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## Letter from the President

by Mark Lockwood, STC/SM President

Just as summer is a time of transition for STC/SM, it is also a time for reflection, especially for the outgoing chapter president. Join us as we look back in this newsletter at some recent activities. We had a wonderful year and are looking to do it again next year, even better!

As I think about the activities and initiatives pursued by the chapter and council, I am pleased about our accomplishments this year as well as our less-than-perfect outcomes. The new STC Society president, Michael Hughes, summed up STC succinctly at the STC SUMMIT in Dallas, TX this past May, calling STC "a writer's club." He is exactly right.

STC/SM is a forum for continued learning and camaraderie. We learn from experience, networking with others and managing events and projects as well as writing projects. As an all-volunteer-staffed organization, STC/SM has some recurring needs—member participation, volunteers to do work, program funding, and yes, lots of writing. However, these needs show the symbiotic nature of the chapter: helping each other through personal skill development.

To all the STC/SM Chapter members, thank you for the opportunity to serve as your chapter president. It was a stimulating yet challenging experience. Although it took extra time and was at times quite difficult, my personal experience was absolutely worth it. In fact, I highly recommend that all technical communicators participate in STC at all stages of their careers.

I also extend my personal thanks to all the volunteers, businesses, and others who contributed to the chapter this year. The Chapter Administrative Council could not have done it without all of you!

## STC/SM Chapter Receives Community of Merit Award



Among the chapter's accomplishments for the 2009-2010 chapter term is the Community of Merit Award that STC/SM recently received.

Formally presented at SUMMIT '10 in Dallas, TX, STC's 57th Annual Conference, the award highlights many of the chapter's efforts. Mark Lockwood accepted the award from STC Vice President Hillary Hart at the conference in early May. The chapter received wonderful feedback from the Society and we are excited about competing for another award next year!



Mark Lockwood accepts the Community of Merit Award from STC Vice President Hillary Hart.

## STC/SM Election Results for 2010-2011

Congratulations to the STC/SM officers for 2010-2011! The following individuals take office starting July 1, 2010:

### Administrative Council Members

**PRESIDENT**  
Maryann  
Bowen



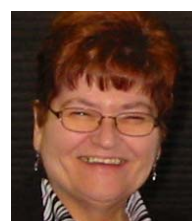
**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Jill  
Money



**SECRETARY**  
Tom  
Glennan



**TREASURER**  
Sharon  
McDonnell



**IMMEDIATE  
PAST PRESIDENT**  
Mark Lockwood



### Committees and Activities

The STC/SM chapter needs volunteers for the non-elected committees, especially for Nominations, Programs, and Membership. The chapter activities depend on the time, talent, and knowledge of the membership. A complete list of volunteer opportunities and descriptions is available on the STC/SM website ([www.stc-sm.org](http://www.stc-sm.org)). If you have the time to participate, STC/SM would really love to have your help or your ideas for programs and chapter activities!

Please feel free to contact anyone on the council for more information on how you can participate.



## Register Now for Internet User Experience 2010 Conference

July 24-29, 2010 / Ann Arbor, MI

The Usability Professionals' Association—Michigan Chapter (MI UPA) is co-sponsoring the sixth annual [Internet User Experience](http://www.iue2010.com) conference. This conference has grown every year and has now captured international attention. Come and participate as world-renowned speakers and trainers cover aspects of web site design and strategy, including usability, marketing, branding, social media, mobile web, and more. Tutorials will be offered on usability testing, storyboarding, focus groups, personas, accessibility and more.

Additional information is available at:

<http://www.iue2010.com/index.html>

and <http://miupa.org/>



**STC/SM is a proud co-sponsor of the IUE 2010 conference.**

STC/SM has supported this event in past years. We are always pleased to partner with other organizations such as MI UPA to further the reach and enhance the value of technical communications in southeastern Michigan.



Guest speaker Joe Lieblang makes a point.

## STC/SM May Program Recap—A Love of Words and Technology: The Evolving Role of the Technical Writer

by Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

Short and sweet. To the point. Engaging. These are some of the adjectives Joe Lieblang used to describe what he values most about good writing. These also describe the presentation Lieblang made at the May 26, 2010 STC-SM program. For 45 minutes, Lieblang, corporate editor at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, asked his audience to sit back and reflect on what we as writers do every day, on why it's important and what difference it makes.

For Lieblang, writers inform, entertain and persuade. Lieblang gave his audience an example of good writing by reading aloud an excerpt from a college application essay written by a high school senior that was as clear, informative and compelling as it could be. The essay would have persuaded Lieblang—and perhaps many STC-SM audience members—to accept the young author immediately for a spot on campus. Here was a clear example, indeed, of how writers can move readers to take action.

Writers also innovate and serve as catalysts for change, said Lieblang. Where would we be without writers? Look at the Magna Carta, he suggested. A one-page document handwritten in 1215 A.D., it forced an unruly king to become subject to the rule of law and served as a guideline for the U.S. Constitution more than five centuries later. Look at Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: a short 285 words that eloquently honored those who died at the Gettysburg battlefield also sounded the clarion call for unity to a nation still bloodied from the wounds of the Civil War. Thomas Jefferson, Leonardo daVinci, Aristotle. All these men were thinkers, yes—but were also writers who changed the course of history. Writers can change cultures and change the way people behave, Lieblang argued.

But what about the more plebian tasks we writers perform in our daily work? What about the form letters we generate every day on our jobs? The manuals we write? The marketing brochures we publish? These documents will not get us a spot in college or change the course of a nation's history. But this type of writing—which might seem trivial to us—can make a significant difference, indeed, to its intended audience. The letter of explanation we write can clearly tell the reader how much is owed and why and, at the same time, conveys an impression of the company sending it. The instructions we produce can make it easier for someone to perform a complicated task. From the stone tablets of old to the social media in vogue today, well-written documents have some things in common: they get the reader's attention, give important information and make a difference to the individuals whose lives they touch.

Turning his attention from the documents produced to the writers who produce them, Lieblang described the qualities he feels good writers possess: fearlessness and courage in facing a blank screen and getting the initial words down. Curiosity and openness to learning from others. Love of exchanging ideas—well suited to blogging and other two-way communication technologies. Skill at interpretation—the ability to take complex information from subject matter experts and boil it down to its simplest, most understandable terms, and sometimes to its shortest terms: the 140-character maximum permitted in a tweet.

Lieblang bemoaned the fate of the writer who works without being appreciated. Despite a pervasive feeling in some workplaces that "anyone can write," Lieblang contends writing is *not* easy. Writing can seem like a simple task to those who don't do it for a living. But professional writers know how much skill is required to turn out a good piece of writing.

Lieblang's remarks represented a change of pace for STC-SM program attendees. His comments weren't the usual "how-to" instructions we expect to hear at an STC-SM program. Instead, Lieblang gave us his views about writing and writers and asked for ours. Most of all, Lieblang gave us a reason to reflect on what we do and feel good about it.



Cathy Vera-Burgos and Joe Lieblang enjoy some conversation after the presentation.



All pictures by Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

## STC/SM Leadership 2009-2010

### Administrative Council

President  
Mark Lockwood  
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Vice President  
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Immediate Past President  
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Treasurer  
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Secretary  
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Membership  
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Nominations  
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[nominations@stc-sm.org](mailto:nominations@stc-sm.org)

Publicity  
Angel Bedford  
[publicity@stc-sm.org](mailto:publicity@stc-sm.org)

Historical  
Julie Dean Wingett



## Member Spotlight: Lisa Veasey

### Why did you decide to become an STC member?

I joined the STC 20 years ago to learn more about the field and begin networking with other technical writers. I have maintained my membership to stay current in the field, to access the resources that the STC provides, and to remain connected with other technical communicators. I have presented at three local chapter meetings.

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

I had many interests when I started college, and initially I found it difficult to select an area of focus. A friend and former teacher recommended the Written Communication/Technical Writing program at Eastern Michigan University. I soon learned that his recommendation matched my interests and abilities perfectly!

### Where are you currently employed?

I am a full-time English/Writing Instructor at Washtenaw Community College, and I am in charge of the Technical Writing Program there.

### What are your job activities?

I design and teach technical communication courses, evaluate student performance, assess courses, and revise the Technical Communication program as needed. I am also the current chair of WCC's Curriculum Committee and serve as liaison to the Assessment Committee.

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

I build student writing projects around technologies and challenges they will encounter in industry. I'm pleased that I've been able to bring the "real world" into the classroom.

### What do you find most interesting or satisfying about your job?

I've met so many wonderful people throughout the years. Those professional relationships have been wonderful on many levels.

### How has your STC membership helped you with your career?

I urge students to develop a portfolio that showcases their skills and to network with others in the field. I also recommend that they join the STC, of course!

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

Be ready to learn, ask lots of questions and take copious notes. If your employer doesn't have a style/process guide, try to get buy-in to start one. They're invaluable!

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

Prior to joining the faculty at WCC, I was a technical communicator in the software industry. That experience gave me insight into what technical communicators need to succeed in the field.

Click for information on the  
[Washtenaw Community College](http://www.wccnet.edu)  
[School of Professional Communication](http://www.wccnet.edu)  
or go to [www.wccnet.edu](http://www.wccnet.edu)

## STC/SM Chapter Awards 2010-2011 Undergraduate Scholarship

by Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

The STC/SM chapter has declared a winner of its 2010-2011 scholarship opportunity! **Eric Johnson** (pictured below left), a technical communication student at Michigan Technological University in Houghton, in Michigan's upper peninsula, was awarded a \$1000 scholarship after judges determined his submissions warranted the honor.

This was the first time STC/SM offered the scholarship, which is intended to support the development of better-educated professionals whose jobs are to make complicated information usable by many. The award monies are applied toward undergraduate tuition and living expenses.

In the following interview, you can learn more about Johnson and about his studies and career goals.



**TechComments:** Eric Johnson, congratulations on your award! Tell us about yourself.

**Johnson:** Right now I am taking several summer courses to continue my goal of graduating in four years, one of which is Introduction to Digital Media. Other courses related to technical communication that I have taken so far include Intro to Scientific and Technical Communication, Intro to Speech Communication and Intro to Website Design. The last two classes were my favorites, hands down.

**TechComments:** What about your career goals? And your background?

**Johnson:** My biggest hope for my career is that I can find a job that I enjoy that will pay enough to allow me to support a family. I enjoy getting up in front of people and speaking. Add to that my interest in math and writing, and technical communication was the perfect major for me!

**TechComments:** How did you become interested in technical communication?

**Johnson:** I have always loved math and science, but I did not feel engineering was right for me. After examining what I am good at and what I like to do (communicate with others), I looked into technical communication and was thrilled to find the perfect blend of science, technology, writing and communication.

**TechComments:** What prompted you to apply for the STC/SM scholarship?

**Johnson:** Honestly, the money was the prominent factor! However, I also applied because I once read an article about a young guy who didn't think he had a shot at a prestigious scholarship. However, he ended up winning because *nobody else* applied for it either—they they all thought someone else would win! So I figured *what the heck? Go for it!* And look what ended up happening.

**TechComments:** Describe the materials you submitted with the application and why you chose to submit them.

**Johnson:** The project I submitted along with the scholarship application was an interview students were required to conduct with a professional in an industry related to writing and design. I chose to submit this interview because of the documentation I had completed during the project, the ease with which I could sum everything up and the fact that everything was very compact.

**TechComments:** How will the scholarship help you achieve your goals?

**Johnson:** Basically, this scholarship will continue to help fund my tuition here at Michigan Tech so I can continue studying and earn my degree.

**TechComments:** What else would you like us to know about you?

**Johnson:** I'm the oldest of five kids and the son of Jeffrey and Susan Johnson. I hail from Poplar, Wisconsin and am a major Green Bay Packers fan. I'm a Christian, and I have traveled around Europe and the U.S., since my dad was a Captain in the Air Force. I am also an Eagle Scout and I love the outdoors!

### STC/SM congratulates Eric Johnson on winning the 2010-2011 scholarship!

On the next page, read comments from the judges about Eric's submissions and about the process of selecting the winner.

## Reflections on Judging the 2010-2011 STC/SM Scholarship Applications

by Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

Three judges reviewed the applications for the 2010-2011 STC/SM scholarship and came to a decision on who was most deserving. Each judge is an experienced technical communicator. Here are some comments from the judges about the selection process. Additional information on the STC/SM 2010-2011 scholarship is located on the [STC-SM website](#).

### What were you looking for in judging the applications? What were your priorities?

"I looked for a demonstration of quality technical communication principles in the applicants' projects; quality in both the methods used in performing the projects and in presenting the results of the projects. My priorities were: 1) Does the applicant meet the minimum requirements stated in the application, and 2) Did the applicant do a worthwhile project and do a good job of research and writing about it?"

### What were you looking for in judging the applications? What were your priorities?

"I wanted to see fundamental skills of good structure, conciseness and clarity, and attention to mechanical details such as proper spelling, use of page numbers, consistency in fonts and capitalization, etc. Also, since technical writers often write for audiences with no prior knowledge of the subject matter, I also judged an entry as successful if I came away with a clear understanding of the topic being presented."

### What did you find the most challenging about the judging process?

"Given that I am one of those people who will reject a resume for having a typo on it, I had to try not to expect students to write at the same level as professionals who have worked in the field for years. I needed to stay mindful of their experience level and rate how they performed as students who are still learning."

### What finally convinced you as to who should win?

"[Eric's] academic record showed serious interest in the field and his submission was a successful example of what technical writing is all about -- it presented its topic in a clear, well-structured, and straightforward manner without technical distractions like typos. "

### Any other comments?

"I think awarding a scholarship is an excellent thing for our chapter to do. I hope that we can find a way to better publicize the existence of the scholarship, receive more applications in the future and continue giving scholarships. I feel that, as a 501(c)(3) organization, giving scholarships is one of the most important things STC can do."

### Any other comments?

"A week or so after our judging was complete and we had awarded Eric the scholarship, I visited Michigan Tech. I heard positive comments about Eric from a couple of his instructors in the Scientific and Technical Communication program. A week later, at the STC conference in Dallas, I received positive feedback about Eric from three of his peers in the same program at Tech. As a result of both sets of comments, I feel we found a worthy recipient of our chapter's scholarship."



## Writing for the Movies

by Julie Dean Wingett

No, I'm not talking about writing screenplays. (Although I'm probably not the only STC member with a few pages of a nascent screenplay stashed in a desk drawer somewhere.) I'm talking about opportunities for technical communicators within the entertainment industry. Given the growing presence of the film industry in Michigan, it's possible that you might be able to leverage your skills into a job with one of the new production studios planned for this area.

For three years, I was a technical writer for DreamWorks SKG in Los Angeles. I worked at the feature animation studio in Glendale, and was part of the Animation Technology department. The studio was focused on 2D animation in its earlier days (e.g., *The Prince of Egypt*, *The Road to El Dorado*) and was moving toward 3D animation (e.g., *Shrek*) right around the time I relocated back to Michigan.

A significant portion of the studio's special effects and animation software was built in-house by a large staff of software engineers. They took on challenges such as how to improve the animation of tricky elements like flowing water or swirling sand, or how to create specialized lighting effects. My job was to talk to the creative staff about their problem, interview the engineers about the solution and then create accessible instructions for applying the solution to the problem. While some of the end-users were highly technical, many were not. (There were a few traditional animators on site who allegedly didn't even know how to access their email, so production assistants regularly printed it out for them.) Once finished, the documentation was then posted on the company intranet for studio-wide access. Given the fast pace of work at the studio, I rarely circulated anything on paper except by request.

The situation was similar with production management: DreamWorks had its own internally built system for tracking tasks and assets, so I needed to write instructions for that, too. As jobs throughout the studio were assigned, finished and passed along to other departments, producers and production managers tracked all this information in a massive database and used it to generate reports for the executive staff. It was a critical tool for the studio, so reliable documentation was a must. It not only served as a handy reference for the end users, but kept the busy engineers happy, too, since their phones didn't end up ringing every time someone had a question about how to use the software.

So, while I didn't work directly on the films themselves, I was learning the nuts and bolts of filmmaking every day, and since every department in the studio needed documentation of some kind at one point or another, I ended up learning quite a bit about everyone else's job—a broad level of knowledge that was invaluable for writing procedural types of documents, and one that relatively few employees could naturally obtain as a part of their day-to-day routine.

Technical writers exist in other aspects of the entertainment industry, too. Before DreamWorks, I worked for a multimedia company that produced children's computer games for clients such as Disney, Mattel, and Hasbro. Design decisions were recorded in a product specification, which I was responsible for formatting and maintaining, and I also helped with tracking assets in the production database. After starting out solely as a technical writer, I eventually got to participate in the creative development process itself, contributing in areas such as user interface design, storyboarding and scriptwriting.

In short, being a technical writer doesn't necessarily mean you will be working in a "serious" business like banking or auto manufacturing. You may be able to slip behind the scenes and help make a little movie magic by creating documentation that helps artists and production staff do their jobs faster and better.

(And if you just happen have a screenplay lingering in your desk drawer as you're working on your technical docs, you're well positioned to bump into someone who might help get it to the right set of eyes!)

**About the author:** *Leveraging her experience in technical communications and STC, Julie Dean Wingett is currently a part-time freelancer and volunteer worker. She has also served as STC/SM Secretary for multiple terms. Driving her work ethic is a broad background in writing and technology combined with her willingness to use her skills to support other professionals in the field.*

## TECHcomments

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

Editor  
Elizabeth Donoghue Colvin

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Please e-mail submissions for future newsletters to [newsletter@stc-sm.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-sm.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](http://stc-sm.org)

Society for Technical Communication  
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

[wms-stc.org](http://wms-stc.org)

Society for Technical Communication  
West Michigan Shores Chapter

[neostc.org](http://neostc.org)

Society for Technical Communication  
Northeast Ohio Chapter

<http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~stcclub/>

Society for Technical Communication  
Michigan Tech Chapter



[miupa.org](http://miupa.org)

Usability Professionals' Association  
Michigan Chapter



[amwa.org](http://amwa.org)

American Medical Writers Association

**IABC** INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION  
OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATORS

[detroit.iabc.com](http://detroit.iabc.com)

International Association of Business Communicators  
Detroit Chapter



[prsadetroit.org](http://prsadetroit.org)

Public Relations Society of America  
Detroit Chapter

[cmprsa.com](http://cmprsa.com)

Public Relations Society of America  
Central Michigan Chapter



[detroitastd.org](http://detroitastd.org)

American Society for Training and Development  
Greater Detroit Chapter

[astdannarbor.org](http://astdannarbor.org)

American Society for Training and Development  
Ann Arbor Chapter

[mm-astd.org](http://mm-astd.org)

American Society for Training and Development  
Mid-Michigan Chapter