STC/SM

Society for Technical Communication
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

TECH*comments*

Letter from the President
by Andrea Frazier

Welcome to the Spring/Summer 2009 issue of TECH*comments*, the STC/SM chapter newsletter! This issue includes a recap of our March and May program meetings. We also include Member Spotlights on our new chapter Vice President, Maryann Bowen, and on Julie Dean Wingett, who continues as chapter Secretary.

STC Annual Conference scholarships

This year, the Southeastern Michigan chapter offered several scholarships for members and student members to enable them to attend STC's 56th Annual Conference, the Technical Communications Summit, in Atlanta, GA (May 3-6). Many other chapters also offered their own scholarships. In addition, the STC Executive Council created subsidies for unemployed and underemployed members, essentially allowing eligible members to attend the conference for little or no charge. We recognize the effect the economy has had on our members' ability to attend training and conferences, and we hope that the scholarships were helpful to those who applied.

Chapter elections

We conducted our annual chapter election in May. Congratulations to the new STC/SM Chapter Executive Council members for 2009-2010:

Mark Lockwood, President
Maryann Bowen, Vice President
Sharon McDonnell, Treasurer
Julie Dean Wingett, Secretary
Kathleen Belanger, Nominations Committee

Member survey

Along with the ballots, we included a brief member survey to find out what sort of programs and speakers our chapter would like to see. Thanks to all who completed their ballots and surveys! Your feedback is very important to us.

It's been great!

As outgoing chapter president, I wanted to take this opportunity to say how much I've enjoyed working with my fellow council members, meeting many of our fellow chapter members (and prospective members!) at monthly program meetings, and brainstorming with everyone for creative ways to keep our chapter moving forward. Our guest speakers have been outstanding and generous with their time and resources. We've also received a lot of interest from related organizations, such as the Michigan Usability Professionals' Association (MIUPA) and the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE), in partnering with STC/SM on joint program meetings in the future.

So thank you to all who helped make my term as chapter president productive, fun and rewarding! It's been a great year.

Regards,

Andrea Frazier, STC/SM President

PS – Be sure to read about the Distinguished Chapter Service Awards I was privileged to give two very deserving STC/SM members on behalf of our chapter. You'll find the details on another page in this newsletter.

March Program Recap:
Translation and Localization: What a Technical Communicator Needs to Know
by Kenneth Caldwell

On March 24, the STC/SM Chapter hosted Fred Meinberg, president of Techworld Language Solutions, for his presentation, "Translation and Localization: What a Technical Communicator Needs to Know." The program was held onsite at the Techworld office in Troy, MI.

Throughout his presentation, Meinberg suggested a number of ways in which technical communicators can effectively manage language translation projects. He addressed typical challenges that translators face and provided mechanical guidelines for authoring a business-related document with respect for global standards of communication.

After pointing out that interpreting is not the same as translating, Meinberg outlined several points that are critical to an effective translation:

- Write concisely. Techworld charges clients by the word. A shorter document means lower cost and faster turnaround time.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms. Unusual, abbreviated, or otherwise ambiguous language can be a source of frustration for translators and readers alike.
- Use images and diagrams when possible. Sidestep language traps altogether by instructing with pictures. IKEA® manuals successfully demonstrate this model.
- Live the subject matter. The most proficient translators specialize in not only the relevant languages, but also the subjects and industries in question.
- Do editors focus on the wrong things? Too many editors focus on details instead of the bigger picture.

In his presentation, Meinberg called attention to some of the challenges translators face when designing global publications. Regional standards of formatting, paper size and general presentation must all be carefully considered. Making a document appear native and fit for its purpose is crucial, as the target audience should feel familiar with the final product. Language "footprints" can also present problems during translation. For example, French and other European languages can expand to as much as 25 percent longer than the original, stealing precious real estate on the page.

While a company like Techworld may seem to be in competition with the growing popularity of free online translation software like Yahoo! Babel Fish and Google™ Translate, Meinberg asserts that these tools are no replacement for expert linguists. Machine translators are an excellent means of instantly conveying the gist of a document, but specific information can too easily become lost or convoluted in poor syntax.

The March program was attended by six people, all of whom contributed to an engaging conversation. The group shared personal anecdotes and related their experiences communicating in non-native languages and cultures.

Techworld, founded in 1984, is a corporate translation and training company offering services in over 60 languages. As an organization promoting seamless communication in the global marketplace, Techworld translates technical documentation ranging from widely distributed newsletters and brochures to legal proposals and mission statements. The company also provides training workshops in language fluency and cultural awareness to educate their customers about native dialects and regional etiquette. In addition, Techworld offers simulations and assessments—specialized services to help global companies ensure that their corporate policies and business practices are continually upheld in offices worldwide.

Fred Meinberg has been involved with the language industry for 18 years. Outside of Techworld, he is President of the Greater Detroit ASTD chapter, and he is also active in the Translation Company Division of the American Translators Association, the South Oakland Boys & Girls Club, On My Own of Michigan, the Optimist Club, and Marketing and Sales Executives of Detroit, and is the Past President of the Royal Oak Foundation for Public Education. Look for more information about Techworld Language Solutions at techworldinc.com.

STC/SM Leadership
2008-2009

Administrative Council

President
Andrea Frazier
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Vice President
Mark Lockwood
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Treasurer
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Secretary
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secretary@stc-sm.org

Committee Managers

Job Board/Listserv
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Professional Liaison
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Programs
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Webmaster
Volunteers needed!
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Education Liaison
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Membership
Sharon McDonnell
membership@stc-sm.org

Member Spotlight: Julie Dean Wingett

Why did you decide to become an STC member?

I joined STC to keep up to date on the latest tools and trends and learn what writers at other companies were doing. These days, when fewer companies have large numbers of technical writers on staff who can share information, having a link to the "outside world" of our profession is more valuable than ever.

Why did you decide to pursue technical communication as a career?

I studied English in college but had no interest in teaching. Technical communications seemed like a great way to write for a living, and being able to learn about new technologies at the same time was a big plus.

Where are you currently employed?

I'm currently freelancing for a small start-up company that is generating content for iPhones. My last full-time job was as a technology writer for DreamWorks Animation in Los Angeles, where the documentation I produced acted as a bridge between the software engineers who created specialized filmmaking tools and the artists and production staff who used them.

What are your job activities?

One of the most satisfying things about technical writing in general is that by interviewing people and gathering information about the products and projects being documented, you learn a lot about everyone else's job. Over time, you can develop a high level of insight into how an entire company works, which increases your value as an employee.

What is an example of a project you are particularly proud of?

While at DreamWorks, I helped build a large library of resource documents on the intranet via a database system, by which anyone in the studio could easily request documentation services. The company had very little technical documentation when I was hired, but there was a well-established system when I left.

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

It's kept me in the loop. Its publications have often given me ideas for approaches to documentation that I'd never thought of before.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication?

Technical communications jobs can be found in many different industries, but they can go by many names and companies don't always have a specific department for them. Be prepared to sell them on your unique set of skills, especially if you have complementary abilities like marketing writing, programming or project management. I think one of the best things a technical communicator can be for a company is a "jack of all trades" who is talented in multiple aspects of a business.

What else would you like our readers to know about you?

Over the years, I've written novels, stories, scripts and a number of other creative projects that were undoubtedly made better by the fact that I wrote for a living every day and kept my skills sharp.

Guest speaker Beverly Cornell talks about social networking tools.

May Program Recap:
You Are on LinkedIn®…Now What?
by Jamie Burklund

On May 14, Beverly Cornell joined members of the STC/SM Chapter to present the program "You are on LinkedIn… Now What?" The business-oriented social networking website linkedin.com launched in 2003 and is mainly used for professional networking, boasting more than 39 million users as of May 2009.

Cornell is the Director of Marketing and Sales at IteroText Translation Services™, a Detroit-based foreign language translation service that specializes in technical translation for manuals and documents. Although Cornell is quick to point out that she is not a writer, she is a self-proclaimed blogger, Twitterer and "social media evangelist." Naturally, she knows a lot about LinkedIn.

Cornell began the presentation with an in-depth description of social media, i.e., MySpace, Facebook, Flickr® and YouTube. As she pointed out, social media is, indeed, everywhere—and it's growing fast. Social media is all about interacting and creating a community. It provides users with a source of choices, if nothing else. Need a dentist? Ask your community for recommendations. Searching for a job? Look to your online community for resources. "Know who your friends know," Cornell suggested.

Cornell described LinkedIn as being similar to Facebook, although she pointed out that Facebook is not as advantageous for professional networking. In the online world, Cornell described Facebook as the "high school cafeteria," MySpace as the "jam session," Twitter as the "24/7 cocktail party" and LinkedIn as the "board room."

Cornell and STC/SM Vice President Mark Lockwood discuss a point after the presentation ended.

The great thing about social media is that it's borderless. LinkedIn connects you to 170 industries around the world, half of which are not in the United States. It also has the highest Google™ search rating and, because LinkedIn is credible, it will improve your personal search results. LinkedIn is your platform to find people and to be found by others—an integral part of any job search.

Lisa Veasey (lower left), instructor at Washtenaw Community College, Ann Arbor, MI, and students from her Advanced Technical Writing class enjoy the presentation.

Cornell suggests using keywords ("google juice"), adding a photo and creating a web-address name (to replace the number in your URL, which has no "searchability") to beef up your profile. She also suggests requesting recommendations from friends, as well as inviting personal contacts once you get started.

To maintain your account, Cornell suggests working on LinkedIn 15 to 30 minutes every day. This work should include inviting new contacts, asking for introductions, asking and answering questions, joining and reviewing groups, and updating your profile. This will keep your credibility rating up as well as keep you connected to your online resources.

Cornell has been on LinkedIn for four years and refers to it as her personal Rolodex—"one more tool in the toolbox," she said.

All pictures by Jamie Burklund

IteroText Translation Services was established in 1973 to address the growing need for international information exchange. Since that time, it has grown to be a respected leader in technical translation services, including translation, technical writing, and foreign language document design as well as publishing and global printing resources. IteroText's unique Total Project Responsibility method, use of technology, MultiLingual Document Review Consultation and Authoring Memory Software deliver reduced translation cost, improved document quality and a one-call project approach to its clients. For more information, visit iterotext.com. (From IteroText Web site)

Member Spotlight: Maryann Bowen

Why did you decide to become an STC member?

When I moved from Massachusetts to Michigan, I also moved to a lone writer position after several years working as part of a team—a team associated with a different professional organization, based on the industry we were in, not the technical communications profession. My new job was in a different industry, so my old networks and familiar resources were no longer useful. I joined STC for new networking opportunities and educational resources, and I've stayed in STC largely because its members represent so many different industries and specialties.

Why did you decide to pursue technical communication as a career?

I'm one of many who came to this career in a roundabout way. I finished a bachelor's degree in education and earned my teaching certificate just as school systems were laying off tenured teachers and closing schools.

I took a "pay the rent" job as a bank teller, which soon led to a position as a teller trainer and an opportunity to participate in an instructional design project: a complete rewrite of the bank's teller training curriculum. Eventually I realized I always found myself writing no matter what my job title was, and I applied for a technical writer position through the bank's internal postings. I must admit, though, I wasn't so much pursuing a career in technical communications as I was escaping retail banking and branch operations! The actual decision came after I got the position, which included hardware and software user testing, documentation, and training, as well as policies and procedures writing. After a few months, I knew I was on the right path. Technical communications, in all its forms, is basically teaching, after all.

Where are you currently employed?

I am an independent contractor. My current major client is Saphran, Inc., based in Franklin, MI, a company whose software and services help manufacturers (mainly automotive suppliers) facilitate their costing/quoting and forecasting processes. I have also spent about four months each of the last eight years at Thomson Reuters Tax and Accounting (formerly Creative Solutions) in Dexter, MI.

What are your job activities?

I primarily develop software user help documentation, help systems, and training materials. For Saphran, I also deliver user training, conduct monthly user meetings, update parts of the corporate Web site and sometimes assist with sales support. We do most user training and meetings, as well as many sales demos, via conference calls and Webinars,

What is an example of a project you are particularly proud of?

My most satisfactory projects have been global collaborations. At Bank of Boston, I worked on a rewrite of corporate policies that, for the first time in the bank's long history, included representation from its international offices. I also led a project to introduce an education program on international travel security for executives, with a project team comprising leaders of some of the bank's international offices as well as the corporate travel and security departments. I was proud of our success in including a major focus on cultural awareness and exchange, along with more tangible safety issues.

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

STC membership provided the lone-writer support I was looking for when I first joined. Continued membership has helped me build the networking connections critical to finding contract jobs. I rely on STC resources such as chapter programs, annual and regional conferences, chapter and SIG online discussion groups, and publications to keep informed about technical developments and trends in the profession.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication?

Technical communication is a broad term that covers a myriad of job possibilities. Don't limit yourself to a narrow definition of a technical communication position or a narrow skill set. Focus on developing solid critical thinking and writing skills, and be open to finding opportunities in unlikely places. Be aware of trends in the profession and be ready and willing to grow and change with the times.

Any career/academic/personal achievements in the tech comm field that you'd like to share?

This was more an opportunity for further growth than an achievement, but in 2002 I had the privilege of traveling to China as part of a People to People International delegation of professional and technical communicators (all STC members) led by George Hayhoe, then editor of *Technical Communication*.

Distinguished Chapter Service Awards Given
Two long-serving STC/SM members are recognized

Congratulations to Christine Pellar-Kosbar!

At the May STC/SM program, Chapter President Andrea Frazier presented STC/SM member Christine Pellar-Kosbar (at left, in photo at left) with the Distinguished Chapter Service Award in recognition of her years of contributions to chapter activities.

In the award presentation, Frazier said that Pellar-Kosbar, an STC member since 1992, has served as chapter President, participated on the Nominations Committee, acted as newsletter editor and presented at chapter programs.

Frazier also reported that Pellar-Kosbar has mentored new council members and leaders, helping provide continuity between council years. Pellar-Kosbar is responsible for bringing several of the chapter council's volunteers on board.

Congratulations to Sharon McDonnell!

Chapter President Andrea Frazier honored STC/SM member Sharon McDonnell (photo at right) with the Distinguished Chapter Service Award in recognition of her years of service to the STC/SM chapter.

In the award presentation, which took place at the May STC/SM program, Frazier noted that McDonnell, an STC member since 1998, is currently the chapter's membership manager. Before that, McDonnell served three terms as chapter treasurer, doing an outstanding job of tracking finances, filing the required reports and helping manage the chapter's budget. McDonnell was just re-elected chapter treasurer and will serve in that capacity during the 2009-2010 year.

McDonnell has also helped run chapter programs, acting as greeter and serving in other ways when needed, and continues to lend her experience and provide guidance on many procedural matters.

Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

The Society for Technical Communication has long recognized the importance of the hard work and commitment of its chapter members. Without their energy and enthusiasm, the Society would cease to be the largest, most effective, and most prestigious organization of technical communicators in the world. In 1988, the Society initiated the Distinguished Chapter Service Award to recognize exemplary dedication to the chapter and its activities. The first awards were presented in 1989.

The Distinguished Chapter Service Awards acknowledge the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities.

(From the STC Web site at stc.org)

Links to Other Organizations

**Check out what other organizations are doing. Get information on
programs you can attend and activities you can participate in.**

stc-sm.org
Society for Technical Communication
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

wms-stc.org
Society for Technical Communication
West Michigan Shores Chapter

neostc.org
Society for Technical Communication
Northeast Ohio Chapter

http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~stcclub/
Society for Technical Communication
Michigan Tech Chapter

miupa.org
Usability Professionals' Association
Michigan Chapter

amwa.org
American Medical Writers Association

detroit.iabc.com
International Association of Business Communicators
Detroit Chapter

prsadetroit.org
Public Relations Society of America
Detroit Chapter

cmprsa.com
Public Relations Society of America
Central Michigan Chapter

detroitastd.org
American Society for Training and Development
Greater Detroit Chapter

astdannarbor.org
American Society for Training and Development
Ann Arbor Chapter

mm-astd.org
American Society for Training and Development
Mid-Michigan Chapter