STC/SM

Society for Technical Communication
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

Winter-Spring 2012

TECH*comments*

Letter from the President
by Maryann Bowen, STC/SM President

As I write this, the calendar shows it's almost spring — and in a rarity for Southeastern Michigan, the weather is ahead of the calendar! We may have already broken those resolutions we made back in January, but along with spring cleaning, gardening and baseball, this time of year presents another chance to start fresh and plan for the year ahead. It's a perfect time to take steps to build your professional network, skills and resume — and help build your STC community at the same time. To borrow a pitch from another springtime tradition, the public radio fund drive, there's an opportunity for everyone reading this to get involved in STC Southeastern Michigan, at whatever level of commitment you choose.

The most significant opportunity — and the most critical, immediate need – is for volunteers to run for chapter officer positions (President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer) as well as two elected (but non-officer) Nominations Committee positions. The current President, Vice President, and Immediate Past President have all served two terms in those positions, which is the limit allowed by our bylaws; all must either step down from elected leadership when this term ends or run for a different position. (For example, it is traditional for the Vice President to run for President the following year.)

Nominations are now open for the 2012 election. The election will take place in May for terms to run from July 2012 through June 2013. We invite you to nominate yourself or a chapter member you think would make a great officer. (Note that candidates must be chapter members.) Send your ideas to nominations@stc-sm.org.

If you're not quite ready to commit to elected office, there are other ways to get involved in chapter activities. For example:

- Join the chapter listserv and our groups on MySTC, Facebook and LinkedIn, and follow @STCSM on Twitter, and then start or participate in discussions.

- Attend a program meeting or networking event. Serve as a greeter at a program meeting.

- Host a networking lunch — or breakfast or happy hour — in your local area.

- Plan to attend all or part of the STC Summit, May 20-23, 2012, in Rosemont, IL (Chicago area).

- Ask your employer to sponsor a program meeting or other event. (Various levels of sponsorship are available, starting with simply providing meeting space free of charge.)

- Write an article for the chapter newsletter. (Report on a program meeting; review a tech comm book, software tool, website or blog; or interview a tech comm "star.")

- Did you read an interesting tech comm blog post or other article? Post a link to it on the chapter listserv and social media groups.

- Need to learn Web skills? Volunteer to help update the chapter website.

- Volunteer to manage or serve on a council committee: the Membership, Newsletter, Nominations, Programs, Publicity, Scholarship and Web committees all have openings. See Volunteer Opportunities on the chapter website or contact any council member for more information.

Last but not least — let's offer a hearty welcome (or welcome back) to these new or returning STC/SM members: J. Paul Frantz, Frank M. Oberc, Amanda Pawczuk and Alison L. Phillips.

The Power of Many: The STC in the Age of Social Media — A Webinar by Scott Abel and Alan Houser

by Sharon McDonnell

In this webinar, which was held on Sept. 21, 2011, the first advice Abel and Houser offered was this: "If you [STC members] give presentations, you'll get work!" Hmm…maybe they were recruiting others to do webinars and present at the STC Summit?

Primarily, these presenters talked about how STC membership can help <u>you</u>. Here are the topics and questions Abel and Houser covered to illustrate that message.

1. Services that STC provides to its members:
   a. Conferences – STC Summit is in Chicago. It starts on May 20, 2012.
   b. Social networking and conventional networking
   c. Education – webinar series, online certificate series, topics at conferences
   d. Publications – *Intercom* published 10 times a year and *Technical Communication* published quarterly (Online issues are free; hard-copy issues are available for a nominal fee.)
2. Literacy is NOT declining!
   a. Captain "Sully" Sullenberger needed documentation to land that plane.
   b. Manuals are needed for all electronic devices.
   c. Audience analysis is still important.
3. Value of making connections through STC and social media:
   a. Start with physical, then move to social media or vice versa (@rabailie on Twitter)
   b. What groups do Alan and Scott like?
      i. www.techcomm.org
      i. STC special interest groups (SIGs)
      ii. Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) groups – extensible markup language (XML)
      iii. LinkedIn® – used by recruiters
      iv. The Content Wrangler group
      v. Facebook
      vi. Twitter
4. What excites you about the profession?
   a. Usability
   b. Content
   c. Literacy is increasing.
   d. Ability to interact with the audience
5. What are the biggest challenges of our industry?
   a. Challenges are opportunities.
   b. We are usually introverted.
   c. The number of communicators who are unemployed or underpaid
   d. Being ready and open to changes in the profession
   e. Typos
   f. Pet peeves? Get over them! Worry about the big picture. Do it efficiently.
6. Is STC still relevant in a socially connected world?
   a. Declining use doesn't mean it's dead; it's just splintering.
   b. STC needs to provide value for its members and for the products they create.
   c. Rich experiences when networking with other tech commers

STC/SM February Program Recap — An Overview of Trends, Tools and Technologies in Software User Assistance
by Sharon McDonnell

Our February program took place at Lawrence Technological University's Welcome Center in Southfield, Michigan, on Feb. 4, 2012. In addition to all his knowledge and expertise, Joe Welinske, our presenter, brought with him an arsenal of toys (iPad®, iPhone®, Android™ phone, etc.) to demonstrate various mobile applications.

Welinske reminded us of what it is we do as user assistance authors and how our skill set is valued and compensated. He talked about the evolution of documentation writing and the various media, platforms and styles that we have become accustomed to using. Then he launched into the "Emerging Paradigms in IT."

Welinske walked us through the new categories of applications such as Web-based apps, Facebook apps, and custom devices. Many of these apps are displayed on much smaller devices and in different ways than we have been used to writing help for. Consequently, we need to rethink our language and style in order to accommodate a much smaller display area. For example, where we once used complete sentences, we now use as few words as

possible to convey the idea. We don't number our steps in order to save space. We used to say "Click;" we now say "Tap." We talk about how to page through a document or expand a screen differently when we're using a touch screen versus using a desktop computer.

Welinske showed us some of the authoring tools to use for Web apps for mobile devices. It's important to have a single-source document that can be interpreted on any size screen and adapt it to the device on which it will be used. We also need to include context-sensitive links from application screens to related content online.

Welinske said that we as technical communicators need to embrace the world of mobile apps and be willing to take a programming course or go to conferences or presentations in which those are discussed. So far, he sees few of us stepping up, but that's where the future lies.

After Welinske's 2 ½-hour presentation, he had a drawing for his book, *Developing User Assistance for Mobile Apps* (WritersUA, June 2011). Jill Money, STC-SM vice president and program manager, also drew names for STC/SM T-shirts and a Pierre Cardin pen and pencil set.

Joe Welinske *is president of WritersUA, a company devoted to providing training and information for user assistance professionals. Welinske has been involved with software documentation development since 1984. He recently published Developing User Assistance for Mobile Apps. The WritersUA/WinWriters conference draws hundreds of attendees each year from around the world to share the latest in user assistance design and implementation. The free content on the WritersUA website attracts over 20,000 visitors each month.*

Welinske has also taught online help courses at the University of Washington, the University of California at Santa Cruz and Bellevue Community College in Bellevue, WA. Welinske received a B. S. degree in industrial engineering from the University of Illinois in 1981 and an M. S. degree in adult instructional management from Loyola University in 1987. He was president of the STC Puget Sound Chapter from 2006 to 2008 and membership director for the Puget Sound Chapter of the Usability Professionals Association in 2010.

Welinske's book, Developing User Assistance for Mobile Apps, is available in print, Kindle, and ePub:
http://www.writersua.com/mobile/book.htm

Member Spotlight: Thomas Glennan

What is your educational background? I have a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering (BSME) degree from General Motors Institute (now Kettering University) in Flint, a Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree from Oakland University in Rochester Hills, and a Master of Science in Technical and Professional Communication (MSTPC) degree from Lawrence Technological University in Southfield.

How long have you been a member of STC? In what STC positions have you served? I have been a member of STC for five years; I joined in 2006. I am serving as secretary for the STC-SM chapter.

Why did you decide to join STC? When I originally considered a career change from automotive engineering to technical communication some years ago, I decided to learn all that I could about my newly chosen profession. So, in addition to going back to school to earn my degree, volunteering as an assistant editor for a local newsletter and writing technical articles, I joined the southeastern Michigan chapter of STC. My involvement with our STC chapter provided me with the resources and experiences to learn first hand about technical communication: excellent networking opportunities with professionals in the field, a forum for hearing and speaking to recognized leaders in the field, and outstanding learning opportunities and resources not otherwise available to me. Even after joining STC as a member and launching my own freelance technical writing service, I continue to find outstanding advantages to STC membership.

Why did you decide to pursue technical communication as a career? Although I thoroughly enjoyed my career as an automotive engineer and manager at General Motors, after more than 35 years I felt I had reached the point in life where my professional interests had changed. While reflecting on what I would like to do next, I realized that as an engineer and manager, I had always enjoyed learning about new technologies and their application to solving problems. I had also always enjoyed my technical writing responsibilities and assignments at GM (an unusual favorite pastime for an engineer) and had developed a latent desire to try starting my own business. The more I thought about it, the more the idea of becoming a freelance or contract technical communicator appealed to me.

Where are you currently employed? I am currently the founder, principal member and sole employee of Technical Writing Solutions, LLC (TWS), a provider of technical writing products and services. I operate out of my home office in Rochester Hills, Michigan.

What are your job activities? As the owner and only employee of TWS, I get to do it all and wear many hats. Not only am I responsible for generating the product content for exceeding my customers' expectations, I also am in charge of marketing, sales, accounting, administration and customer relations. I also make a mean cup of coffee.

What do you find most interesting and/or satisfying about your job? Many things, but I especially love learning about the subjects I am writing about. (I specialize in the automotive, alternative energy and manufacturing industries, as well as grant applications for nonprofit organizations.) I also enjoy the challenge of preparing and presenting ideas and information in a way that the intended audience can understand and use them.

What are some examples of projects you are particularly proud of? I recently spent six months updating, revising and republishing an old laboratory test procedure used by one of the American auto manufacturers to measure a vehicle's moment of inertia. I am also very gratified when a grant application that I have written and submitted on behalf of one of my nonprofit clients is approved by the funding organization.

How has being an STC member helped you with your career? I can sum it up best in one word: opportunity. The networking, learning, volunteering, and professional and social experiences that I have enjoyed as an STC member have all been excellent opportunities for me to grow and improve my technical communication abilities. The relationships that I have established and the lessons that I have both learned and shared with others as a result of my membership and participation in the STC and STC-SM have proven to be invaluable.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication? Any profession is a continual learning experience and technical communication is no different. Take advantage of the many learning opportunities that STC provides you with and continually push the envelope in applying the lessons learned. Take pride in both the profession and your work as a professional writer. In the words of Mahatma Gandhi, "Live like you will die tomorrow, but learn like you will live forever."

What else would you like our readers to know about you? Did I mention that I make a mean cup of coffee?

STC/SM February Program Recap (continued)

The slides from Welinske's presentation are available here:

- *Trends in UA http://writersua.info/snlGPO (code: 7286)*
- *UA for Mobile Apps http://writersua.info/ukQ8P1 (code: 6941)*

Another summary of Welinske's points is available in Devil Mountain Views, the online newsletter of the East Bay (San Francisco area) chapter of STC, at http://ebstc.org/newsletter/0112/Article_1.htm

Check out WritersUA's Resource Directory and Articles: http://www.writersua.com/

Consider joining the LinkedIn Software User Assistance group: http://writersua.info/rTOnNE

WritersUA's salary survey is in progress. Please consider contributing: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/salary_survey

Welinske is always looking to take on contracting and consulting projects. If you need any help, he would be happy to present a proposal.

If you haven't renewed your STC membership yet, consider this your reminder!

You probably know some of the benefits of STC/SM chapter membership, which include:

- Space on the STC/SM website to host your professional portfolio

- Exclusive advance notice of job postings, via the members' listserv

- Preferred pricing on continuing education and networking events hosted by STC/SM

Webinar by Scott Abel and Alan Houser (continued)

7. How is STC responding to rapid changes in technology, methods and practices?
   a. Social media is available.
   b. Managing Your Own Small Trucking Company (MYSTC) software
   c. New website
8. Where do we see ourselves in five years?
   a. The membership model is changing.
   b. Need to provide value, services, promotion and support for the profession.
9. What advice would you give tech commers just starting out?
   a. Learn about language, communication and tools.
   b. Read books on strategies and tools.
   c. Listen to webinars.
   d. Use social media.

Scott Abel, co-program manager at Content Strategy Applied NA in the greater Los Angeles area, is a content management strategist and social media choreographer whose strengths lie in helping organizations improve the way they author, maintain, publish and archive their information assets. Scott assists his clients in determining the best ways to efficiently manage their content life cycle, including leveraging social media and networking technologies. Find more information about Scott Abel at http://www.linkedin.com/in/scottabel

Alan Houser is a technical publishing consultant and trainer and owner of Group Wellesley, Inc., in the greater Pittsburgh area. He is also currently vice president and fellow, Society for Technical Communication. Find more information about Alan Houser at http://www.linkedin.com/in/alanhouser

2012 Calendar of Upcoming Events

Month	Date	Time	Topic	Speaker	Location
March	28	6:30 pm	Council Meeting	Council	Conference call
April	2	6:00 pm-8:00 pm	Developing the Corporate Story	LTU Professors Corinne Stavish and Dino Baskovic and LTU graduate students	Lawrence Technological University (LTU), Southfield MI. Taubman Student Services Bldg. (Welcome Center), Room C406
April	25	6:30 pm	Council Meeting	Council	LTU
May	20-23		STC Summit '12	Various	Chicago-Rosemont, IL. Register at http://summit.stc.org
June	TBA	TBA	STC-SM awards/recognition dinner	Maryann Bowen	TBA

Reading Roundup: Words About Books
by A.Word.A.Day at wordsmith.org

Though just a few ounces of paper and ink, books can be threatening to some. Governments try to ban them. Religious leaders try to shield their followers from them.

Of course, it's not the container; it's what's in them -- the ideas -- that frightens those in power. A good gauge of a free society is the freedom it enjoys to publish and read a book, even when some people don't agree with it.

As an antidote to the banning of books, Banned Books Week is celebrated in the U.S. every year. This year it's September 30 to October 6. This year, to mark the event, A.Word.A.Day featured six words to describe various forms of books. For words featured in A.W.A.D. for the Banned Books Week in previous years, see here and here.

vade mecum

PRONUNCIATION: (VAY/VAH-dee MEE/MAY-kuhm)

MEANING: *noun*: A book for ready reference, such as a manual or guidebook.

ETYMOLOGY: From Latin vade mecum (go with me), from vadere (to go) + me (me) + cum (with). Earliest documented use: 1629.

NOTES: An iPad may serve as the modern vade mecum, but in earlier times there was no Wi-Fi with easy access to reference material. A moneylender may have had to carry a book of interest tables, a doctor a book of treatments, and so on. A vade mecum was often folded like an accordion or a map and suspended from the belt or girdle.

USAGE: "The U.S. Senate, over which Dallas presided, ordered twelve thousand copies of Hickey's pro-slavery vade mecum." Jill Lepore; The Commandments; The New Yorker; Jan 17, 2011.

enchiridion

PRONUNCIATION: (en-ky-RID-ee-uhn, -kih-)

MEANING: *noun*: A handbook or a manual.

ETYMOLOGY: From Latin enchiridion, from Greek encheiridion, from en- (in) + cheir (hand) + -idion (diminutive suffix). Ultimately from the Indo-European root ghes- (hand) that also gave us cheiromancy/chiromancy (palmistry), chiral (not superimposable on its mirror image), and surgeon (literally, one who works with hands). Earliest documented use: 1541.

NOTES: In the beginning an enchiridion was a book concise enough to be carried in one's hand, as its origin from Greek cheir (hand) suggests. Both 'handbook' and 'manual' are literal equivalents of the word from English and Latin (from Latin manus: hand) respectively.

USAGE: "What to read: Toronto Life has been the enchiridion for Toronto's savvy since 1966." Alexander Besant; Canada's Capital of Cool; Times Union (Albany, New York); May 16, 2010.

roman-fleuve

PRONUNCIATION: (roe-MAAN*-fluhv) [* the middle syllable is nasal]

MEANING: *noun*: A long novel, often in several volumes, that tells the story of an individual, family, or society across several generations.

ETYMOLOGY: From French roman (novel) + fleuve (river). Earliest documented use: 1936. Plural romans-fleuves.

USAGE: "And it'd be a shame to miss out on the delights of the roman-fleuve as summer reading: there's a thrill in buying 12 volumes to read end-to-end." Tim Martin; I'll be Joining the Dance Online; The Daily Telegraph (London, UK); May 17, 2008.

Reading Roundup: Words About Books (continued)

chapbook

PRONUNCIATION: (CHAP-book)

MEANING: *noun*: A small book or pamphlet containing stories, poems, or religious tracts.

ETYMOLOGY: From chapman book, a small, cheap book sold by a <u>chapman</u> or a <u>colporteur</u>. Earliest documented use: 1824.

USAGE: "Gloucester writer and editor David Rich will read from and discuss his new chapbook of poems."
Ann Gail McCarthy; Rocky Neck Tradition Kicks Off Busy Weekend; Gloucester Times (Massachusetts); Aug 10, 2011.

omnibus

PRONUNCIATION: (OM-ni-bus)

MEANING: *noun*: 1. A volume reprinting several works by one author or works on one theme. 2. A public vehicle designed to carry a large number of people.
adjective: Including or dealing with many things at once.

ETYMOLOGY: From French, from Latin omnibus (for all). Ultimately from the Indo-European root op- (to work, produce) that is also the ancestor of words such as opera, opulent, optimum, maneuver, manure, <u>operose</u> and <u>inure</u>. Earliest documented use: 1829.

USAGE: "Say I'm reading an omnibus edition, where three novels are published as a collection. Does that count as one book or three? As far as I'm concerned it's three."
Glen Humphries; Last Word on Speed Reading; Illawarra Mercury (Australia); Jan 13, 2011.
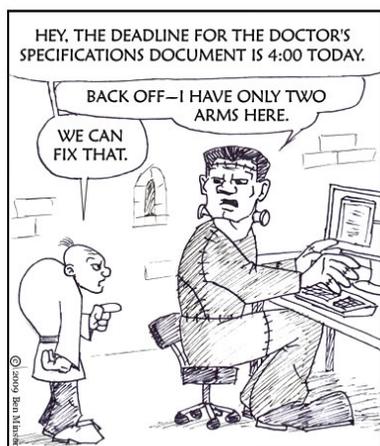
onomasticon

PRONUNCIATION: (on-uh-MAS-ti-kon)

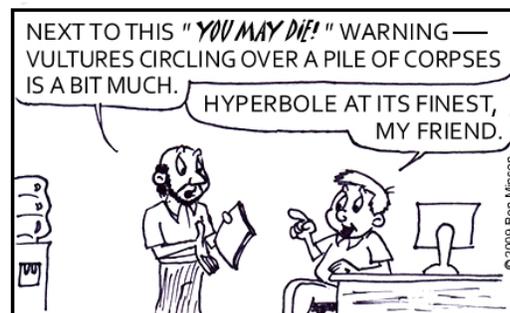**MEANING:** *noun*: A dictionary of names, especially personal names or place names.

ETYMOLOGY: From Greek onomastikos (of names), from onoma (name). Earliest documented use: 1710.

USAGE: "Even the ancient onomasticon was of no help to her. While she was able to find all sorts of names for mythological and religious figures who aided and abetted the human world, there was no name to be found for what he did."
Manya Steinkoler; The Body Retriever; Literature & Psychology; Jan 2002.

HEY, THE DEADLINE FOR THE DOCTOR'S SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT IS 4:00 TODAY.

BACK OFF—I HAVE ONLY TWO ARMS HERE.

WE CAN FIX THAT.

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In Dr. Frankenstein's Documentation Department

I HAVE SOME FEEDBACK ABOUT THE USE OF GRAPHICS IN YOUR DRAFT.

LAY IT ON ME.

NEXT TO THIS "*YOU MAY DIE!*" WARNING — VULTURES CIRCLING OVER A PILE OF CORPSES IS A BIT MUCH.

HYPERBOLE AT ITS FINEST, MY FRIEND.

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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

https://sites.google.com/site/wmsstc/
Society for Technical Communication
West Michigan Shores Chapter

neostc.org
Society for Technical Communication
Northeast Ohio Chapter

http://www.mtulode.com/news/2011/10/27/stc-student-chapter-gets-national-recognition/
Society for Technical Communication
Michigan Tech Chapter (student)

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

http://michichi.org
Michigan CHI - The Michigan Chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer-Human Interaction