect with others who have similar interests. STC conferences we'd attended were fun

and a cheap source of education. As far as phone seminars go, the price tag is reasonable, but the topics may not often match our interests. Kathy mentioned that the first 10 years she was involved in STC, there seemed to be a lot going on—competitions, regional conferences, workshops—but the last 10 years these activities have been waning. We wondered if the downturn coincides with a decrease in volunteerism in general.

November

At the November 9 networking Lunch, held at Applebee's on Green Road, Kathy, Jinny Singer, Emily Eisbruch, and I continued discussing some of these same topics. Kathy showed us an AMWA monthly job list. It was quite long and even included a few tech-writing positions. Most jobs tend to be located along the coasts, especially the DC-to-NY-to-Boston corridor.

Technical communication
is only part of our lives, after all,
and it was refreshing to look
beyond it for awhile...

We also spent a few minutes talking about what it is we'd "really like to do." The projects we daydream about between the things we have to get done. Technical communication is only part of our lives, after all, and it was refreshing to look beyond it for awhile and talk about the things that keep us going.

Where do Networking Lunches stand amongst the array of things we could be doing? We all agreed that it's good to get to know different people, their thoughts and interests, and be exposed to different work (and life) situations and possibilities. Networking lunches are definitely on the low-key end of the range of networking opportunities, but they're a valuable opportunity we wouldn't want to lose. Check the schedule on page eight in this issue and make it a point to join us in January! *<end/>*



Community Comments

by Emily Eisbruch

This month we surveyed attendees at the October 21 STC/SM program meeting to find out their answers to the following question:

How did you become a technical writer?

Susan Korbal: “The whole art major thing just didn’t work out. I needed to eat!”

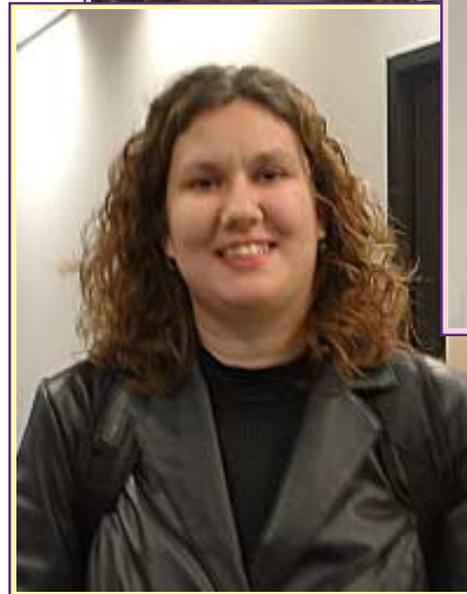
Laura Allen: “I went to school for it at Milwaukee School of Engineering. I dual majored in Engineering and Technical Communication for one quarter and then I decided I didn’t want to be an engineer.”

Sandy Harlacher: “Hughes Electronics took a chance on me and hired me for a technical writing position. I had been teaching technical writing at Western Michigan University. I had loved my teaching position, and then I moved to California, where I got the technical writing job with Hughes.”

Bill Peters: “I fell into it—literally. I started doing web development at AAA Michigan and for my Dad’s sporting goods e-commerce site. Technical writing just came along with the website work.”



*Top to Bottom:
Susan Korbal,
Sandy Harlacher,
Laura Allen,
Bill Peters*





October Presenter Demonstrates Successful Speaking Techniques

by *Emily Eisbruch*

Losing your voice, feeling your face turning red, experiencing trembling hands, losing your train of thought....none of these are pleasant things to experience—ever. But all of these can happen—right in the middle of giving a presentation—to people who suffer from fear of public speaking.

Strategies for overcoming the fear of public speaking and turning that fear into positive energy was the focus of Linda Meloche's presentation at the October 21, 2004, STC/SM program. Linda, a Trainer and Marketing Consultant for Dale Carnegie Systems, gave a lively presentation at the Borders Group Headquarters in Ann Arbor. She talked about her own passion for what she does helping people to become effective speakers, and she suggested that we all need to overcome our fears in order to reach our greatest potential.

Since Linda was giving a public talk about talking in public, she was able to personally showcase many of the strategies she was proposing. For example, one of the many tips Linda offered on public speaking was "Let an audience get to know you. Share obstacles and what life has taught you." After presenting that tip, Linda shared with our STC/SM audience a very personal experience she had

several years ago that escalated from a don't-worry-about-it small lump on her forehead into an MRI, CAT scan, biopsy, and eventually major surgery. The story itself was certainly interesting, and the way Linda told it, including details about her family's reaction and the doctors involved, definitely pulled in the entire audience.

Here are a few of the many other useful tips Linda presented for fun and fearless speaking:

- ✓ **Never memorize a talk**
- ✓ **Never write out a talk word-for-word**
- ✓ **Fill your talk with examples and stories**
- ✓ **Know 40 times more than you need (for confidence and Q & A)**
- ✓ **Practice with a supportive person**
- ✓ **If you act confident you will become confident**
- ✓ **Tell an audience you are honored to speak**
- ✓ **Speak with enthusiasm**
- ✓ **Use natural gestures**
- ✓ **Make eye contact; look for "friendly faces"**
- ✓ **Breathe!**
- ✓ **Smile**
- ✓ **Have a glass of water (not soda or coffee) ready**
- ✓ **Get to the talk early to meet and greet members of the audience**
- ✓ **Provide handouts AFTER the talk**
- ✓ **Don't be afraid to express emotion along with logic; you need both**
- ✓ **If you don't know the answer to a question, ask the audience for input**
- ✓ **Have fun giving your talk!**

continued on page 8 »

Book Review

Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job

Authors: Gerald J. Savage and Dale L. Sullivan

Reviewed by Emily Eisbruch

It's sad but true. Many books about technical communication are on the dry side. However, I recently read a book about our profession that is actually rather juicy! It is *Writing a Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job* by Gerald J. Savage and Dale L. Sullivan. Rather than attempting to lay out the theory or principles (yawn) behind what we do, this book takes a fresh approach

to exploring the technical communication profession. It consists of twenty-two short stories by technical communicators about their actual, real-world experiences in the field.

The story titles offer a sense of the fun of this book: "Tech Writing and the Art of Laziness," "How I Became a Goddess," "I'm a Nibbie: The Tale of an Object-Oriented GUI Developer," "Stranger in Paradigm," and "The Great Pyramid War" are just a few of the intriguing story titles.

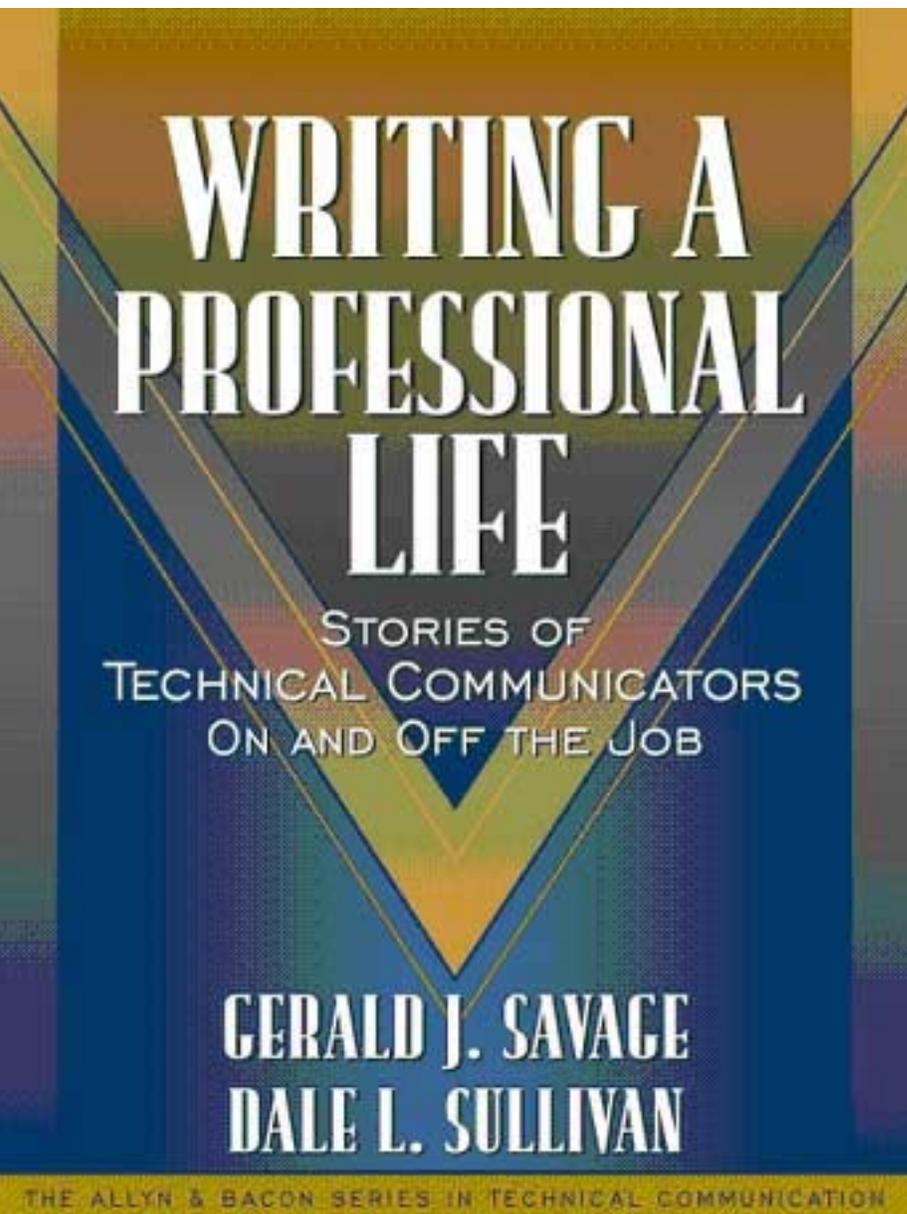
This book explores themes rarely discussed in most technical communication books, for example, the potential importance of food in our profession. Here's a sample from a story entitled "Three Months, Three Pages" by Vancouver-based technical communicator Rahel Anne Bailie:

It's the third month on the job, and I've held two technical review meetings, bought four dozen doughnuts, and made one funny birthday card. The later two items are bribes—incentives, if you're practicing corporate speak—for the engineers to cooperate in the first item, the tech review meetings.... Bringing food to engineers is a time-honored tradition. It makes them detour by your desk for a midafternoon sweet-tooth fix and brings out the eloquence of even the most recalcitrant engineers.

In an essay called "It's Not Mark Twain's River Anymore" Carol Hoeniges talks about the nervousness and anticipation that can accompany the job interview process.

My knuckles were white, I clutched the steering wheel for the entire fifty-five minute drive to Peoria. Why was I so nervous this

continued on page 8 »



Book Review

« continued from page 7

time, I wondered? After all, I'd been through the hiring drill before: resume, letter acknowledging the resumé, polite phone call to gather more information, cordial phone call to set up the time of our meeting, blah, blah, blah. So far so good. I liked Emma already. So why all the panic?

This interesting essay continues across many themes, as the narrator is hired and begins this new job, then leaves the company and starts working in another technical communication job for which she finds herself better suited.

The book features photos and short bios on each of the twenty-two contributors. One exciting surprise for me, and I'm sure many of us in the STC/SM Chapter, is a story by our very own Christine Pellar-Kosbar, who currently manages our chapter's Employment Referral Listserv. Christine's piece, entitled "What a Life," describes her life after leaving Michigan Tech. University in Houghton, Michigan, and moving with her husband to Washington D.C. A particularly memorable paragraph in Christine's story is this one: "Becoming a technical editor is like getting a disease. You can't read a restaurant menu without seeing a typo or noticing ways in which the format could be improved so you could find the soups."

Writing a Professional Life is part of The Allyn & Bacon Series in Technical Communication, which includes a range of books used in technical communication courses. You can order this book from www.amazon.com at a cost of \$30.00 for a new book or \$13.00 and up for a used copy. I encourage you to get a copy. You just might recognize yourself in a few of the stories! <end/>

October Presenter...

« continued from page 6

According to Linda, the best way to improve at public speaking is to practice. She urged each of us to seek out and volunteer for public speaking opportunities regularly. She suggested, for example, that we step forward to speak at events such as retirement parties or business meetings.

Importantly, Linda emphasized that volunteering to speak at an STC program is a wonderful way to enhance your speaking and presentation skills. The STC/SM Programming Committee, led by Dunrie Greiling, 734-913-1098 (email: programs@stc-sm.org), would love to hear from any of you who might be inspired to give that a try. <end/>

STC/SM Ann Arbor Networking Lunch 2005 Schedule

STC/SM members meet informally for lunch each month to share news and information. Gatherings start at 11:30 a.m., but arrivals are welcome at any time. Members, as well as interested technical communicators, are welcome to attend. R.S.V.P.'s are appreciated in order to secure sufficient table space.

Contact Kathy Carter at (734) 475-5865 (bluehoo@comcast.net) or Doug Howell at (734) 477-2857 (dhowell@bordersgroupinc.com) 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.

The following schedule was revised 16 Aug 2004. Dates and locations are subject to last-minute change.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Host</i>	<i>Location</i>
Thu, 13 Jan	Kathy	Shehan-Shah Indian
Tue, 8 Feb	Doug	Chili's Grill
Wed, 9 Mar	Kathy	California Pizza Kitchen
Tue, 12 Apr	Doug	Zingerman's Roadhouse
Thu, 26 May	Kathy	Northside Grill
Tue, 26 Jul	Doug	Kabob Palace

Chris Pellar-Kosbar Demonstrates Her Tutorial Prowess

by Mary Jo David



On November 16, 2004, the Programs Committee presented "A Comparison of Tools to Create Flash Tutorials" with guest speaker Christine Pellar-Kosbar. Chris, who happens to be our chapter's Job Board / Listserv Manager, presented four tools she investigated as part of a project she was undertaking for her employer, Gyricon, to develop an animated Flash file for showing users how to install, configure, or use one of their products. The tools she presented were Camtasia, Captivate (formerly RoboDemo), Qarbon, and Wink. Except for Wink, which is freeware, the other tools were in the \$300 to \$500 price range.

Chris explained that she had done most of her investigating of these tools six months to one year ago, and warned that most of them have had new releases since then. Prior to presenting them, however, she took the time to download evaluation copies of each new release so she would be informed of some of their latest features, and it was these latest versions that she demonstrated for us. Still, she made it a point to remind us that her tool choice—Qarbon—was made based on the features available earlier this year, before the new releases became available.

Chris began by introducing the concept of online tutorials. She mentioned that some consider these tutorials to be "demos" because they're viewable, but not something the viewer can interact with. Chris also explained the decision-making process she and her coworkers went through before deciding to create the tutorials in-house. As with most decisions, theirs was driven by time and cost. Their budget wasn't huge, so outsourcing the project to a local firm was cost prohibitive. However, they did have some time before the tutorials had to be out

the door, so—provided they found a reasonably priced tool—creating the tutorials in-house seemed the way to go.

For the purposes of presenting to our group, Chris took us through the process of using each of the four tools to create a step-by-step demo of how to change a heading style in a Word document. During the process, she highlighted some of the pros and cons of each product. Ironically, many of the pros could also be viewed as cons, depending on what features and what level of control you are interested in. For example, Chris listed the Timeline feature as both a pro and a con of Camtasia and Captivate, explaining that while the Timeline feature provides the author with lots of control, it can be quite complicated to use, especially with audio.

Searching for Software Options

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camtasia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Snagit ↗ - \$300 • Robodemo (now Captivate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Macromedia ↗ - \$500 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qarbon Viewlet Builder <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qarbon ↗ - \$500 • Wink (new) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Freeware" |
|--|---|

After demonstrating the tools, there was plenty of time for Q&A from the audience. In addition, Chris made laptops available after her presentation to attendees who wanted a chance to try the software firsthand before they left. If you'd like to view a more detailed list of the pros and cons of each tool, you can review the content of Chris' presentation at www.stc-sm.org/new.htm.

A special thanks to Chris Pellar-Kosbar for spending an evening sharing her knowledge with our members and to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for hosting this STC/SM program. [<end/>](#)

Networking & Learning Opportunities

Many of the following events are posted at www.stc.org/related.asp or www.stc.org/seminarsList.asp

December 8

Online seminar with Leah Guren, "Highlighting Hazards: Mastering Warnings and Error Messages." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

January 12, 2005

Online seminar with John Hedtke, "Preemptive Project Planning." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

January 13

STC/SM Ann Arbor Networking Lunch at Shehan-Shah Indian. Hostess: Kathy Carter. Email Kathy to confirm: bluehoo@comcast.net.

January 15-16

The James River Chapter STC will hold its 2005 conference at the Four Points by Sheraton hotel in Williamsburg, Virginia. The conference theme is "Information Design and Management." For more information, please contact: Don White IDM2005@stc-jamesriver.org or go to www.stc-jamesriver.org.

January 26

Online seminar with Thomas White, "A Pound of Salt, A Pint of Blood—Getting the Most Out of Your Contractors to Ensure Project Success." For all levels. See www.stc.org.

January 24-27, 2005

The 51st Annual Reliability and Maintainability Symposium will be held at the Hilton Alexandria Mark Center, Alexandria, Virginia. For more information, please visit: www.rams.org/

January 30-February 4, 2005

ASTD (the American Society for Training and Development) will hold the ASTD TechKnowledge 2005 Conference and Exposition at the Riviera Hotel and Casino, Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information, please contact: ASTD (703) 683-8100, www.astd.org.

February 15-16

National Association of Science Writers Conference. Washington DC. Early registration until December 15. See www.nasw.org/mem-maint/workshops/. A limited number of registrations available for non-NASW members. Contact workshops@nasw.org.

February 17-21

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) annual meeting, Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC. Contact AAAS Meetings Department (202) 326-6450 or see aaasmeeting@aaas.org.

February 25-26

The Atlanta Chapter STC will hold *Currents 2005*, its annual technical communication conference, at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University. Includes a full-day workshop on February 25 and a full-day conference on February 26. Contact Rachel Grimes, Conference Manager at rhrgrimes@checkfree.com or see www.stcatlanta.org.

March 16-19

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference on College Composition and Communication, "Opening the Golden Gates: Access, Affirmative Action, and Student Success," in San Francisco, CA. Contact NCTE (217) 328-3870 or see www.ncte.org.

March 19

The Philadelphia Metro Chapter STC will hold its annual conference on the Great Valley campus of Pennsylvania State University in Malvern, Pennsylvania. Includes a keynote address by Jean-luc Doumont and a presentation by Chris Kojm, the Deputy Executive Director of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, who will speak about the development of The 9/11 Commission Report. Contact Gary Samartino at (610) 701-0577 or garys@infoventions.com or see www.stcpcmc.org.

March 20-23

WinWriters UA Annual Conference, Las Vegas, NV. Register by phone 9 a.m.-4 p.m. PST, Monday-Friday at (800) 838-8999 (US and Canada) or (206) 285-2605 or go to www.winwriters.com/ohc05/reginfo.htm.

CoolTools!

by Mary Jo David

Cool Tools! is a new column this year in TECHcomments. Here, we hope to present one or two useful mini tools each issue. In some cases, these are proven tools and in other cases, they're just tools we've heard about. Either way, they're tools that, potentially, can save our members time or aggravation—or both!

PrimoPDF

PrimoPDF is a freeware program that was passed along to me from a friend who pointed out its usefulness for people who have not purchased the full version of Adobe Acrobat and, therefore, aren't able to create PDF files.

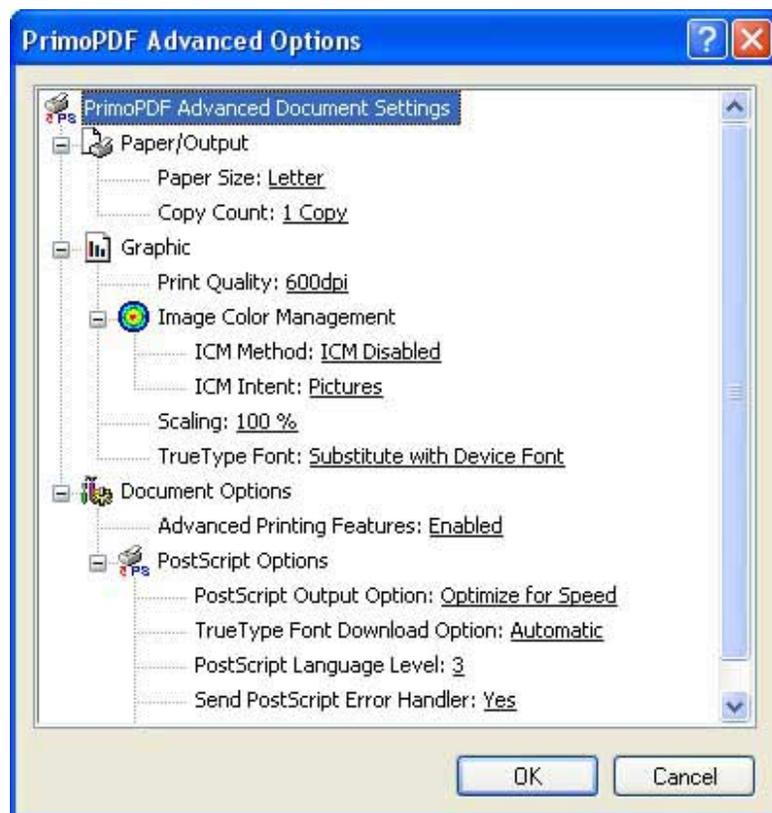
For background, the Acrobat Reader is a free download, available through Adobe, that enables you to view files that were created in PDF format. However, the Adobe Acrobat Reader does not enable you to *create* PDF files. For that, you need to have the Standard or Professional version of Adobe Acrobat or find a tool like PrimoPDF.

If you're interested in checking out PrimoPDF, go to www.primopdf.com and take a look. There's a great "See How It Works" link on the site that steps you through an online demo (much like the demos Chris Pellar-Kosbar showed how to build at the November chapter program!).

Although I own a full copy of Adobe Acrobat and can create PDF files from that, I did download the software (Warning, it's a 10MB download) from the <http://www.primopdf.com/> site and installed it to give it a try. It works fine for basic PDF creation, although I didn't test any of the Advanced Document Settings.

In case you're feeling adventurous, you may want to test out some of the advanced options (shown right) available for creating PDF output with PrimoPDF.

In addition, I noticed a user forum for PrimoPDF available at <http://forums.primopdf.com/>. (FYI: It



was here that I discovered mention of some problems PrimoPDF is having handling Type1 fonts. I don't know if that problem has been solved or not.)

If you seldom have to create PDFs, so you can't justify the added expense of a full copy of Adobe Acrobat, you might want to consider trying PrimoPDF. <end/>

If you have a tool you've found useful—or not—e-mail me at newsletter@stc-sm.org and tell me about it. If you've used one of the tools featured in the column, write and share your experiences—good and bad. Remember, the views and opinions in this column are the views and opinions of the writer only, and should not be considered a product endorsement by the STC/SM chapter.

From the Editor:

“Pay to Play” ... Why Should I?

by Mary Jo David

I remember when my children’s school district started its “pay to play” policy for school sports teams. It took some convincing to get parents in the district to see that the school taxes they paid just didn’t cut it when it came to supporting the many high school sports teams the district was supporting.

Coincidentally, this year’s STC dues renewal bill came while I was under the gun to wrap up the editing of this issue of *TECHcomments*. That’s when the irony hit me...I’m paying to play. In other words, I’m paying STC to allow me to volunteer to work for free as the Managing Editor of *TECHcomments*!

Call me naïve, but in the 18 years I’ve been an STC member, I’ve never questioned whether I get my money’s worth out of my STC dues. For about half of those years, the dues were paid by my various employers, but for about half of those years, I’ve paid them myself. There were times I questioned whether I could afford the dues, but I never questioned the worth of my membership.

As Managing Editor of *TECHcomments*, I have the opportunity to work with a team of people I might not have gotten to know much about otherwise. Working on the newsletter gives me (and my team) the perfect excuse to approach people and say, “Hey, I’d like to hear more about you,” which of course enables each of us to grow our networking circles. My role as the newsletter’s copyeditor provides me the opportunity to edit content that is notably more interesting than some of the manuals and reports I edit. I daresay, with each newsletter issue, I have lots of room to improve my management skills, which have become quite rusty since working as the sole employee of my company for seven years. Admittedly, I have a way to go on that one (as I’m about two weeks late getting the last of the stories to our layout person!).

Never mind that I didn’t write many of the stories and I didn’t design the layout. Selfishly, the greatest benefit of all is looking through a completed issue and being proud of a job well done—and a work sample to boot. That’s when I can say, “Heck yeah! It’s worth it to ‘pay to play!’” <end/>

A Warm Welcome!

Please join us in welcoming new members to our chapter. As new members, we hope you’re making the most of our chapter listserv, chapter programs, and the camaraderie available among technical communication professionals in the area. Any questions about joining our chapter? Contact membership@stc-sm.org.

New members
(since August 2004)

Margaret Brown (joined 08/13/04)

Mark Kakkuri (joined 9/30/04)

Members transferring into our
STC/SM chapter
(since August 2004)

Ryan C. Vis

Sarah B. Buffington

Christine Ann Phillips

Member Profile:

Karen Minto

Interview by Maureen E.C. Moyer

If you enjoyed learning more about STC/SM member, Sharon McDonnell, in the last issue of TECHcomments, we know you will be just as captivated by reading this month's profile of STC/SM member, Karen Minto. Talk about an amazing and diverse career!

Karen Minto recently joined our STC chapter. She first became interested by reading the Society magazine, *Intercom*. Karen really enjoyed the articles and in particular, the articles focusing on e-learning. She surveyed the information diligently and put it all to good use in an e-learning marketing presentation for her company, Cogentix.

Cogentix Communications is the brainchild of Karen and her husband, William Minto. Cogentix provides value-added technical communication services for its clients, and besides being co-founder of the company, Karen is also the company's technical illustrator, multimedia designer, and Flash animator. She has an extensive history in automotive-parts-and-service

Karen
Minto



art, totaling 17 years! In fact, she displayed some of her work at the STC/SM Member Showcase portion of the June 2004 chapter program. William works just as hard in his role as the instructional designer, technical writer, and IT guru for Cogentix. Between

them, they've certainly managed to cover all the bases for their business.

When asked where she attended university and if her major was technical communication, Karen laughed. "If you would have told me that I would be drawing and animating car parts in 1972, when I was entering Purdue University to become a scientist, I would have laughed and said 'you're crazy!'" Learning more about Karen's background will help explain her chuckle as she responded to this question.

Karen grew up in northern Indiana surrounded by the amber waves of grain for which the state is well known. Karen's mother used to take her younger brother and her to work with her at an egg-candling factory. (*Egg candling* is the pre-packaging process by which workers check back-lit eggs to ensure that the health of the egg is fit for human consumption and there is no embryo living inside.) This experience provided Karen with an excellent example for her future work ethic. It also gave her some ideas for how to make an otherwise dreary job more interesting and finding ways to become more efficient.

Her talent for illustration appears to have been passed down from her father. Karen says her father was "a very talented commercial and fine artist who wrote and illustrated books on nineteenth century American history, including Custer and the Indian wars." Karen's father also taught her to paint with oils, which led to many first-place finishes at the 4-H fairs in her community. After looking into a career as a fine artist, she was "discouraged by the current state of the art world." She felt that she would not be able to make a living making "representational art." When the artist's life fell through, her back-up plan leaned toward the opposite end of the continuum, science.

Karen entered Purdue and fully expected to be "challenged by highly intelligent professors." But at the time, what she found were "drugged hippies who could barely hold chalk in their unsteady hands, let alone teach." (Ahh, to reminisce on the wonders of yesteryear!) After sticking it out for two semesters, Karen eventually joined the U.S.

continued on page 14 »

Member Profile: Karen Minto

« continued from page 13

Navy where she studied meteorology. She made weather observations, briefed pilots, and made ocean temperature/salinity maps for US planes hunting Soviet subs. (Red October, perhaps?). While in the Navy, Karen received her first recognition for her technical communication ability. She was awarded "Sailor of the Quarter" for a weather manual she wrote for naval reservists. Following her duty in the Navy, Karen then worked for the National Weather Service and other independent weather facilities. During this time, she created the first animation showing global weather for an entire year, which she produced for a local satellite scientist.

Eventually, Karen made her way to Detroit where she worked for an advertising agency as a keyliner. After observing other artists illustrating auto manuals, she taught herself this craft. In the mid-1980s, Karen began to freelance and, while she was at it, founded an international newsletter, *Full Context*. This newsletter focused on Ayn Rand's "philosophy of Objectivism." Among the fascinating people Karen interviewed for the newsletter were ABC reporter John Stossel and economist Walter Williams.

Working through the burgeoning growth of computer technology, Karen says she realized she had to constantly reinvent herself. From learning new skills to changing over from line art to computer animation, Karen has successfully managed to keep pace with the ever-increasing changes in her industry and is now diving into the challenging area of 3-D tools.

By working her magic on a computer—or even the old-fashioned way, using pen and ink—Karen can look at an engineering diagram, a photo of an automotive part, or even a particular process, and trace it with thick ink lines for either print or

digital rendering. She stresses that using a piece of line art for her work is far superior to using a photo because "you can focus in on the item being described by the author by either highlighting it or leaving out extraneous detail."

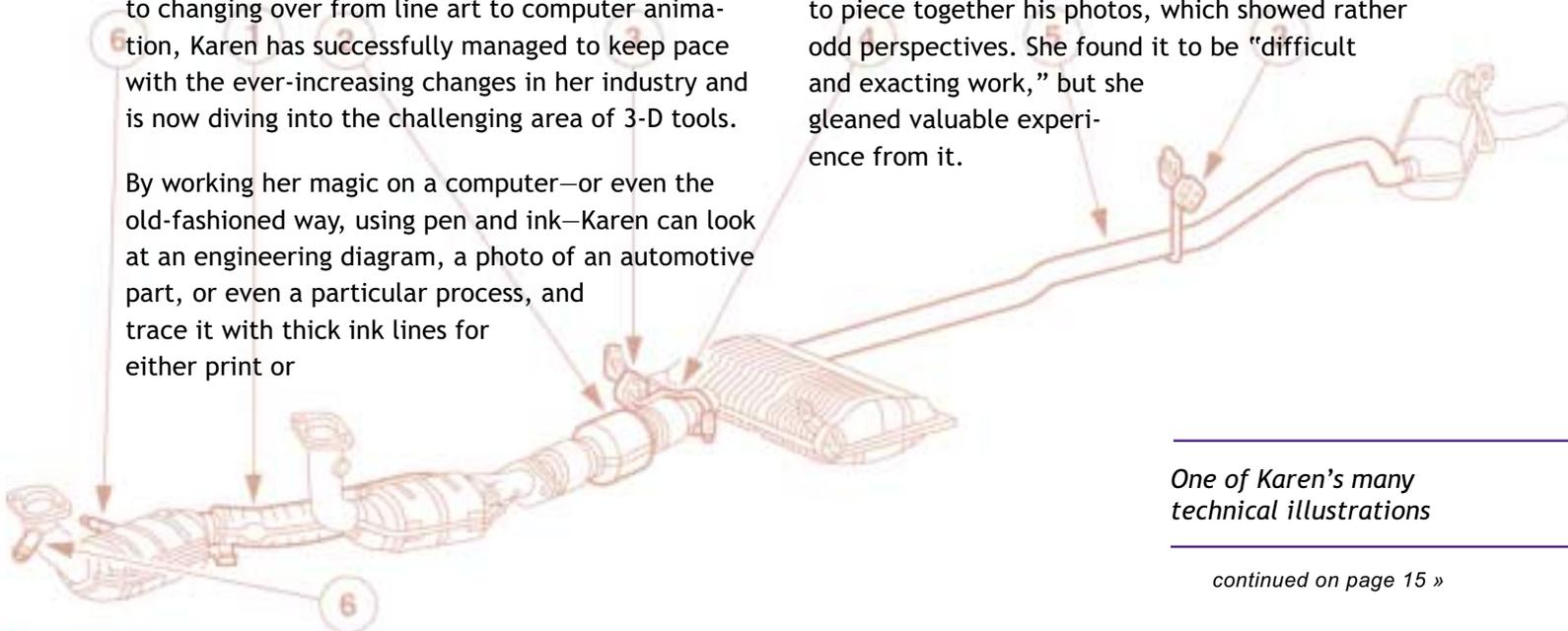
Karen was awarded "Sailor of the Quarter" for a weather manual she wrote for naval reservists.

She also sounds quite excited about online e-learning and the potential for visualizing how something actually works—a brake, for example—with other moving parts. Karen believes that visual motion instruction reduces the need for words and increases "knowledge transfer." She is even more eager to witness the proliferation of real-time animated 3-D artwork on the Internet, once the bandwidth catches up.

Karen's most unusual assignment since becoming a technical illustrator occurred with a local client from Detroit Diesel. Her assignment was to draw giant diesel engines, the kind used for ships. The man who was photographing the engines, from scaffolding no less, was nearly killed when a suspended engine above his head broke loose and fell to the ground. After he completed the photography, Karen was able to piece together his photos, which showed rather odd perspectives. She found it to be "difficult and exacting work," but she gleaned valuable experience from it.

One of Karen's many technical illustrations

continued on page 15 »



AJ0149-A

Member Profile: Karen Minto

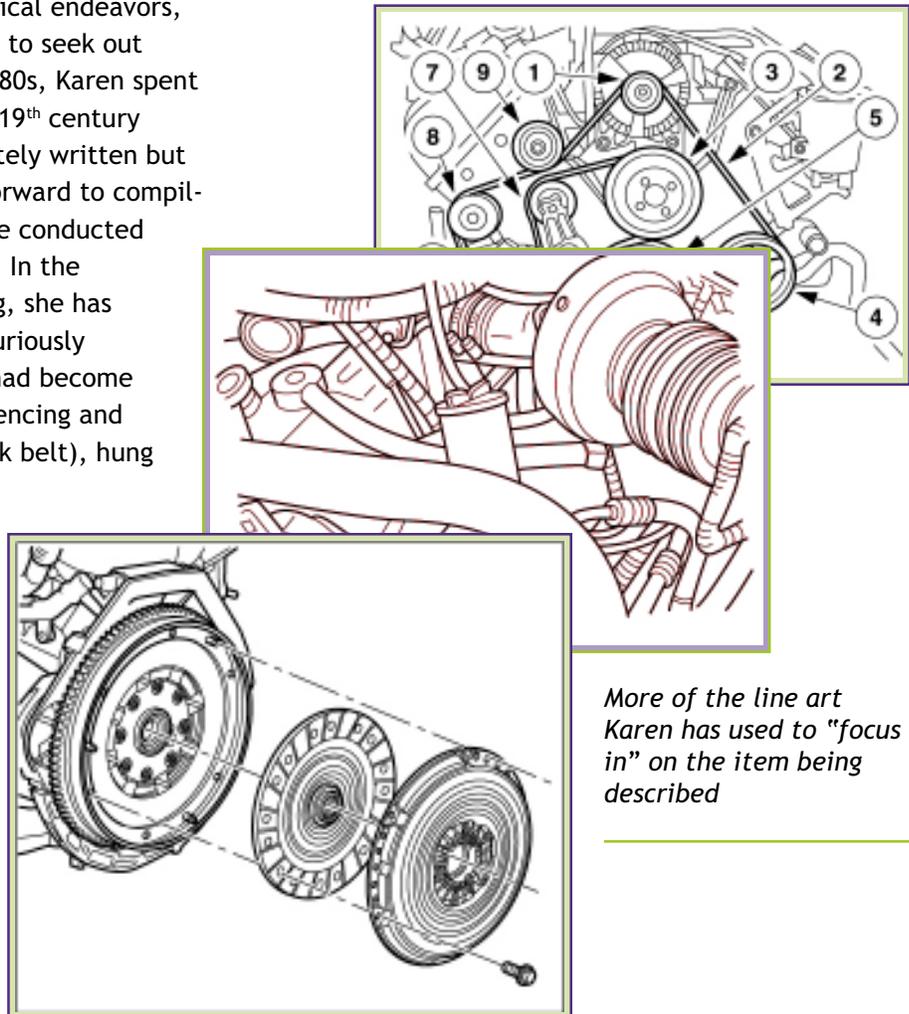
« continued from page 14

A positive outcome of this assignment was learning that the client, who was developing a computer program to replace Karen, scrapped the whole idea when he discovered that she was actually faster than the program! (So you see, computers really *can't* do everything!)

While it appears that Karen has spent her whole career completely involved in technical endeavors, surprisingly, she has also found time to seek out entertaining releases. During the 1980s, Karen spent ten years researching and writing a 19th century dramatic novel that she has completely written but has not yet edited. She also looks forward to compiling and publishing the interviews she conducted over her 13 years with *Full Context*. In the meantime, when she wasn't working, she has skydived (during which she had to furiously straighten her canopy lines, which had become tangled around her neck), studied fencing and karate (she plans to pursue her black belt), hung out with Green Berets, hitchhiked to Hawaii (how does one hitchhike across a vast ocean?), climbed a volcano, studied gourmet cooking with Jacques Pepin, as well as met and spoke with her hero Jacques Cousteau. (Are you exhausted yet?) She also satisfied her craving for science by working in South Dakota with the Black Hills Institute (the group that discovered T-Rex "Sue"), digging for dinosaur bones. Believe it or not, there is more, but Mary Jo insists on brevity.

So, in 50 years what life lessons did Karen manage to glean? The most important thing is "having the courage to face and deal with everything that comes your way." To quote Karen's novel, "Turn your back on the wind and it will blow you over, walk into it with a strong gait and it will soon rush by." <end/>

Maureen E.C. Moyer joined STC/SM as a student member. She recently completed her senior project and is looking forward to receiving her bachelor's degree in technical and professional communication at Lawrence Technological University.



More of the line art Karen has used to "focus in" on the item being described

Student Spotlight: Holly Helterhoff

Interview by Elaine Wisniewski

Holly Helterhoff is a graduate student at Lawrence Technological University (LTU) pursuing a master's of science in technical and professional communication. She is currently in her second year and is a full-time student. She plans to graduate in the summer of 2005. She received a B.A. in Anthropology from McGill University, Montreal, Canada.

W

hy did you decide to pursue graduate education in Technical Communication?

I love to write. As a marketing project manager, I enjoyed collaborating on all of the programs that had written elements: proposals, collateral, etc. As I advanced, I found that running larger projects did not necessarily result in increased creative involvement. That is when I knew I should follow my heart and develop my professional writing skills.

Why did you choose LTU?

The Technical and Professional Communication program at Lawrence Tech. has been a wonderful fit for me because the coursework is demanding, yet the small class size allows for truly individualized attention. I feel as though I am being coached as well as taught.

What are some example projects from your coursework that you are particularly proud of?

Currently I am co-leading a virtual team studying conflict resolution strategies in off-shore, outsourced virtual teams. We meet once a week in person and communicate the rest of the week via email and discussion boards. We will be producing a white paper focusing on an IT company. The structure of this class is very innovative. I have learned a lot more by acting as a virtual team leader than I would have if we just wrote a traditional research paper. Modeling our team like this has really taken the theories of virtual team building and put them into practice.



Another project close to my heart is grant writing. I am creating my first grant proposal to fund a research project. The research project supports a product developed at an ergonomic flooring company I have been affiliated with for the last ten years. I have found a tremendous willingness by the teaching staff at LTU to allow graduate students to tailor class projects around the real-life challenges of the workplace. This adds depth to my classwork and also brings a fresh approach to my employment tasks. Sometimes you need a fresh approach!

Which classes/topics have influenced your thinking as a Technical Communicator?

My first semester at LTU I took a class entitled Professional Public Speaking and Presentation. I took this class specifically because I felt that my discomfort speaking in front of a group was holding me back as a professional. Not only did I make enormous progress in overcoming that fear, but I also gained a lot more insight into how a general fear of public speaking has led to the widespread use and abuse of technologies such as PowerPoint.

Before taking this class, I really never questioned how internal business communication was conducted. In most agencies I have worked in, the communication

continued on page 17 »

Student Profile: Holly Helterhoff

« continued from page 16

rationale was always along the lines of, "If the client wants PowerPoint, let's always use PowerPoint for all meetings. If this information succeeded once in a Gantt chart, let's put everything into a Gantt chart." There was no critical analysis as to why. I think this is true at most companies, but with everyone on information overload, I think we can start to make inroads to reform some of these misconceptions.

How will your graduate degree help you in your career?

Returning to school has reawakened my need to learn new things and try new experiences. Once I made the decision to return to school, it felt as though a lot of other things started to fall into place in my life. I realized that I, personally, could not continue in my former position and become the person that I wish to be, largely due to time constraints. In the year and a half since I made my decision, I have built up a group of clients for marketing work. Hopefully in the future the balance of assignments will lean more toward writing and editing. I have already begun to make some inroads in that respect, with two small editing jobs this fall.

I also started looking into all of the other elements of communication which interest me, but which I never pursued. For example, I have belonged to a local access media group for a few years, but until last spring, my involvement had been at the periphery. Then I had the opportunity to write and produce a segment about a friend of mine, Christine McCauley, who is a local artist. The segment was a huge success, and we plan to film a full documentary about her work this year.

Being back in school gave me the confidence to explore these avenues. I also think being a graduate student opens a lot of doors. Most people, particularly potential clients and contacts, equate being in school with being ambitious and innovative. It also establishes some authority without being threatening.

What advice do you have for those considering Technical Communication?

Tech. Comm. has been the logical next step in my career, and I am sure the field will continue to grow exponentially. We are all under more pressure for written communication than ever before with the internet explosion. At the same time, general writing ability in the population at large seems to be lacking. Technical communicators have an opportunity to fill that void.

I also believe that the idea that more initials after your name will *automatically* increase your earning power is over. We are in an employers' market, and what you do inside and outside of school to create opportunities is still up to you. I believe this is true for any prospective student going into any field at any level. I would also challenge professionals to embrace learning and expect to return to school at various times in their careers.

"Being back in school gave me the confidence to explore..."

Any academic/personal achievements in the field you'd like to share?

Last summer I had the opportunity to teach Photoshop at LTU as part of my practicum. I had been contracted as a training representative for Olympus Digital Cameras for the program's duration of one year, and I have been

using Photoshop for about ten years. This class was the first time I had ever formally taught anything, and it was amazing! Not only did I challenge myself, but the work students turned in by the end of the summer was amazing.

In addition to gaining experience in all of the elements which go into teaching, such as course design and classroom management, I also found that revisiting the software from a beginner's standpoint made me far more proficient at its use. It also challenged my assumptions about how technical knowledge can be shared. When I started using Photoshop, the internet was limited. Now there are pages and pages of tutorials. Some are quite wonderful, while others are written by people who know a lot about Photoshop and very little about technical communication. I was struck by how often I would find a tutorial that I would want to present in class. I would try to follow the steps as listed and never get to the outcome. This happened repeatedly. Adobe Photoshop is one of those powerful software programs such as Microsoft Excel. It can take seconds

continued on page 18 »

Student Profile: Holly Helterhoff

« continued from page 17

to learn and a lifetime to master. I think there are tremendous opportunities for technical communicators in software education.

Were you involved in STC as a student? What experiences can you share?

I am a new member of the STC. I know I'll benefit from being a student member. The past eighteen months of freelancing have given me a true appreciation for the fellowship needed among professionals working from home. There is a "feast or

continued in next column »

famine" facet to freelancing, which I know many STC members have shared. I'm not sure how long I will want to continue to freelance, but it has been an amazing experience so far. I hope to continue my affiliation with the STC long after I graduate. <end/>

Student Spotlight: Maureen E.C. Moyer

Interview by Elaine Wisniewski

Maureen E.C. Moyer (aka: "Moe") is an undergraduate student at Lawrence Technological University (LTU). She is pursuing a bachelor's degree in technical and professional communication and plans to graduate in December 2004. She has two associate's degrees—an AA in criminal justice/law enforcement administration and an AS in computer information systems.

Why did you decide to pursue undergraduate education in Technical Communication?

After receiving my second associate's degree (this one in computer information systems) I knew I wanted to pursue my bachelor's in a field that would allow me to focus on writing, something I have always felt the need to do. With no knowledge of how I could do that, I floundered at U of D-Mercy for 1.5 years, working on my bachelor's degree in computer information systems. One day, by happenstance, I was blessed with some "insider information." At an STC meeting I heard a couple of people talking about the Tech Comm program at LTU! Gadzooks! You mean a university actually has a program in technical communication? Who knew? I immediately got in touch with Prof. Corrine Stavish at LTU and inquired about the program and transferring to the school...at last, courses from which I could actually learn and



*Moe
Moyer*

information I could use. I was indeed in heaven.

Why LTU?

I have, in the past two years, become much attached, personally, professionally, and as a student, to all of the tech. comm. instructors at LTU. They are a fantastic group and the vast array of knowledge I have gleaned from all of them has been invaluable. Their encouragement and support have done so much to keep me upbeat and focused while attempting, in vain, to look for work in this field. I can never give them all enough praise: Dr. Brian Pedell, Prof. Corrine Stavish, Prof. Kevin Kelch, and Mary Jo David...wonderful people all.

What are some example projects from your coursework that you are particularly proud of?

The first project that really meant a great deal to me came from my first document design class. We had to produce a 12-page company newsletter and include a myriad of items. I focused my newsletter on my "pen manufacturing company" and set it up in a way that I, as an employee of the company, would enjoy perusing. This newsletter contained not only important company achievements, but loads of fun and interesting tidbits.

continued on page 19 »

Student Spotlight: Moe Moyer

« continued from page 18

The second project was a major research methods paper that focused on a suggestion for a new method of performing clinical trials to obtain FDA approval for new drugs. It was very arduous work, but as it was in a field that fascinates me, I derived great pleasure in presenting the paper and I proudly include it in my portfolio, student work notwithstanding.

The third project of which I am also proud, and also include in my portfolio, is yet another major research paper regarding the principles and ethics of xenotransplantation (using animal organs for human transplants). This paper was based on a documentary film shown by Dr. Brian Pedell and first presented on PBS' *Frontline* television show. This, too, was a major undertaking and something I knew would generate controversy simply due to its subject matter. Taking



into account much of what I had learned from the program up to that point, I felt I was able to present a solid, sane, and succinct argument for furthering the necessary research.

Which classes/topics have influenced your thinking as a Technical Communicator?

Without a doubt, the two document design courses have had a major influence on, not only my technical communication work, but my personal artwork as well. Professional Presentation Strategies was very beneficial in that I learned what really works best for

communicating to an audience in the business world...some things are different. Advanced Research Methods and Advanced Rhetoric have both influenced how I seek out information and how I can best present it. My difficulty was learning how to take a topic that I felt was already focused and narrow it down even further and then present the best and proper rhetoric to project my point. I will forever be grateful for all of the coursework I have received from all of my tech. comm. professors, however unappealing it may have seemed at the time. Their extensive knowledge, skills, life experiences, and even teaching methods, have influenced me in ways I cannot adequately relate.

How will an undergraduate degree help you in your career?

Without having a job that allows me to write for a living, I must be confident that my undergrad. degree

Moe Moyer (right) being introduced by Dr. Brian Pedell (left) at her senior project presentation at LTU.

will now prove to an employer that, yes indeed, I can do that particular job for you. Somehow, that piece of parchment must be my magic carpet to a career that I can enjoy for my remaining working days.

What advice do you have for those considering Technical Communication?

It will not be easy. So many people I know in the program, or even already in the field, fell into their jobs by accident and have been in tech. comm. for many years (just check out our STC-SM rolls), the degree is merely a formality. Why I cannot have that kind of luck is beyond me. For anyone just entering this field all I can offer for advice is to make connections...that is how you may find a position. For those just entering the academic program, my advice is, quite seriously, to treat every tech. comm. course as a valuable asset to your career. Put all of your effort into it, and treat every written project as something that you want published in a professional journal.

Any academic/personal achievements in the field you'd like to share?

Only to say that Dr. Brian Pedell allowed me to take

continued on page 20»

Student Profile: Moe Moyer

« continued from page 19

many post-grad classes right along side the master's candidate students and never treated me as an undergrad. He expected graduate work out of me and demanded nothing less than that. For that I am truly grateful.

With the support and encouragement of both Dr. Pedell and Prof. Stavish, I was able to present my senior project (a business plan to market my artwork) as an art show and display many of my works. That was a wonderful experience and I was so very fortunate to have been able to do it.

Were you involved in STC as a student? If so, what experiences can you share?

Yes, since I have been in school seemingly forever, my entire membership time has been as a student. Meeting all of the people in the Michigan chapter has been wonderful, especially Mary Jo David. Her encouragement, humor, and sensible advice have meant a great deal to me. She also gave me sensible advice as my instructor in Technical Editing at LTU (small world). Many of the STC programs I have been able to attend provided valuable information I was able to use elsewhere and provided me with important contacts. Without those meetings, and Mary Jo's "influence," I would have not experienced the joy of writing for our STC-SM newsletter.

Any other comments you'd like to include?

A simple and quick thank you for selecting me for this profile...I hope it does not exude nepotism. A thank you to all of the members of STC-SM, whom I have met over these last several years. I may not remember all of your names, but I do remember your kindness and friendliness toward me, someone who is quite shy and not comfortable introducing myself to strangers. <end/>

Elaine Wisniewski is a senior member of STC. She is currently working toward a master's degree in written communication at Eastern Michigan University. She holds degrees from the University of Michigan in Industrial and Operations Engineering and works as a Research Ergonomist at Applied Safety and Ergonomics, Inc. in Ann Arbor.



One of the many "Moe Moyer originals" on display during Moe's senior project presentation at LTU.

A Matter of Degrees

by Elaine Wisniewski

Lawrence Technological University Degrees in Technical and Professional Communication

Lawrence Technological University (LTU), located in Southfield, Michigan, has undergraduate and graduate programs in technical and professional communication. The programs prepare students for professional careers in written, oral, and computer-based communication. Students learn to make technical problems and issues clear to non-specialists. Graduates are prepared in the processes of communication and in an individually selected area of business or technology.

Each issue this year will focus on one of the area's technical communication education programs. Last issue, we presented Eastern Michigan University. This issue, we present Lawrence Technological University.

continued on page 21 »

A Matter of Degrees

« *continued from page 20*

Students at LTU can take advantage of the following opportunities:

- ✓ Learning from an outstanding faculty made up of experts and practitioners in their fields
- ✓ Participating in small classes that support team building and continuing communication with fellow students and instructors
- ✓ Receiving careful and caring advising from technical and professional communication faculty
- ✓ Developing projects in computer classrooms and a multimedia studio equipped with up-to-date technology
- ✓ Having access as an undergraduate to paid internships in Southeast Michigan businesses
- ✓ Making valuable connections to professional organizations and major corporations

Graduates of LTU's program have careers as:

- ✓ Technical writers
- ✓ Instructional designers
- ✓ Speech, script, and video writers
- ✓ Publications editors and managers
- ✓ Multimedia specialists
- ✓ Graphic designers
- ✓ Environmental, medical, and science writers
- ✓ Web site designers and editors

LTU offers three options for students interested in pursuing Technical and Professional Communication: a master's degree, a bachelor's degree, and a program certificate.

Master of Science in Technical and Professional Communication (MSTC)

The master's program is designed as a comprehensive, theory-and-practice-oriented program that prepares students for leadership, management, and consulting roles in the fields of technical and professional communication. The MSTC also enables students to pursue doctoral studies or research in

academic, corporate, or governmental environments. The degree requires 30 credit hours, 12 of which can be earned from elective and special topics courses. The degree also offers six practicum options.

Some of the course offerings include: Advanced Publication Design; Advanced Nonverbal Communication; Communicating Across Cultures; Proposal Writing; and Managing Organizational Communication.

Bachelor of Science in Technical and Professional Communication (BSTC)

The Bachelor's program is the only program in Southeastern Michigan to offer a multifaceted approach to technical communication. Oral, written, and computer-mediated communication are emphasized to equip students with the skills employers expect from professional communicators. This degree requires 121 credit hours, 12 of which may be selected by the student in a technical specialty of his or her choice.

Some of the course offerings include: Collaborative Communication, Document Design, Interpersonal and Nonverbal Communication, Multimedia Studio, Presentation Media, Technical Editing, and Web Site Design.

Certificate in Technical and Professional Communication (CTC)

The Certificate program was designed for professionals who are seeking an alternative to a degree and who would like to broaden their backgrounds in technical communication. All LTU undergraduates have an opportunity to earn the CTC to enhance the value of their professional degrees.

The Certificate program requires 15 credit hours, six of which can be chosen as electives from the entire range of undergraduate and graduate technical communication courses.

Students can earn a minor in technical communication by completing the courses required for the CTC, with the addition of three communication courses at the 3000 level or above.

continued on page 22 »

A Matter of Degrees

« continued from page 21

For more information on LTU's programs, including course descriptions, check out the web site at: http://www.ltu.edu/arts_sciences/technical_communication/index.asp or contact the program director, Dr. Brian Pedell, at pedell@ltu.edu or 248-204-3525. <end/>

Member "Personals"

Congratulations go out to chapter member and Program Registration Coordinator, **Jenn Burchill**, who gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, Charlotte Lucy Burchill, on 10/25/04.

A special "thank you" to Erin Snoddy who, in addition to her own position as Program Venue Coordinator, has been filling in for Jenn as Registration Coordinator while Jenn is on maternity leave.

Do you know of any personal or professional accomplishments that should be mentioned in TECHcomments? Feel free to pass them along for publication. Write to newsletter@stc-sm.org.

Congratulations to New Senior Members!

The grade of "senior member" is conferred automatically on each member after five years of Society membership. Congratulations to the following STC/SM members who were added to the STC senior member rolls from April through August 2004.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Member since</i>
Theresa O'Leary	April 9, 1999
Lynn Lawson	April 21, 1999
Elaine Wisniewski	April 21, 1999
Julie Gibson	May 3, 1999
Carissa Demetris	August 18, 1999

