



CAPITAL LETTER

Washington, DC Chapter

Volume 32 / Number 7 / March 2001

Looking Ahead

April: The Perfect Fit— Understanding Work Styles, Learning Styles, and Technical Abilities

Date: Wednesday, April 25.

About the program: The explosion of Internet technology does not eliminate the need to understand or interact with people. Understanding and appreciating different personality types, work habits, and learning styles can tremendously impact a team's work progress. Publications or project managers may discover "diamonds in the rough" among new candidates or current employees if there are appropriate processes in place to measure how someone will, or even can, "fit" on their team.

Intended audience: Anyone interested in learning how to evaluate, recruit, or work with people. Don't forget your business cards for networking and books for the book drive!

About the speaker: Conni Allen-Evans is the founder and president of The Ancon Group, an information design firm that provides consulting and staffing in the areas of technical documentation, business communication, and information security planning. She serves as the Technical Publications Competition manager for the Washington, DC Chapter of STC and has been a presenter at the STC Annual Conference.

Schedule: Registration: 6:45-7:00 p.m.; dinner: 7:00-8:00 p.m.; program: 8:00-9:00 p.m.

Food: Salad, entrée, dessert, beverage. Entrée choices are Chicken Genovese (marinated grilled breast of chicken layered over linguine, then topped with a light cream sauce and tomato concasse), or linguine with a light cream sauce and tomato concasse, topped with fresh, grilled vegetables.

Cost: With advance reservations: \$12 for Administrative Council members, \$15 for students, \$24 for members, and \$30 for nonmembers and walk-ins. Program only: \$10.

Reservations: Advance reservations are *required* and must be received by Friday, April 20. No-shows will be billed.

On the Agenda

March: Technical Communication Progression and Résumé Review

Date: Saturday, March 24.

About the program: STC Fellow Connie Kiernan hosts our second annual progression meeting with the James Madison University Student Chapter; all local technical communicators are invited to attend. After lunch, attendees will participate in three round-table discussions lasting ½ hour each. Round table discussion topics decided by press time include

Mary Wise: Reach out and touch someone: distance learning.

Annette Reilly: Go do the right thing: ethics for technical communicators.

Elizabeth Pass: Get caught in the Web: Web design.

Mike Zerbe: What's a caret? Editing in the workplace.

Roger Munger: Designing job search portfolios for cranky, skeptical, and tired interviewers.

Bud Brune: Who you know is important: how networking can help you develop your career—and find better jobs.

Jonathan Hine: The world on a string: technical translation.

Thea Teich: Report from five years in the self-employment trenches.

New this year is the résumé review by local recruiters. After you arrive at the program, place one copy of your résumé on the recruiter table. One of the recruiters will review it while you attend the round table discussions. On your way out, pick up your résumé and speak to the recruiters further about job opportunities if you wish. Be sure to take their cards! The current list of recruiters includes representatives from TechPlacement, HireStrategy.com, and webMethods.

Don't forget your business cards for networking and books for the book drive! We collect a business card from each attendee for a chance to win the registration fee for the STC Annual Conference. *The drawing will take place at this program.* Books collected in the book drive are donated to local charities.

Schedule: Registration and lunch: 11:30 a.m.-12:15 p.m.; introductions: 12:15-12:30 p.m.; program: 12:30-2:00 p.m.

Washington, DC Chapter **Capital Letter**

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The Capital Letter is published ten times per year by the Washington, DC Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Its purpose is to inform chapter members about special functions and regular activities of the chapter and society, as well as to provide articles and essays in the field of technical communication. Material for publication should be submitted to

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Deadline for April 2001 Issue:
Tuesday, March 13

Deadline for May 2001 Issue:
Friday, April 13

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Chapter Web Site

<http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www>

Looking for a Job?

If you need job listings, you may

- Visit our website at http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/jobs_1.shtml. If you don't have access to the web, try your local library for web access. More and more libraries are providing some type of Internet access.
- You can download a text file of the job announcement lists or get a textfile by e-mail from http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/jobs_listings.shtml.

To request a list by e-mail, send mail as follows:

To: lockley@lockley.net Subject: WDC jobs list1

To: lockley@lockley.net Subject: WDC jobs list2

To: lockley@lockley.net Subject: WDC jobs list3

- Call Ann Ray at 301-918-0341 and ask her to send you a hard copy. ✉

Public Relations (PR) Mailing List (listserv)

The Public Relations (PR) Mailing List (listserv) is for notifying chapter members about chapter meetings, events, and related information. We use this mailing list to improve communications to our members about chapter events and also reduce the cost for mailing announcements and reminders to the nearly 700 members in our chapter. The name of the mailing list is stcwc-pr. Commands may be sent by e-mail or by using the Web page at <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcwc-pr>.

To subscribe by e-mail, send an e-mail message to lyris@stc.org. Put nothing or a dummy word in the subject line, and only the following words in the body of the message (anything else will confuse the program):

subscribe stcwc-pr your name

To unsubscribe by e-mail, send an e-mail message to lyris@stc.org. Put nothing or a dummy word in the subject line, and only the following words in the body of the message (anything else will confuse the program):

unsubscribe stcwc-pr youruserid@youraddress

To post a message: Send an e-mail message to stcwc-pr@stc.org. (Do Not include graphic or document attachments—these are binary items and they get converted to unreadable code.)

More details are provided for the listserv at

<http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/listserv.shtml>. ✉

Where Are You?

If you change your address or phone number, please let STC headquarters know by sending an e-mail message to membership@stc-va.org. Keeping this information up to date helps keep down our mailing costs. ✉

On the Agenda: March: Technical Communication Progression and Résumé Review, continued from page 1

Food: Cheese pizza, vegetable pizza, pepperoni pizza, fresh garden salad, cookies, brownies, and beverages.

Cost: Program only (no lunch): \$8; Students with advance reservations: \$10; Members with advance reservations: \$15; Nonmembers and walk-ins: \$20.

Reservations: Advance reservations are required and checks must be received by March 19. No-shows will be billed. See the Reservation and Cancellation Policies on the chapter Web site for more information. To reserve, complete the online reservation form at http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/mtg_reserve_mar2401.shtml and send a check payable to STC Washington, DC Chapter to Carolyn Kelley Klinger, 18221 Paladin Drive, Olney, MD 20832.

Place: Cisco Systems, Millennium Conference Center, 13615 Dulles Technology Drive, Herndon, VA 20171.

Directions: From the Beltway, take the Dulles Toll Road (Route 267). Be sure to stay to the right and avoid going to the airport. Pay 50¢ toll at toll plaza and travel about 12 miles. Take the Route 657, Centreville Road Exit (25¢ toll) and turn left onto Centreville Road. At the first light, make a right onto Fox Mill Road. Make your first left onto Dulles Technology Drive. After you pass the Litton/TASC building on the left, make a left and go straight towards the Cisco buildings (there is a sign right after you turn). The Millennium Conference Center, 13615, is on your left. You can park anywhere. ✍

Looking Ahead: April: The Perfect Fit—Understanding Work Styles, Learning Styles, and Technical Abilities, continued from page 1

To reserve: Complete the online reservation form at http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/mtg_reserve_apr01.shtml and send a check, payable to STC Washington, DC Chapter, to Carolyn Kelley Klinger, 18221 Paladin Drive, Olney MD 20832.

Place: University of Maryland University College Inn and Conference Center, 3501 University Blvd. East, Room 105, College Park, MD 20742; 301-985-7000. Park in the adjacent garage at the hourly rate (posted at the entrance). The garage is accessible from either east-bound University Boulevard or from Campus Drive off Adelphi Road. Parking is approximately \$2 or more. From the garage's lower level, enter the Inn and Conference Center (the building is on your right). The meeting is in Room 0105 on the lower level.

Directions: By car: *From Rockville:* Take I-270 South (toward Northern Virginia) to the Beltway east towards Silver Spring. Continue to Exit 28, New Hampshire Avenue South. Turn left at the 2nd light onto Adelphi Road (you'll see a green highway sign in the median for the University of Maryland and the National Archives before the turn). Continue down Adelphi Road about 1.5 miles going through the intersections with Riggs Road and Metzertott Road. After you cross Metzertott Road, the National Archives will be on your left just past the trees and the high power lines. Continue to Route 193, University Boulevard. Turn left onto University Boulevard and go

about 100 feet to enter the UMUC parking garage on your right. *From Baltimore:* Take the Baltimore-Washington Parkway (MD-295) south toward Washington. Take the exit towards MD-193/Greenbelt/NASA Goddard. Keep left at the fork in the ramp. Turn left onto Southway. Turn right onto Route 193 west /Greenbelt Road. Stay straight to go onto Route 193 west/University Boulevard. At Adelphi Road, make a U-turn onto Route 193 east and go about 100 feet to enter the UMUC parking garage on your right. *From Alexandria, Virginia Beltway (outer loop):* Take the Beltway toward Baltimore. Take Exit 25B (U.S. Route 1 South). Take Route 193 west (University Boulevard). At Adelphi Road, make a U-turn onto Route 193 east and go about 100 feet to enter the UMUC parking garage on your right. *From Falls Church, Virginia (inner loop):* Take the Beltway south (I-495) toward Rockville/Baltimore to Exit 28, New Hampshire Avenue south. Turn left at the second light onto Adelphi Road (you'll see a green highway sign in the median for the University of Maryland and the National Archives before the turn). Continue down Adelphi Road about 1.5 miles going through the intersections with Riggs Road and Metzertott Road. After you cross Metzertott Road, the National Archives will be on your left just past the trees and the high power lines. Continue to Route 193, University Boulevard. Turn left onto University Boulevard and go about 100 feet to enter the UMUC parking garage on your right.

By public transit: Take the Metrorail Green Line to the College Park / U. of MD Station. (If you need to transfer to the Green Line, consult the maps at your station.) The College Park / U. of MD station is located approximately one mile from campus. UMUC is on the far end of campus from the Metro station. You may choose to ride the free Shuttle UM bus (University guests are welcome on the Metro route without identification), walk, or take a taxi to UMUC. ✍

April 1 Deadline for Faculty Internship Proposals

STC sponsors both a Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals and an Industry Fellowship for Faculty. The next deadline for both is April 1, 2001. Grant funding up to \$2,000 is available to help support internships for full-time university faculty to spend time in industry. This funding is in addition to the salary that the faculty member receives for the internship.

The internship is designed to support faculty with limited workplace experience or to support faculty in areas with limited access to the technical communication industry. Either faculty members with job offers or companies seeking faculty interns may propose projects in which the faculty member will serve as an intern.

Please send inquiries to Kristene Sutliff, manager of STC's Academe-Industry Committee: Kris Sutliff, Assistant Head, Dept. of English, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, MO 65804; 417-836-4804; e-mail: kss172f@smsu.edu. ✍

Getting Chapter Program News

by Carolyn Kelley Klinger and Cynthia A. Lockley

Some members have noted that the *Capital Letter* does not always arrive prior to program dates, making it difficult to make plans to attend programs. If that were our only method of getting you the information you need about programs, we would have to agree that you're right.

A few years ago, the chapter published the *Capital Letter* only every other month. When we moved to a monthly schedule, we set fixed content submission and printing deadlines. For example, content for the newsletter is always due on the 13th of each month. The programs, however, continue to happen monthly, but at a less predictable schedule, depending on the availability of speaker and venue. Sometimes this makes it difficult for us to advertise the monthly program in the newsletter for that month. To ensure that program announcements do get to members in time for them to plan on attending, we announce the programs in several ways.

1. We mail postcards to each chapter member announcing upcoming programs for the next two months. The postcards are timed with the programs so they always come out at least two weeks (for the first of the two programs on the postcard) in advance. The postcards are often more correct than the newsletter because there is a quicker turnaround with the printer for them so they often include late-breaking information. The URL for the full program details and reservation form is included on the postcards. For the March 24 program, this is http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/thismonth_mar2401.shtml.

2. The newsletter for the previous month includes an announcement about the program for the following month; for example, the February newsletter had the information about the upcoming March 1 awards banquet on the front page along with the announcement for the February program. When programs occur this early in the month, the newsletter will usually arrive after the program date because of its production schedule. The newsletter will arrive well ahead of programs that occur later in the month such as this month's March 24 program.

3. The full calendar of programs with links to program details and reservation forms is on the chapter Web site at <http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/calendar.shtml>. You can also reach it from the home page at <http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/> by clicking on the link for programs.

This program year, we've added additional methods for announcing programs.

1. We created an e-mail announcement mailing list to distribute announcements and reminders about upcoming programs and related events by e-mail to each chapter member. The announcement list is even more current than the postcards, but goes out only to a subset of our members because some members choose not to subscribe to it. If you want to subscribe to the announcement list, send an e-mail request to carolyn.klinger@mindspring.com. This list is kept separate from the postal mailing list.

2. Starting with the January newsletter, we have been putting the newsletter online in PDF format on our chapter's Web site at <http://www.stc.org/region2/wdc/www/newslet.shtml>. This will make the newsletter available before the printed version is printed and mailed.

To help us ensure we get the announcements out to you in time, please verify your mailing address.

1. If STC mail is going to your work address, do we have the complete address such as suite or floor number? If not, this may be holding up delivery in your building.
2. If STC mail is going to your home address, is it current and is the zip code correct? We get our addresses from the membership list sent out by the Society office, so if you change it with them, you will change it with us.

To make changes to your mailing address, access http://www.stc-va.org/_private/fonlinedir.htm, enter your name, click Search, click View Details, and then enter your new information. You will need to have your STC membership number handy to actually change your information. You can find your five-digit STC membership number on the mailing label of any STC publication you receive.

In these ways we have tried to cover all the bases for getting the announcements out ahead of the programs. If we can provide additional ways for the announcements to get out, we would like to hear your suggestions. ✉

Technical Arts and Publications Managers Thank the Judges

by Randee Markowitz and Conni Evans

The 2000-2001 Washington, DC Chapter's Technical Publications Competition is over. The successful competition received 89 technical publications and 22 technical art entries from the Washington, DC area and various cities here and abroad. The competition staff extends a hearty "thank you" to the judges who volunteered their time to critique the material and confer awards.

Technical Publications Judges:

Wendy Albrecht, MainControl, Inc.
Lindsay Barber, National Milk Producers Federation
Bing Crisologo, KBM Group
Elana Churchill, CACI, Inc.
Karen Fojt, NCS Pearson
Lynn Gandy, Lucent Technologies
Nancy Haney, Aether Systems
Debra Hayes, DHI
Laura Jackel, Jackel Publications
Hillary Jaffee, worldweb.net
Alice Jones, CeLight Design
Ray King, Federal Bureau of Prisons
Aimee Kratts, BMC Software, Inc.
Doreen Mannion, McDonald Bradley, Inc.
Jenifer Maroon, QEC, division of Macro International
Judy O'Neill, OPNET Technologies
Kathie Porter, Acterna Corporation
Carrie Pyell, Acterna Corporation
Kurt Rosenkranz, Cisco Systems

Laurel Rosinger, American Management Systems, Inc.
Janey Solwold, webMethods
Kirsten Sweet, Corvis Corporation
Rob Thornton, worldweb.net
Marty Williamson, IMCI Technologies

Technical Art Judges

Jordan Jones, Cisco Systems
Shari Lewis
Patti Merrill, TCI Companies
Alyssa Slotkin, DocuCorp
Tom Witherspoon, worldweb.net
Rebecca Young, Logicon INRI, a division of Logicon, Inc.

Best of Show Judges

Andrea Allen-Cerioli, Accenture
Tracey Chiricosta, KBM Group
Beth Hamilton, Hughes Network Systems ✍

Managing Documentation with Humor and Grace: An STC Telephone Seminar

Managing the people and projects associated with technical documentation gets more difficult every day. Coping with changes in technology, blending teams after mergers and acquisitions, facing layoffs, finding qualified candidates, meeting ever-changing deadlines and requirements—these are just some of the challenges technical communication managers and team leaders face. This telephone seminar will give you practical tips and techniques that you can use to help keep your sanity while those around you seem to be losing theirs—as well as a greater appreciation for all the good things about technical documentation that led you to the field in the first place.

What are the objectives of this seminar?

- To develop methods to promote your department
- To discover your professional passion
- To understand the real reason subject matter experts are not more cooperative
- To appreciate the role of humor in ensuring your success
- To learn a sure-fire way of helping co-workers appreciate the challenges of being a technical communicator
- To understand how respect and credibility are earned, not awarded

You will also take away two complete Powerpoint presentations supporting the objectives of this seminar that you can tailor and offer to your colleagues at the office.

When is it? Wednesday, April 18, 2001, 1:00-2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

What is a telephone seminar? A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call—but in a more controlled, radio-like environment. You simply dial the 800 number from your phone, enter your personal identification number, and you're connected! You then sit back and listen to the presentations and join in the lively Q&A sessions.

What are the benefits?

- No travel time
- Pay per site and not per person
- Opportunity to train all your people without anyone leaving the office

How much does it cost? With a telephone seminar, the cost is per site, not per person. U.S. sites: \$125.00; Canadian sites: \$140.00; overseas sites: please contact the STC office. An additional \$8.00 will be charged for registrations received less than five days before the seminar. Train as many people as your conference room can hold—for one flat rate!

About the speaker: Doreen A. Mannion, a senior member of STC, has been a professional communicator for over fifteen years. She is also an award-winning author, a frequent speaker at the STC Annual Conferences, and the Management and Professional Development stem manager for STC's 48th Annual Conference, May 13-16, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois.

Doreen has worked as a stand-up comedienne, advertising salesperson, trade show coordinator, technical editor, technical writer, indexer, insurance agent, sports talk show host, and football official. She is currently a project manager at McDonald Bradley, Inc., in McLean, Virginia. McDonald Bradley consultants provide information technology services to government and commercial clients. ✍

Managing Documentation with Humor and Grace: An STC Telephone Seminar

Wednesday, April 18, 2001, 1:00-2:30 EST #STC6040-0

Name: _____ Company: _____

Street Address: (No PO Boxes) _____

City, State/Province: _____ Zip/Postal Code: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____ E-mail: _____

Will you be able to receive seminar handouts via the Web? Yes No

Cost: \$125.00 U.S. sites \$140.00 Canadian sites

Method of payment (check one):
(Payment must accompany registration)

Check enclosed payable to KRM

MasterCard Visa Discover American Express

Card#: _____

Expiration Date: _____

Signature: _____

Amount Charged: _____

Date: _____

Fax completed form with credit card information to 800-676-0734 -OR- phone 800-775-7654 (please have credit card ready) -OR- mail completed forms with payment to KRM Information Services, PO Box 1187, Eau Claire, WI 54702. Coordinating services provided by KRM Information Services, Inc. KRM will send registration confirmation, participation instructions and handout materials to all registrants. ✍

Please Let Me Introduce Myself

by Thea Teich

Senior Member, Southwestern Ohio Chapter; Candidate for STC Second Vice President

I'm Thea Teich, and I'm running for Second Vice President of STC. That means a four-year commitment to Society leadership, which is something I look forward to, should I win your votes.

Who Am I?

Just a quick overview of my background: I was brought up in northern New Jersey. For those of you in the area, my high school overlooked the back side of the Statue of Liberty. Really.

I left NJ to attend the University of Michigan. Then I took a master's degree at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. I spent several summers as a park ranger in Oklahoma during this period. Yes, really.

I continued to spend my young adulthood on Big Ten campuses by working for the Ohio State University School of Natural Resources for three years. Then I became the environmental education coordinator for the Carnegie Museum of Natural History in Pittsburgh. There I developed cooperative programs mainly for adults, trying to make complicated environmental subjects understandable and interesting so that people would be willing to take action. I didn't call it technical communication at the time, but that's what was going on.

In 1980, I moved back to Ohio, to Cincinnati, and have worked here for government agencies, private industry, and as an independent, in technical communications concerning everything from water pollution control to plastic processing methods, from pharmaceutical market research to ERP software. I also teach technical marketing communications in a local technical college program. My decision to "go independent" was a long time in the making, but my being downsized in late 1995 was a significant shove in that direction.

I've been a member of STC since 1988. I've been Director-Sponsor of Region 4, public relations manager for the 1999 STC Annual Conference, and a member of the Academe-Industry Committee. I've presented at many annual and regional conferences on starting your own business, professional development, and marketing communications. For the Southwestern Ohio chapter (SWO), I was president, vice president, and competitions manager (for three years). I also served on the 1997 Region 4 conference committee and the SWO professional development committee. I regularly judge local STC competitions, have judged international competitions, and have won publications awards. I'm also a member and past officer of some other local communications organizations.

What Do I Bring to the Table?

First, I bring a "can-do," implementation-focused orientation. Moving ideas and plans from "ought" to "action" is one of my strengths. Determining the optimal way, which may not necessarily be the fastest or the

cheapest way, to transform projects from plans to production—and then doing it—is how I've earned my living for many years.

Second, I believe that to make good decisions, input from people who don't think exactly as I do or who have different priorities is necessary. I listen. I believe consensus leads to decisions that respond best to the issues.

Third, I bring a breadth of experience to the office. Technical communicators work in varied situations—and I've been through most of them. Independent, corporate, nonprofit, educational, downsized, upsized, overwhelmed—I've been there. As a result, I think I have more than an inkling of what many STC members face every day.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, my aim is to use the talent and capabilities we have as an organization to foresee the trends in our profession so we can plan for them and better help STC members meet the needs and opportunities presented by those trends.

Our profession's value to the world at large is being increasingly recognized. Part of the reason for that is the times we live in. But another part of the reason is that we have a professional organization that represents us as a body; we are no longer an amorphous conglomeration of easily replaced "support services." Over much of the past almost 50 years of STC's existence, the focus has been on promoting our professionalism, supporting educational programs and research, improving, and—let's face it—helping to stabilize—our places and value in corporate and other entities.

Now that we've determined "to design the future of technical communications" (our new mission statement), my goals involve focusing our efforts on the professional development of our members so they can answer the classic job interview question, "where do you want to be in five years?" By exploring trends and possibilities now and helping members prepare for them, we can work toward—instead of merely respond to—what will happen five years from now. We can truly "design the future of technical communication." In other words, we can design, draw, paint, and frame *our own futures*.

I also want to promote both the profession and the organization so that technical communicators view STC the way medical doctors view their associations and engineers view their societies—as essential elements of their professions. Our branding effort was a springboard. Let's put what we learned about ourselves to work.

In the meantime, please remember to vote in the upcoming STC elections. You can do so either on the traditional paper ballot or electronically at the STC Web site this year. I hope you'll vote for me for Second Vice President. But the important thing is to vote. You're a member of this group. Here's your chance to help design STC—as well as the future of technical communication.

For more information about me, please visit my Web site, www.TeichTMC.com. You may also contact me at Thea@TeichTMC.com. ✍

Vote! It Will Affect Your Future!

by Andrea L. Ames

STC Region 8 Director-Sponsor (1998-2001); Candidate for STC Second Vice President

In response to inquiries and requests from several chapter leaders for an article about my candidacy for STC Second Vice President, I'd like to share my thoughts with you about our future—yours, mine, STC's, and the future of the technical communication industry as a whole—and why I want to continue to serve you on the STC Board of Directors for the next four years. As you might know, the candidate elected to the office of Second Vice President will serve for one year in that position and will then serve one year each as First Vice President, President, and Immediate Past President. This is an important vote, and I hope this article enables you to make an informed decision when you cast your ballot.

If you have any questions about me or my candidacy, feel free to contact me at andrea@verbal-imagery.com. You can also visit my Web site (<http://www.verbal-imagery.com>) for postings of recent chapter-meeting presentations and other information.

The Vision

If elected, I will work for the next four years to raise our strategic value—both as individuals and as an industry—to the organizations for which we work.

My vision for the industry is one in which our main goal is to ensure users' success—not to write documentation, and we design and develop information to enable users to use products—not to fill in for the deficiencies in product design. In other words, we will no longer define ourselves by the information products (manuals, help, etc.) we deliver—nor the tools we use to develop them. Instead, our employers will recognize the value we bring to the products and information we design and develop. Think about it: The real value we bring is not the documents we develop but the user's increased success! My goal is to work to help the organizations in and with which we work understand this and help enable them to get the most value from us.

As I've traveled around the country speaking with members, I've met many of you who share this vision. From my 17 years of experience in the industry, my vast network of associates, and the strategic work I've done with various kinds of organizations, I'm convinced that this is the right vision. The question remains: How will it happen?

The Implementation

The move toward this vision has already begun—primarily via STC. As our new mission statement proclaims, we are certainly “designing the future of technical communication.” STC is one of the most valuable and powerful tools we have, and our work in STC is one of the most important contributions we can make to our own careers. The power of many, the visibility of a large and well-respected professional organization, and vision and leadership are the ingredients that will change the face of our industry.

To do this, I want to work with the Society as I have during my 14-year STC career to enable members of our industry to become leaders and to be recognized for that leadership—particularly within our organizations and among our employers' and clients' industries. Working with the Board of Directors, committee managers, and chapter leaders, I can support and maintain important programs like branding and governance that are already working to move us in this direction. I can also work with other leaders to devise new initiatives to raise the visibility of STC and our industry, as well as help our employers and clients further recognize our value.

Why Me?

Not one to sit around and wait for someone else to take the lead, I've spent most of the past four or five years changing our industry to fit my vision. In my own career, I have focused on learning and developing skills, technologies, and tools to design and develop information for products and user experiences, rather than documentation deliverables. I am a technical communicator specializing in audience analysis, information and interaction design for product user interfaces and online assistance, usability, and user-centered product and information design and development process.

To assist others in the effort to move toward the future, I've acted as a mentor, teacher, and educational certificate coordinator to design programs and courses around these skills and technologies, to impart to my students strategies and problem-solving skills so that they can participate in this new world, and to guide those asking for assistance to develop their careers in similar directions.

I've spoken at many STC chapter meetings, regional conferences, and annual conferences, and met many of you—the members of our industry. My presentations are aimed toward helping you make career development choices that increase your value to the industry and to your employers and clients. I have encouraged you to think outside the traditional documentation box, evangelize usability and user-centered design and development techniques within your organization, and participate in your organization's design and development process at a strategic level.

I've used my term as Director-Sponsor, and my year as Society Bylaws Committee Manager, to learn as much about you and the Society as possible. Understanding how our organization works enables me to influence STC's direction and effect change. I've also participated very actively in two very important Society initiatives: integrated branding and governance.

The results of these programs are already permeating the Society and changing the way we do business. From the Board of Directors to the Society Office to Society-level committees to chapters to members, everyone will feel the impact of these very positive changes.

I've also served the Society extensively in other international-level positions and at the regional, local and chapter levels. Details are posted at <http://www.verbal-imagery.com/PositionStatement.pdf>.

And although I've spent a lot of time talking to members of the profession, I draw from extensive experience of my own in the corporate world, academia, and government—both as a direct employee and as a consultant. ✍

Single Sourcing Program Review

by Susan Grodsky

“Write once, use many times.” “Separate content from format.” “Build a content management system, not a document management system.” “Get out of prose mode.”

With these exhortations, Ginny (Janice) Redish led attendees of STC’s February program to an understanding of the single source method of information management. The concept is simple: write the text once, then reformat it as needed for Web pages, manuals, online help, and other forms. But as the listeners who packed the cafeteria of Hughes Network Systems in Germantown, Maryland, came to understand, the method can change what you write, how you write, how you create documentation, and how you think about your job.

Ginny’s presentation (illustrated with slides that featured the White Rabbit and other time-pressured beings) began with a series of questions:

- Do you need to create more documentation in less time and with fewer resources?
- Are you fussing with formats?
- Do you want to be more productive without sacrificing quality?
- Do you want your documentation to be more consistent?

Single sourcing can help you meet these goals. But how do you get to single-sourcing heaven—every document seamlessly assembled from a database of information units—when you’re down in the trenches with 10,000 pages of manuals, info sheets, and online help?

A preliminary step is to use templates to create structured documents: documents that are consistent in format, content, voice, and tone. Using a template enforces consistency and offers multiple benefits for both writers and users:

- Writers can produce the document more quickly: you don’t fuss with format because those issues are decided. You don’t fuss with content because you’ve been given style, tone, and word count parameters. And you’re less likely to forget minor points because a template (such as the example, an invoice from Redish and Associates) prompts you to enter data you might otherwise overlook.
- Users benefit from the consistent format, as Ginny illustrated with an L.L. Bean web page. They instantly learn to focus on a certain part of the page

for a certain type of information, allowing them to process pages without effort. “The secret of a successful site is structure,” Ginny pointed out, as Cynthia Lockley, chapter president, nodded agreement. “You’d have fewer broken navigation links,” added the president and Web diva.

Once you have structured your documents, Ginny explained, you can continue with the next steps to single sourcing:

- Identify and name the “information units” in a document. Understanding that bit of jargon was no problem for this group, which took just seconds to deconstruct a manual page to information units: level 1 heading, intro sentence, procedure steps, graphic. We were clear on the concept.
- Assign attributes to the information units, customizing for the target document type. For example, Ginny said, you might want that level 1 heading to be bold, 12 point Palatino, centered on the top of each page in the printed doc, but the same information unit is blue, 14 point Helvetica in the online help, and placed in the left-hand navigation frame. Attributes can also include writing style.
- Customize the information unit name. A procedure step is a step, but it needs to be unique to one particular information unit: “Install_keyboard_step1” for example.

(At this point, while Ginny fielded a question, I did some rough mental arithmetic. Ten thousand pages of doc, maybe 3,000 procedures at 5-10 steps apiece...how would we keep track of tens of thousands of pesky information units?)

“You need a content management system,” Ginny was saying when I tuned back in. Not a document management system, she emphasized, which is just an

electronic filing cabinet, but a system that controls these thousands of information units. Management is critical in single sourcing, because an error in the database embeds itself in every target document.

Anticipating the next question, Ginny motioned to the displays to her right: marketing communications from content management systems vendors, which she invited us to peruse. And no, she would not discuss the details of any system. There was still a lot else to say.

Now that we understood what single sourcing was, Ginny pointed out how it would change our jobs: Writers would be preparing content for the database and assembling documents from it. And though we still might be called writers, Ginny encouraged us to aim for a terser, chunkier style: Web writing she called it, in opposition to the more discursive prose mode. Would we be spending less time writing? We would, Ginny pointed out, still be

Who Was There?

The meeting, a joint effort of the chapter and the local Usability SIG, attracted members from both groups, plus a half dozen attendees from DC-CHI, the Computer-Human Interaction special interest group of the Association for Computing Machinery, and one member of the IABC, the Association of Business Communicators.

Some attendees drove in from Richmond and Baltimore, testimony to the speaker’s excellent reputation.

The crowd was dense with accomplished chapter members, including three Fellows of STC (Annette Reilly, Connie Kiernan, and Ginny Redish), two past presidents of STC (Mary Wise and Annette Reilly), and chapter presidents galore: the current chapter president (Cynthia Lockley) and two past presidents (Janet Scharp and Susan Grodsky). ✍

assembling and reviewing documents. Our communications skills would still be critical. But we would be freed from formatting, she averred, and able to spend more time on the critical task: ensuring that the right information, in the right presentation, was accessible to users.

But is it all worth it? Does single sourcing deliver on its promise, and how can you get there from here?

First, think of the benefits: consistency, time savings for writers and users, a database of reliable information, time to focus on content, not format. One study cited a 25 percent increase in productivity.

Ginny then described the route:

- Analyze how you communicate
- Make sure the first documents you deconstruct for your database are ones that work well now (applause!)
- Involve all the writers and other relevant departments (marketing, legal) in the effort
- Do a small pilot project

Following the question-and-answer period, I chatted with Mary Wise, former director-sponsor of the chapter, former president of STC, and currently the manager of several thousand pages of information in several different forms. Making the big switch to single sourcing was a daunting task, we agreed. "But," Mary added, "I think we get a filling now, or look forward to a root canal later." ☞

"Beyond the Bleeding Edge" Wants You!

Waves of new technologies are sweeping over us, and many writers can barely keep up with the daily grind, let alone find time to research the next wave.

In 1999, STC's 46th Annual Conference addressed this by adding a series of sessions called "Beyond the Bleeding Edge." These sessions were designed to offer quick looks at technologies too new to present in traditional formats.

It's now time to start thinking about "Beyond the Bleeding Edge" topics for STC's 48th Annual Conference in Chicago in May 2001.

Are you working on something that's so new that practically no one has ever heard of it? Do you work with wearable computers for field service technicians, design virtual people for use as help interfaces, write content for voice portals (minimalism at its most extreme), or deal with something else equally new, innovative, interesting, and applicable to technical communication?

If you are already scheduled to be a presenter at this conference and you've used a technology that you'd like to discuss (or hear someone else discuss), let us know.

In 1999, we covered XSL, JavaHelp, and WebTV. In 2000, it was XHTML and database-driven publishing systems. This year we might cover smart cards, mCommerce, and the issue of writing quality in the online age and the tools that support it. As always, other possible topics include existing technologies that may be new to technical communicators, such as Active Server Pages.

To be considered for a "Beyond the Bleeding Edge" session, a topic must be novel in early 2001. This means the technology should be emerging now, or should exist now and be applicable to technical communicators but little known.

"Beyond the Bleeding Edge" presentations are short—you will have 25 minutes to cover the topic and take questions; informal—attendees prefer handouts, but this is at your discretion; and level-appropriate—you may cover a topic at whatever technical level you consider necessary.

If you enjoy investigating new technologies and like to talk about them, we want to hear from you. A formal proposal is not required; simply send a brief description of your presentation to Neil Perlin, Hyper/Word Services, nperlin@concentric.net or 978-657-5464.

Note: As long as there are open slots, we can accept proposals up to the last minute before the conference. However, to appear in the program, you must submit a proposal by March 20. Those submitting proposals after March 20 will appear in a supplement (handout) to the program. ☞

Improve the Conference: Complete the Straw Poll

This year, STC members will be asked to participate in a straw poll concerning STC's 48th Annual Conference, to be held May 13-16, in Chicago, Illinois. The poll form will be included with the *Preliminary Program*, which will be mailed with the March issue of *Intercom*. The poll asks those planning to attend the conference to give the STC office a general idea of what sessions they're interested in attending. (Attendees are not "locked in" to these sessions if they send in the poll—the poll simply helps STC improve the balance between room capacity and attendance at this year's conference.)

At your next chapter meeting, please remind those who plan to attend the conference to fill out the form and return it to the Society office. ☞

Advertising Rates

Wouldn't you love to get some publicity and help your chapter at the same time? Why don't you consider advertising in the *Capital Letter*? You can place an ad for your company or you can take out an ad featuring your own special skills and talents.

Please send e-mail to Doreen Mannion at damannion@yahoo.com.

Rates are

Full page:	\$140
Half page:	\$75
Quarter page:	\$40
Business card:	\$25

We give discounts if you run an ad in 2 or more issues within 6 months. ☞

The Evolving World of Software User Assistance

by Kippi Fagerlund

More than eighty people turned out for the Tuesday, January 16, STC program hosted by Margot Goldman of Booz Allen in McLean, Virginia. Sutton Place Gourmet catered a delicious picnic-style supper of sandwiches, salads, fruit, and cookies and bars. Carolyn Kelley Klinger, Program Chair for the Washington, DC Chapter, opened the meeting and introduced Melissa Brown, the chapter's online competition manager and organizer of the evening's program. Melissa arranged for Joe Welinske, President of WinWriters in Seattle, Washington, to be the guest speaker.

Joe, an 18-year member of STC, is well known as the producer of the annual WinWriters Online Help Conference and publisher of the Online Help Journal. He warmed up the audience with his "Geek Trivia Wake Up Call," a series of questions on topics ranging from Latin word origins to Star Trek.

Alternately entertaining, opinionated, and informative, Joe started off his talk by sharing his main interest in user assistance as the point where technical writing and software development merge. It's frequently a point of discussion or contention among technical communicators as to which is more important: writing or technical skills. His assertion is that foundation skills of writing come first. However, different platforms have different standards. Ninety percent of help doesn't work properly because 90 percent of the people writing the help don't know how to write it effectively. In considering specific tools such as Acrobat, it's worth learning a bit about its advanced techniques, such as those available for the table of contents, index, and window placement. But content should be an author's main focus.

Joe then went on to provide an overview of what he sees going on in the area of user assistance.

The question of embedded help and what types exist came up. There is no current standard; embedded help is more an idea for simplifying the user interface and integrating help into it as much as possible. Microsoft Money dialog boxes were cited as good examples of embedded help. Intuit TurboTax was another. Many writers are familiar with WinHelp and its specific embedded help hooks as well.

Web applications simplify the user interface so that it doesn't need a help server. However, this changes the organization of an interface. These Web applications are focused too much in the "PC mode" right now. Many applications would function better as wizards.

Standardization came up again; Joe is actively involved in meetings of the W3C (World Wide Web Consortium) and its help for the Web initiative, but no standard or draft has been established.

It thus remains a challenge for all good writers to use the combination of their writing and technical skills and those of their teams to develop innovative user assistance that is truly beneficial to their audience. ✍

Highlights from the Winter 2000–2001 Board of Directors Meeting

by Ellen Fenwick, Region 7 Director-Sponsor, with minor edits by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

The Winter 2000-2001 STC Board of Directors meeting was held in San Diego, California, January 18-20, 2001.

The board approved the formation of three new chapters, bringing the total number of STC chapters worldwide to 153 (120 regular and 33 student chapters). The three new chapters were Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, New York), in Region 1; Australia and the Hill Country student chapter (San Marcos, Texas), in Region 5.

The board approved two appointments to Society-level committees: Kathryn M. Poe, Manager, Public Relations Competition Committee; and Paula Stanzioni, Manager, Education & Research Special Interest Group (SIG).

The board reviewed and approved fiscal year 2001 income and expenses as of October 31, 2000. Income and expenses were well within budget. Through the dues rebate program, STC will return a little over \$650,000 to chapters to support their fiscal year 2001 programs and activities.

The board awarded a merit grant of \$3,000 to the Mercer University student chapter to build its scholarship fund, and a research grant of \$10,000 to Eva R. Brumberger for a study entitled *The Rhetoric of Typography: A Study Investigating Typeface Personality and Its Impact on the Reading Process*.

Available now on the STC Web site: The new STC logo; online voting for new officers (voting by mail will also be an option); the STC membership directory, searchable by full or partial first and last names; and the *Technical Communication* journal: abstracts and PDF files of the 1996 and 1997 issues. Check it out!

Membership: Total STC membership at the time of the meeting was 23,553, with a projection of 26,000 by the end of March.

48th STC Annual Conference: The conference program committee reviewed nearly 400 proposals and selected about 440 speakers for 256 sessions. About 41 booths have already been contracted for the vendor exhibit.

STC Governance. This year, the board is evaluating governance through a series of workshops. This activity is an outgrowth of STC's new mission statement: "Designing the future of technical communication." Aspects being evaluated include the structure of representation, the way that decisions are made, the balance of volunteer and office staff workloads, and communication patterns. A concluding workshop in May will set short- and long-term goals for meeting established objectives.

Note: For previous Director-Sponsor articles, please visit <http://www.stc.org/region2/www/chair.shtml>. You can reach Chris by e-mail at Chris.Benz@e-pubcorp.com or by telephone at 919-226-0060 (day) or 919-479-4891 (evening). ✍

From the President

Mission Statement: STC: Designing the Future of Technical Communication

by Cynthia Lockley

Did you miss the deadline for renewing your STC membership? Are you looking for justification for your employer to support your membership? Are you wondering how to justify spending \$110 plus \$5 for each SIG you're interested in? Wonder no more. It's never too late to renew your membership or encourage a co-worker to join STC.

Your decision to join STC may well be the single most important decision you can make to enhance your career and add to your profession. Here are answers to some questions you may have about becoming a member of STC and the Washington, DC Chapter.

1. *Who is in the Washington, DC Chapter?* The WDC Chapter is one of the largest in the Society. Also known as the Capital Chapter, it has more than 750 members in diverse fields including advertising, computer manufacturing, consulting, data processing, education and training, electronics, engineering, government, human factors, graphic design, management, marketing, medicine, public relations, publishing, and research.
2. *What do technical communicators do?* Technical communicators serve as the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. They must be able to convey scientific and technical information precisely, accurately, and clearly. Technical communication has become an important part of business and government, and jobs can be found in almost any sector.
3. *Are membership dues tax deductible?* Yes, you can claim dues as a deduction in several ways: charitable expense, business expense, or miscellaneous expense. Details about each category are provided in the FAQs link at the top of http://www.stc-va.org/fmbr_menu.htm. The Society for Technical Communication is a Section 501(c)(3) not-for-profit educational, scientific, and charitable organization dedicated to furthering the art of communicating technical information and promoting the education, improvement, and advancement of its members.
4. *What are the other benefits I'll get by being a member?* STC journals, books, and other publications keep you up-to-date on technical communication topics. The STC Annual Conference provides seminars and workshops devoted to technical communication, as well as numerous networking opportunities. STC membership also provides a demonstration of your commitment to your profession.
5. *What does the WDC Chapter do for me?* Our chapter newsletter and Web site provide job announcements, program information, honors and awards, and useful resources. We sponsor annual online communication, technical art, and technical publications competitions. We provide scholarships in a technical writing contest for high school students. You have the opportunity to volunteer and gain leadership and management skills by organizing a program, running a PR campaign, judging competition materials, and more. And best of all you have the opportunity for professional and personal friendships.
6. *What happens in the monthly programs?* Chapter programs are held from September through June, featuring guest speakers, workshops, and panel discussions on topics of interest to technical communicators. We provide a variety of program formats from informal social hours and discussions to complete dinner programs so you don't get bored. And we allow time for networking with other members and job announcements. With over 750 members living in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia, it isn't possible for the location of every program to be convenient for every member of our chapter. We move the location around the metropolitan area to provide convenient locations at least once a year to most members. We also move the dates around so that members who attend evening classes or have other activities on set days in the week have a chance to attend a meeting on an available night.
7. *What are the SIGs?* STC's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are groups of STC members with common experiences and interests who share their skills and knowledge with each other and the Society. You may sign up for as many SIGs as you wish at the national level. Our chapter currently sponsors a local Usability SIG. ✍

CAPITAL LETTER

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In This Issue

Looking Ahead:	
April: The Perfect Fit—Understanding Work Styles, Learning Styles, and Technical Abilities	1
On the Agenda:	
March: Technical Communication Progression and Résumé Review	1
Looking for a Job?	2
Public Relations (PR) Mailing List (listserv)	2
Where Are You?	2
April 1 Deadline for Faculty Internship Proposals	3
Getting Chapter Program News	4
Technical Arts and Publications Managers Thank the Judges	4
Managing Documentation with Humor and Grace: An STC Telephone Seminar	5
Please Let Me Introduce Myself	6
Vote! It Will Affect Your Future!	7
Single Sourcing Program Review	8
“Beyond the Bleeding Edge” Wants You!	9
Improve the Conference: Complete the Straw Poll	9
Advertising Rates	9
The Evolving World of Software User Assistance	10
Highlights from the Winter 2000-2001 Board of Directors Meeting	10
From the President	11