



# CAPITAL LETTER

## In this Issue

Local Impression of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual STC Conference:  
 Understanding Our Communities..... 1  
 From the President ..... 2  
 From the Editor..... 3  
 Chapter Chatter..... 4  
 Membership News..... 4  
 Upcoming Chapter Events ..... 4  
 Other Events of Interest..... 6  
 Rave Reviews: Designing Highly Useable Software,  
 by Jeff Cogswell..... 8  
 Volunteers Celebrate Their Success..... 9  
 Recruitment for Competition: Tap into Your Inner Designer 10  
 Events and Volunteers ..... 11  
 SIGs Revealed: SIG Membership ..... 12

## Quotable Quote:

You must be the change you wish to see in the world.

~Mahatma Gandhi~

## Local Impression of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual STC Conference: Understanding Our Communities

By E.C. Eklund

“Community” was a key concept at the May 2005 52nd Annual STC Conference in Seattle. As it happens, a sense of belonging to a community was my main reason for wanting to be there.

As most of you probably know, the STC is undergoing what it refers to as a “transformation.” Part of this transformation is the redefinition of chapters as “geographical communities” and of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) as “virtual communities.” Over the 35 years of my professional career, I’ve come to regard such “transformations” with more than a little skepticism. All too often, I’ve found, we change the words without really changing the underlying realities.

As an internal consultant and, until recently, the only writer in the office where I work, I don’t get much of a chance to interact with other technical writers in my job. I miss the opportunities to discuss problems and gain insight from professional colleagues. That’s one of the major reasons why I belong to the STC—to relate to and interact with a peer group. As a member of two SIGs, I have opportunities to interact with peers, but only at a distance. There’s still something to be said for meeting people face-to-face and getting to know them. Attending my first annual conference was a way to do that, and I was looking forward to matching faces with some

[Continued on page 7](#)

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

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**Bobbie Dofflemeyer at**  
[news@stcwc.org](mailto:news@stcwc.org)

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# From the President

Eddie VanArsdall

## It's All About the Journey

At age 19, I dropped out of college to join a rock and roll band. During the summer following my freshman year, I began playing with the band and was invited to spend the next year touring the college circuit. When I told my parents that I had decided not to return to school, they agreed to let me live with them, but only if I agreed to find a job to supplement my paltry musician wages.

In our small southern Virginia town, jobs weren't exactly plentiful. I became an assembly line worker in a sheet metal factory, building farm machinery. I spent many long days wearing safety goggles, steel-toed boots, and clothes filled with metal dust. Each morning, after playing a late-night gig, I dragged myself to work at 7 a.m., jolted awake by the pop and crackle of arc welders and the acrid smell of burning metal.

After only a few sobering months as a laborer, I resolved to return to college. I put away half of each weekly paycheck and saved enough money to return the following year. I resumed my studies with a much deeper appreciation and focus, embarking on a journey of learning that continues to this day. I still view that stint in

the factory as a transforming experience in my life.

After college, I started my first job in the corporate world. Music continued to provide a creative outlet until I grew tired of performing and turned to writing. My employer recognized my interest and ability, and I began writing user guides and training materials for mainframe applications. My love of writing and technology led me to a career in technical communication, and that career led me to the STC.

Another transforming moment. Joining the STC has been the most intelligent decision I have made during my entire career. I had been a member of another international professional organization that required one fee for basic membership and a separate, nearly equal fee for local chapter membership. (I never joined the local chapter.) In contrast, STC membership gives me access to a vast, vibrant community that comprises local and international practitioners.

To subscribe to specialized periodicals published by my former organization, I would have paid nearly half the cost of the membership fee for

[Continued on page 5](#)

## From the Editor

Bobbie Dofflemyer

Ah, the lazy days of summer. Vacations, barbecues,... Wait a minute, let me back up. Hi, my name is Bobbie Dofflemyer, your new editor of *Capital Letter*. When our newly appointed chapter president, Eddie VanArsdall (whom you met on the previous page), asked me if I would consider taking the position, my first thoughts were, "Wow, that's a lot of responsibility, isn't it?" and "Where did this guy get my name, anyway?" After my initial panicked, deer-in-headlights response, I started to realize what a great opportunity this could be.

As some of you may know, I started my foray into the newsletter as Production Manager. For the most part, I gave in to my introverted tendencies by staying in the background, quietly providing PDF and HTML files without really taking part in the actual content of each issue. Well, ladies and gentlemen, that's all about to change! And with that rather confident yet silly preamble, I would like to introduce this summer issue of *Capital Letter* as a sort of transition, a changing of the guards, if you will. I'd also like to take a moment to ask you a favor: HELP!!

*Capital Letter* needs you! We need your fresh ideas and we need your assistance turning those ideas into reality. We're always thrilled to get new volunteers, so whether you're ready to commit to an ongoing role (I know someone out there is biting at the bit to be one of our new copy editors), you want to get your feet wet by publishing a single article, or you have a great topic for an upcoming issue, let us know. You can drop me a note at [news@stcwdc.org](mailto:news@stcwdc.org) or you can fill out the volunteer signup form at [http://www.stcwdc.org/volunteer\\_form.shtml](http://www.stcwdc.org/volunteer_form.shtml).

We all have hectic lives, so the more people who can contribute their time and skills to the newsletter, the better the newsletter will be for us all. Lots of volunteer positions are available for any number of interests and skill sets—graphics, event reviews, editing, you name it. We are starting to plan our strategy for next year's publication (you never know, we may shake things up a bit), and we'll share those details in our fall issue. For now, just know that this is an excellent time to get involved!

[Continued on page 5](#)

### Chapter Leadership President

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##### Strategic Planning

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# Chapter Chatter

## Membership News

### New Members Who Joined Between May 16, 2005 and June 15, 2005

Jeffery T. Adelsberger	Ashley M. Burnette	Laura Harley
Scottie L. Ahmed	Laura J. Crews	Frank Q. Irving
Mujtaba Ahmed	Erica Flanders	Gwendolyn McDaniels
Philip Bulman	Lisa M. Gaddy	Michael D. Miller
John Burlison	Mary Graham	Yonca Peyraz-Doyan
Judith S. Burnes		

**Total STC Members: 15,619**  
**Total STC WDC Members: 546**  
**Welcome to STC!**

## Upcoming Chapter Events



**Event:** Summer Planning Meeting

**When:** Saturday, July 9, 2005 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Where:** Eddie VanArsdall's home, 1400 S Joyce St, #1133, Arlington, VA 22202  
 Phone: 703-486-2952

**Cost:** Free

**RSVP:** Reservations are requested. To reserve, complete the reservation form at [http://www.stcwdc.org/prgm\\_summer05.shtml](http://www.stcwdc.org/prgm_summer05.shtml) or contact Eddie VanArsdall at [president@stcwdc.org](mailto:president@stcwdc.org).

**Info:** Our elected Administrative Council officers and committee managers will soon meet to discuss our plans, programs, and initiatives for the coming year.

This is an open meeting. All STC WDC members who are interested in the administrative workings of the chapter are invited to attend. A light lunch will be provided at no cost.

[Continued from page 2](#)

each subscription. STC membership not only includes the cost of publications in the base fee; it also includes membership in one special interest group (SIG) and enables me to join additional groups for \$5 each.

My membership also provides access to the STC's extensive knowledge base. In the last year alone, I have attended moderately priced, chapter-sponsored workshops on project management, single sourcing with AuthorIt, and basic XML. I have extended my XML training by taking two online courses recommended to me by another member at the 2004 Annual Conference. I have served as an online judge in the annual competition and learned more about what others in our profession are producing. I have read innumerable thought-provoking books on various technical communication topics, thanks to the quarterly *Technical Communication* journal. I have explored many websites recommended to me by other members.

But what I value most about belonging to this organization is the people with whom I have

established professional relationships and cherished, lifelong friendships. I have also contacted and met many experts in our field, and I have been delighted to find them accessible, open, and responsive. I have connected with several online communities, and I regularly tune in to their discussions. Sometimes I participate, and sometimes I just absorb.

As your president, I have a personal interest in seeing that you have the same positive STC experiences that I have had. You can play a part in the Society's transformation and in our chapter's rechartering by simply giving us your opinion.

Many of you recently gave us valuable feedback in our Program Interest Survey, and we are grateful for your advice. We intend to broaden our perspective during the coming year by soliciting more general comments about what you expect from STC membership. I encourage you to maintain an ongoing dialog with me, with other chapter officers and volunteers, with the Society office, and with each other.

[Continued from page 3](#)

So as you're enjoying those cookouts and trips to the beach, please take a few moments to think about what you'd like to get out of this newsletter. Share your ideas, share your knowledge, and tell us a little bit about what you do. I believe *Capital Letter* should be a

community publication, with input from as many members of our chapter community as possible. Let's make this fun, educational, and most importantly, a community effort.

Have a great summer. See you in the fall!

#### Cast Your Vote!

How do you like to read *Capital Letter*? What kind of topics do you enjoy? Help us improve the newsletter by completing our online survey at

<http://www.zoomerang.com/survey.zqi?p=WEB224F7TVUU2G>.

Event:

**Opening Social**

When:

Thursday, September 15, 2005 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Where:

National Museum of Natural History, 10<sup>th</sup> and Constitution Ave, NW

Cost:

\$5

Info:

Writers meet artists this fall when our chapter teams up with three other organizations for our first event of the year. On September 15, 2005, we will join the following groups for a social and informational meeting:

- The Guild of Natural Science Illustrators
- The Association of Medical Illustrators
- The Illustrators Club of Washington

We will meet at the National Museum of Natural History at 10th and Constitution Avenue, NW. Join us for networking, eating (of course!), and learning. Each group will give a short presentation, followed by a Q&A session at the end. As the date draws closer, look for more details about this event in the weekly announcement and on the chapter website.

For more information, contact Kristen Sweet, First Vice President and Events Committee Manager at [events@stcwdc.org](mailto:events@stcwdc.org).



## Other Events of Interest

### Free Webinar Miniseries: “Multilingual Publishing: How Do You Manage All Those Languages? It’s Greek to Me!”

This three-part webinar miniseries will provide insight into how organizations can use XML to streamline their multilingual publishing and save thousands of dollars in translation costs.

*When:*

- June 28, 2005 – Part 1: Speak a New Language: XML
- July 19, 2005 – Part 2: It’s Not Greek, It’s Automatic
- August 16, 2005 – Part 3: A Real Life Success Story

*Where:* Online

For more information, visit

[http://www.xmetal.com/en\\_us/marketing/registrati on.x?keyword=webinar\\_701300000001NJd&ls=v](http://www.xmetal.com/en_us/marketing/registrati on.x?keyword=webinar_701300000001NJd&ls=v)

### Tri-XML 2005 Conference

The theme of this year’s conference is XML in Practice: Hit the Ground Running. The conference is geared toward users of XML and XML-related technologies. Speakers will present a wide range of topics, from basic concepts to cutting edge technologies.

*When:* July 28-30, 2005

*Where:* North Carolina State University’s McKimmon Conference and Training Center

For more information, visit

<http://www.trixml.org/confindex.shtml>

**LavaCon**

The Third Annual Conference on Technical Communication and Project Management includes three days of breakout sessions and hands-on workshops on managing technical projects, technical people, and your personal and corporate development.

*When:* September 25-28, 2005

*Where:* Honolulu, Hawaii

For more information, visit  
<http://www.lavacon.org>

**FrameMaker 2005 Chautauqua**

This three-day conference features a convergence of FrameMaker users and certified experts to share knowledge, network, and hear Adobe speak on the future of the product.

*When:* November 7-9, 2005

*Where:* North Carolina State University's McKimmon Conference and Training Center

For more information, visit  
<http://www.travelthepath.com/conf2005.html>

<b>CHAPTER FINANCES</b>	
Below is a summary of the chapter's financial status as of June 17, 2005. Questions may be directed to <a href="mailto:treasurer@stcwdc.com">treasurer@stcwdc.com</a> .	
<b>ASSETS</b>	\$20,641.76
Cash & Bank Accounts	\$19,641.76
Inventory (estimated)	1,000.00
<b>LIABILITIES</b>	\$960.03
Current Liabilities	\$960.03
Long-term Liabilities	
<b>NET WORTH</b>	\$19,681.73

[Continued from page 1](#)

of the names I've seen in the various STC discussion lists.

From the opening keynote address on Leadership Day to the closing session on Wednesday, I discovered it wasn't hard to meet my long distance peers. Without exception, everyone I approached was warm and welcoming, even if they didn't recognize my name. Without exception, I was made to feel a part of the group. Without exception, I

experienced a true sense of community. What this brought home to me was that it doesn't really matter whether we call ourselves chapters and SIGs or geographical and virtual communities. Regardless of what we're called, the underlying reality is that we are a community of peers. The STC's "transformation" is not just a change of terms; it's a true reflection of what we really are. I'm not sure I'd have come to that realization as quickly without attending the annual conference.

## Rave Reviews: Designing Highly Useable Software, by Jeff Cogswell

Reviewed by Eddie VanArsdall



Paperback: 342 pages

Publisher: Sybex Inc.

ISBN 0-7821-4301-6

If you think no author could possibly have a fresh perspective on usability, think again. Jeff Cogswell's *Designing Highly Useable Software* examines usable software design from the inside out. An accomplished software engineer, Cogswell contends that many software disasters happen in parts of the program that users cannot see. Unlike many authors on usability, he devotes only three of his book's fifteen chapters to user interface design, and even those chapters emphasize usability within the context of best programming practices.

Cogswell has extensive experience in programming Windows software, so many of his examples are drawn from Windows (although he does occasionally refer to conventions used on the UNIX and Macintosh platforms). Although he acknowledges that many Windows idioms are not especially intuitive (for example, "That stupid desktop metaphor," pp. 11–13), he recommends that software designers generally stick with the "established idioms" unless their designs are improvements.

Part I, "Keeping It Simple," comprises seven chapters covering usable interfaces, real-world device modeling, system response time, report layouts, and Web interfaces. We are introduced to the author's pet peeves, which include systems that (1) display confusing messages, (2) force users to reboot, (3) exit without saving user preferences, and (4) require overuse of the mouse without providing keyboard shortcuts. For each of these annoyances, Cogswell provides a solution giving users more control.

The four chapters in Part II, "The Lonely Engineer," are devoted to specific programming practices, with most code samples given in C++. Cogswell provides advice on handling startup issues, shutdown issues, and system errors, and on managing dynamic link libraries (DLLs) and object-oriented programming constructs. He discourages programmers from imposing arbitrary limits on software behavior, such as the number of files that can be opened, and promotes the use of dynamic memory allocation to handle the number of open files.

Directed to business owners and managers, Part III, "The Business of It All: It's 'Dollars and Sense,'" emphasizes that technology companies must conduct thorough usability testing and must listen to customer feedback; otherwise, they won't survive. Chapter 14 emphasizes the importance of ensuring that software is easy to install, providing online help, and offering training options. Written for "bosses and managers" (p. 304), Chapter 15 identifies and describes six programmer personality types and how they can contribute to—or ruin—a project team.

Fortunately, Cogswell's lively sense of humor prevents *Designing Highly Useable Software* from becoming overly dry and technical. In his "Real World Scenario" sidebars, he discusses usability issues inherent in everyday things such as refrigerator doors and paper towel dispensers. And his admonishments to programmers can be stern but downright funny: "As for Abort, Retry, and Ignore, all I'm going to say is this: Don't you dare" (p. 83).

Technical communicators can benefit from reading this book, largely because the information on back-end software issues can help improve your communications with

engineers. You'll now have a realistic grasp of the workaday constraints experienced by these colleagues, the best practices that they should be observing, and the types of suggestions from you that might sound plausible to them. Having some background in programming and scripting is helpful but not essential for understanding Cogswell's recommendations.

*Eddie VanArsdall has worked in various technical communication disciplines since the late eighties. His experience includes technical writing and editing, instructional design for print and the Web, instructor-led training, and usability evaluation. He has designed information solutions for government agencies, law firms, the World Bank, and telecommunications and health insurance clients.*

## Volunteers Celebrate Their Success

By Jennifer Reed

I think we all sometimes forget that our entire chapter is run by volunteers. Without people getting involved, we wouldn't have any of the great things our chapter provides, such as the STC WDC Chapter competition, our monthly events, award-winning newsletter, an excellent website, and exciting PR material, just to name a few.

We have dedicated individuals who donate their time and expertise to run our chapter and various committees. Some of these positions are like part-time jobs. We all applaud those who take such positions, but we can't all handle them. Just as important, if not more important, are the volunteers who don't have a lot of time but still manage to give an hour or two. These volunteers see a need and fill it, providing articles for the newsletter, assisting with a monthly event, judging competition entries, providing advertising for events, and so many more roles that I can't list them all. We wouldn't be the STC WDC chapter of STC without all of these individuals. It would be like sitting in a plane with no pilot—we would get nowhere.

With that in mind, it's only appropriate that we end our year by celebrating and thanking our volunteers. The annual Volunteer Luncheon provided a festive opportunity to come out and meet many of our volunteers and thank them for

their hard work. Kathy Bine, our Immediate Past President, took time to thank her officers, the Extended Administrative Council, and everyone who volunteered this year. In turn, Kathy was thanked for the amazing job she did this year.

Even as we wrapped up the year, ideas for next year were bubbling to the surface. The room was buzzing with thoughts on how to provide more for our members—ways to improve and enhance the member experience. "How do we get more people involved?" "What do our members really want?" Hopefully, the coming year will bring more answers to these questions. I know everyone has their ideas, and the Admin Council would love to hear them.

I believe everyone has something to offer, and our chapter is a good outlet. Whether you just have an hour or two to give, or ten hours a week, there's a place for you to volunteer and contribute to the chapter. You don't have to be a committee chair; you could write an article, develop a flyer, donate a location to hold an event, offer your editing services to the newsletter, . . . Nothing is too small. Are you interested in learning more about HTML? Volunteer to work on the website or help publish the newsletter. Enjoy developing marketing material? Help with the advertising of our events. Volunteering can benefit the chapter, but it can

also benefit you by allowing you to enrich your skills.

Next year, we want to celebrate you and your involvement at the Volunteer Luncheon, so contact me, [jreed4@gmail.com](mailto:jreed4@gmail.com), check the



Eddie VanArsdall, Kristen Sweet, and Kathy Bine at the Volunteer Recognition Luncheon

volunteer website,

[http://www.stcfdc.org/volunteer\\_openings.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/volunteer_openings.shtml), or contact our Volunteer Manager, Mike Cleary, [mcleary116@aol.com](mailto:mcleary116@aol.com), to get involved.



Kathy Bine and Carolyn Kelley Klinger celebrating Carolyn's international award

## Recruitment for Competition: Tap into Your Inner Designer

By Sarah Gill

Are you ready? The STC WDC Chapter 2005-2006 Competitions will soon be accepting entries!

Now is the perfect time for you to peruse your recent masterpieces and select the ones most likely to win that coveted STC WDC Distinguished Technical Communication award, or maybe even Best in Show. You can do this by the pool, with your sunglasses on.

Below are some guidelines for eligible entries:

- Contain sufficient technical, scientific, medical, or similar content to qualify as technical communication. (Additional details can be found at

[http://www.stcfdc.org/competition\\_technical.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/competition_technical.shtml) for a definition, if needed.)

- Have been produced or substantially revised within 24 months preceding September 1 of the current year (that is, between September 1, 2003 and September 1, 2005).
- Have been originally prepared for and accepted for publication by a client, employer, or publisher.

Keep an eye out for the Call for Entries, due in July, with more details on where to send your entries. The entries deadline this year will be September 30th, 2005.

## Events and Volunteers

By Kristen Sweet

Have you always wondered how we make our chapter events successful each month? Have you ever considered helping out but were hesitant because of other commitments? Are you interested in expanding your volunteer activities on a limited basis? Consider helping the Washington, DC Events Committee. We need people to volunteer at one or more upcoming events for 2005-2006.

I know what you must be thinking:

- "I don't have time."
- "Getting to events is a hassle because of the location."
- "I can't deal with all of that traffic!"

Some of the volunteer positions we are looking for involve only behind-the-scenes work, while others require that you attend an event. Still hesitating? Does helping to coordinate a location by e-mail or phone interest you? How about coordinating with the speaker on the program topic or tracking registration using our online registration form? Many of the positions only require a couple of hours of work each month. So, if you are interested, here are the types of volunteer positions we are looking for this year:

**Event Manager:** For one event, coordinate the speaker, meeting room logistics, equipment, handouts, and catering. You will receive instructions on how to handle each of these responsibilities, and you will work with a team to make the event successful. This is a great way to ease into event management while also qualifying for half-price admission at the event you are managing.

**Registration Desk Attendant:** Register attendees and collect any unpaid attendance fees as people arrive at the chapter event;

receive and maintain the registration spreadsheet given to you by the Registration Desk Coordinator.

**Program Greeter:** Encourage networking among attendees by introducing people; help new people feel welcome.

**Program Reviewer:** Write an article, approximately 500 words long, about a chapter event for *Capital Letter*; summarize the speaker's main points and your overall experience at the event. You may attend the program you are reviewing for half-price admission with prior authorization from the First Vice President, Kristen Sweet.

**Membership Desk Attendant:** Set up the membership table at the event (poster and packets); answer questions, talk to prospective members, and distribute new member packets. This position requires attendance at the event and is eligible for half-price admission.

**Membership Data Manager:** Submit list requests to the Society office; maintain a spreadsheet of membership numbers and current and prospective members; generate a PDF of chapter members. This position is completed online at home and requires approximately two hours every month.

**Membership Materials Manager:** Mail new member packets and prospective member packages; assemble membership packets for meetings. This position is completed online at home and requires approximately two hours every month.

If you are interested in any of the positions described in this column, please contact Kristen Sweet at [firstvp@stcwwdc.org](mailto:firstvp@stcwwdc.org) or [events@stcwwdc.org](mailto:events@stcwwdc.org).

## SIGs Revealed: SIG Membership

By Carolyn Kelley Klinger

Our members are represented in each of the Society's 21 Special Interest Groups (SIGs). Members can join multiple SIGs per their membership arrangement with the STC. The following table shows how many Washington, DC chapter members have chosen to join each Society SIG. Note that SIGs are managed by volunteers at the Society level, and your membership benefits may include a SIG newsletter, website, and/or online discussion list. Some SIGs have representation at the chapter level, and these, too, are managed by volunteers. The Washington, DC chapter has two SIGs, Usability and Consulting and

Independent Contracting, both of which meet infrequently. If you are interested in planning a meeting for one of these SIGs, please contact the following SIG managers:

- Allen Rotz (allen@dctechwriting.com), of the chapter's Usability SIG
- Carolyn Kelley Klinger (carolyn.klinger@verizon.net), of the Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG

For more information on contacting Society-level SIG managers or becoming involved in a chapter SIG, see <http://www.stcfdc.org/sigs.shtml>.

Accessibility	16	Lone Writer	44
Canadian Issues	2	Management	37
Consulting & Independent Contracting	85	Marketing Communication	28
Education & Research	26	Online Information	61
Environmental, Safety & Health	14	Policies & Procedures	37
Illustrators and Visual Designers	20	Quality	13
Indexing	23	Scientific Communication	32
Information Design	105	Single Sourcing	33
Instructional Design & Learning	58	Technical Editing	114
International Technical Communication	23	Usability and User Experience	84