



CAPITAL LETTER

Washington, DC Chapter

Volume 33 / Number 2 / October 2001

Our Colleagues Care

The chapter Administrative Council has been touched by the many expressions of sympathy and support we received following the tragic events of 11 September 2001. We are printing some of these warm thoughts here and hope you find some small comfort in the wishes we've received from around the world.

Hi Raymond,

On behalf of the STC Washington, DC Chapter membership, I extend my heartfelt condolences to your members following this horrific disaster. We are torn apart here in Washington, DC but I'm sure it's even worse for you in New York and New Jersey. I can't imagine what it must be like for families that have lost parents, children, or siblings. For those of your members that have lost friends and loved ones, your STC family here in DC shares your grief. If there is any way our chapter can help support you and your members, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Kelley Klinger
President, STC Washington, DC Chapter

Hello, Carolyn!

Thank you for your message of condolence. We will post it on our chapter website for the other members whose lives have been changed forever by this tragedy. My second oldest son, Marcus Mullin, worked for the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission in Building #7 of the World Trade Center. Fortunately, he made it home alive. It was an ordeal. Some of the things he saw are unspeakable. I'm sure that some of your chapter members will be affected by the tragic event at the Pentagon, and so on behalf of the Central New Jersey Chapter, allow me to extend our sincere concern and heartfelt sympathy to those who even at this late time may not yet know the final outcome regarding their relatives and friends.

Ray Mullin, President
Central New Jersey Chapter

Greetings, US-based STC Region 2 Chapter Leaders,
I am relieved to report that, as far as I can tell, none of my family, friends, or STC associates were killed or injured in the attacks. I hope that you can say the same, and that all is well with you and yours. If not, my sincerest condolences.

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On the Agenda November Program: Information Architecture

Date: Monday 12 November.

Topic: How You Can Think Like an Information Architect and Improve Your Organization's Performance.

About the program: Good information architecture matters. To make the complex clear, organizations increasingly depend on information architects—those who structure information so people can find it, use it, and appreciate the experience. Business statistics show that user-focused structure can help organizations meet business goals, increase membership, save money, and improve organizational performance (what we do and what we leave behind).

The label Information Architect carries with it real-world implications. We must be able to articulate what information architects do and do not do. And we must be able to say that even if we wear some other organizational title (such as technical writer), we understand what it takes to structure information with the user in mind.

As information architects we have the opportunity to help users see the untapped potential of information structure. We are challenged to strategize, plan, render, manage, build, and measure so we can help organizations improve performance, boost productivity, and increase profitability.

Can we do it? You bet.

Join us on 12 November as Thom Haller, user advocate, and principal of Info.Design, Inc. explains how you can apply eight principals of information architecture to improve the structure of information in your organization.

Don't forget to bring business cards for networking!

Schedule: Registration and networking: 6:30-7:00 p.m.; program: 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Food: Fruit and cheese platter; bite-sized tortilla wraps with meat and vegetarian fillings; cookies and brownies; sodas and water.

About the speaker: After several years working as a writer, trainer, and information designer, Thom Haller founded Info.Design (<http://www.infodn.com>), a Washington, DC-based information architecture firm, to apply the science of information architecture in the workplace. In his capacity as trainer and consultant, he

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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 November 2001 Issue:

Friday 12 October

Deadline for December 2001 Issue:

Tuesday 13 November

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Chapter Website http://www.stcwc.org

Looking for a Job?

If you need job listings, you may

- ◆ Visit our website at http://www.stcwc.org/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.stcwc.org/jobs_listings.shtml.
To request a list by e-mail, send mail as follows:
To: webmaster@stcwc.com Subject: WDC jobs list1
To: webmaster@stcwc.com Subject: WDC jobs list2
To: webmaster@stcwc.com Subject: WDC jobs list3
- ◆ Call Ann Ray, Employment Committee Manager, at 301-918-0341, and ask her to send you a hard copy. ✉

Chapter Mailing Lists

The Chapter provides a mailing list to improve communications with our members about chapter events and also reduce the cost for mailing announcements and reminders to the members in our chapter. The ANNC mailing list is sent out monthly (with occasional late breaking news updates). It provides the details about the chapter's monthly programs and events. Commands may be sent by e-mail or by using the Web page at <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcwc-annc>.

To subscribe by e-mail, send an e-mail message to lyris@lists.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-annc *your name*

To unsubscribe by e-mail, send an e-mail message to lyris@lists.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-annc *youruserid@youraddress*

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

More details are provided at

<http://www.stcwc.org/listserv-annc.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.org. Keeping this information up to date helps keep down our mailing costs. ✉

Of course, we're all affected, but at least we're in a position to help others as needed.

While the events of the past week have been disturbing, to say the least, one of the positive things that comes out of disasters such as this is the human compassion that pours forward. On that note, I've included below some of the kind words I've received from some of our STC friends overseas. At times like this, it's good to know that we're not alone.

Chris Benz

From Paul Bernstein, President of STC Israel:

Subj: Message to STC USA Members

Further to yesterday's despicable and catastrophic terrorist attacks on New York, Washington D.C., and the American people, on behalf of your fellow STC members in Israel, please pass on our warmest thoughts and heartfelt condolences to all STC persons whose lives have been touched by these tragic events.

We share in the pain, horror, and dismay of all Americans that any person or group could unleash such violence on innocent citizens going about their daily lives.

Please accept the expression of the Israel Chapter's members' solidarity with STC members throughout North America.

With the arrival of the Jewish New Year next week, we wish for all the world a year of peace and harmony.

From Michael Fritz, Executive Director of Tekom (STC's sister organization in Germany)

Dear friends,

In the face of the abominable terrorist act yesterday I would like to express our sincere sympathy to all our friends and colleagues the United States.

Our indignation and dismay about this terrible crime is beyond words. We are deeply concerned and would like to emphasize our solidarity with all the citizens of your country, all the victims, their relatives, friends, and colleagues.

From Claus Noack, also of Tekom:

After having learnt from the television about the tragedy which happened yesterday in New York and Washington, we would like to express our deepest sympathy to all the citizens of the United States.

We are extremely shocked about this cruel terrorist act and very much concerned about all those who have been affected.

Although we are not in a position to give any help, my fellow-members of tekomp and I would like to affirm our sincere solidarity with all those to whom this atrocity has been inflicted.

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helps organizations and government agencies structure information so people can find it, use it, and appreciate the experience. Thom's clients include multinational organizations, associations, think tanks, corporations, foundations, and government departments and agencies. Thom teaches courses in Business Writing, Technical Writing, Writing for the Web, Information Architecture, Information Design, Creative Nonfiction Writing, and other understanding-focused courses. He is an instructor with The University of Maryland's Professional Writing Program, Georgetown University's Center for Professional Development, EEL Communications, and the USDA Graduate School, where he received the prestigious USDA Faculty Excellence Award. Prior to launching Info.Design, Thom managed corporate communications and established documentation departments for small businesses. He received several awards sponsored by the Society of Technical Communication and was the recipient of the Donald Bullock Award for Performance Intervention, an annual "Oscar" provided by the Potomac Chapter of the International Society of Performance Improvement.

As a user advocate, Thom has been instrumental in helping organizations and individuals structure information with the user in mind. He serves on the Board of Directors for the International Association of Professional Communications Consultants. His advocacy was profiled in the Fall 1999 *Communications Transactions*, a publication of the IEEE. This story is available for reading or downloading at http://www.infodn.com/staff_thom_story.shtml.

Cost: Chapter members, Administrative Council members, and students with advance reservations: \$5; nonmember guests and walk-ins: \$10.

Reservations: Advance reservations are required by Monday 5 November. Complete the online reservation form at http://www.stcfdc.org/mtg_reserve_nov01.shtml and mail a check payable to STC Washington, DC Chapter to Laurel Rosinger, Hospitality Committee Manager, 13325 Foxhole Drive, Fairfax, VA 22033.

Place: Georgetown University Center for Professional Development (GUCPD), Car Barn, 3520 Prospect St. NW, Suite 308, Washington, DC 20057; 202-687-7000.

Directions: GUCPD is located in the historic Car Barn building at the foot of Key Bridge in Georgetown, about four blocks from the Georgetown University campus.

By Metro: Take the Blue, Orange, or Yellow line to Rosslyn. Either walk across the Key Bridge to the historic Car Barn building or take the Georgetown University Transportation Shuttle (GUTS) shuttle at a cost of \$1 per ride. Let the driver know you want to get off at the Car Barn and he will do his best to stop there for you. If he cannot do that safely, you will be dropped off at the Leavey Center in the heart of Georgetown's campus (3700 O Street NW), a four-block walk to the Car Barn. A taxi ride from Rosslyn station to the Car Barn is another option and it is approximately \$5.

Continued on page 4

From Jill Nicholson, President of STC Australia:

This is a letter to all my dear friends in the USA. Paul and I feel with you following the tragedy at the WTS.

How can people do these atrocious acts? It is hard to believe that today the beautiful city of New York and all the American people are devastated by the act of a few fanatics.

I believe all Australians have support for you all in this very troubled time. Paul and I send our continuing love and support.

Dear Carolyn:

I am a member of the Silcon Valley chapter of STC, and I would like to let you know that my prayers are with all of the members of the Washington, DC chapter and their families. I know that there may be members of your chapter who may have been killed or injured, or who have suffered the loss or injury of family members. I will continue to keep all of you in my prayers.

With great sympathy and concern,

Laurie Pritchard
Sunnyvale, California

Dear Carolyn:

I want to express the profound sorrow, sympathy, and support of the STC Boston Chapter membership during what must be an extremely difficult time for you and all members of the Washington, DC Chapter. Many of us watched events unfold in horror yesterday, and many of us have friends and relatives who were involved as well. Please pass on our thoughts of comfort and prayers to your membership and their families during this shocking period of grief and anger.

If there is ANY way in which our Council or chapter can be supportive to you, please don't hesitate to let me know any time.

With sincerest condolences,

Hans Fenstermacher
President, STC Boston Chapter ✍

By Car: *From Northwest Washington:* take Wisconsin Avenue south to Reservoir Road, turn right. Turn left at Entrance 1, just past 38th Street. *From Southeast Washington:* take Pennsylvania Avenue west to Independence Avenue. Bear left. Take Independence to 12th Street NW, and turn right. Take 12th Street to K Street and turn left. Follow K Street to the Whitehurst Freeway. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From Northeast Washington:* take Rhode Island Avenue west until it feeds into M Street. Take M Street through Georgetown and past the Key Bridge. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From Maryland:* Take I-270 south toward Washington. Exit Route 355 Wisconsin Avenue south to Reservoir Road. Turn right. Turn left at Entrance 1, just past 38th Street. Or take I-95 south to I-495 west to Silver Spring. Exit Route 355, Wisconsin Avenue south to Reservoir Road. Turn right. Turn left at Entrance 1, just past 38th Street. *From Baltimore-Washington Parkway or Route 50 westbound:* take B-W Parkway or Route 50 west to New York Avenue. Take New York Avenue to L Street. Bear right. Turn left on 10th Street and then right on K Street. Follow K Street to the Whitehurst Freeway. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From Northern Virginia:* *From I-66:* take I-66 east to the Rosslyn-Key Bridge exit. Stay in left lane and follow signs to Key Bridge. Cross Key Bridge, staying in second lane from left. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From I-395:* take I-395 north. Exit Washington Boulevard and follow signs to Rosslyn and Key Bridge. Cross Key Bridge, staying in second lane from left. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From Route 50 eastbound:* Follow Route 50 east and take Rosslyn-Key Bridge exit. Follow signs to Key Bridge. Cross Key Bridge, staying in second lane from left. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus. *From the George Washington Parkway:* Take the G-W Parkway south. Exit Key Bridge. Cross Key Bridge, staying in second lane from left. Turn left onto Canal Road. Stay in right lane. Bear right into campus.

Parking: At the end of Prospect Street is Entrance One and the main visitor parking area for University visitors. There are also several private parking lots near the intersection of M and 34th Streets, as well as metered parking on the streets in the immediate area. Street parking is limited to two hours and is strictly enforced.

Questions? For more information, contact Laurel at 703-227-6075 or lrosinger@hotmail.com. ✍

Do You Like This Paper Newsletter?

So far, only a few people have signed up to keep receiving the *Capital Letter* on paper. If you would like to continue receiving the *Capital Letter* on paper (rather than finding the PDF file on the chapter website), please so request at http://www.stcfdc.org/newsletter_print.shtml. ✍

Competition Update, October 2001

by Melissa Brown

By the time you read this article, it's likely that the entry submission deadline of October 13 will have passed. Those of us on the Competition Committee hope you were able to enter your latest and greatest work. If not, there's always next year! Our judges are now perfecting their analytical and constructive criticism skills as they judge their set of entries. The Competition Committee, with a lot of help from Carolyn Klinger, is also busy planning the Awards Banquet. The banquet is planned for Thursday 7 February 2002 at the Tysons Sheraton Premiere. Mark your calendars!

This year, in response to your feedback, the display of award-winning technical art, technical publications, and online communication entries at the banquet will be improved for accessibility. In addition, an Ask the Judge table may be added. As usual, food stations will be distributed around the room with enough choices to please the most discriminating palate, including the famous chocolate table!

If you have any suggestions as to how to improve the banquet or competitions in general, I'd love to hear them! Thanks again for all of your support so far. Judges, start your engines! ✍

Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals: Proposals Due 1 November 2001

Reprinted from *Tieline*, September 2001

The STC board of directors annually awards two stipends to help support short-term teaching fellowship positions lasting for at least one academic quarter, trimester, or semester. The amount of funding depends upon the complexity and duration of the teaching assignment, with a maximum allocation per fellowship of \$2,000.

Eligible applicants for a teaching fellowship must be employed full-time as technical communicators or must do a considerable amount of work in consulting or other related activities. Practicing professionals who have found adjunct or visiting teaching opportunities at a college or university may submit a proposal requesting a fellowship grant to the STC Academe/Industry Committee, which evaluates proposals and makes recommendations to the board of directors. The next deadline to submit proposals is 1 November for spring teaching assignments. (Proposals for summer or fall teaching assignments are due 1 April.)

Guidelines can be found on the web at http://www.stc.org/word_files/99-99.doc. For more information, please contact Kristene S. Sutliff, Manager, STC Academe/Industry Committee, Southwest Missouri State University, kss172f@smsu.edu. ✍

Membership at a Glance

Our Dynamic Membership

Please congratulate our new senior members and welcome our new members, reinstated members, and members transferring in from other chapters.

According to the STC Bylaws, the grade of senior member is conferred upon those who have held the grade of member in STC for 5 years. The following members of the Washington, DC Chapter have achieved senior member status:

New Senior Members

Ralph A. Besser
Bobbie A. Dofflemyer
Burke V. Lee
Nancy K. McGuire
Hugh W. Owen
Julia K. Pitt
Shelly Schwartz
Denise J. Srniec
Michael Wahlster

New Members

Susan Dye
Peggi Gill
Diane Ivone
Carlanda Jones
Jon Kliner
Chrissy Rey
Maureen Rogers
Elizabeth Simmons
Charles Winter

Reinstated Members

Clark Bouwman
John McMillan

Transferred Members

Janet Cook
Alice Horn
Carolyn O'Connor
Karen Skelton
Cheryl Spangler
Rachel Stebel
Victor Pryor

Total chapter members: 696. ✍

New Canadian Issues SIG Signing Up New Members

by Alexa Campbell, SIG Manager

Would you like to join a group of Canadians? Now who wouldn't want that opportunity? The new Canadian Issues SIG is now signing up new members and you can be a part of this new group. You'll find it's a great way to network with other STC members in Canada and elsewhere, focusing on issues pertinent to Canadians. One of the good features now is that membership is free for the rest of the year!

In May 2001, STC formed a new SIG devoted to improving communication among its Canadian members. I am Alexa Campbell, a long-time member of STC who is serving as SIG manager. I'm inviting Canadian STC members, and others who are interested in Canadian issues, to join this new group.

Right now, STC members can sign up for the Canadian Issues SIG for free until the end of the year. SIG membership dues will be billed in the 2002 STC dues notices scheduled to be sent out in November. To sign up for SIG membership, e-mail your request to the STC membership department (membership@stc.org).

Keys to the success of any organization are the enthusiasm and support of its members. I hope many of you will step forward to help make this one of the most effective SIGs in STC. We can use volunteers to fill the important positions of newsletter editor, webmaster, listserv coordinator, and membership coordinator. The tasks are not hard, nor do they take a lot of time; however, they will take your commitment.

We have established a listserv that is a source for exchanging information and ideas. To subscribe, go to <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stc-ca-l> and click the "Join stc-ca-l" button. Complete the information and you're there. (Note that the l is a lower case L.)

Here is some information about the Canadian Issues SIG, its mission, its name, and its goals.

Mission statement

The Canadian Issues SIG fosters communication among Canadian members of STC to allow them to exchange information and to discuss issues within STC that

- Are of a particular concern to Canadian members
- Arise by reason of political, socioeconomic, and geographical constraints because the members reside in Canada

Rationale for name

The name reflects the membership of the SIG, and carries on the title of the Canadian Issues Committee, which was formed in 1990. In the ten years of its operation, this committee helped identify and resolve many issues of concern to Canadian members of STC. Membership in the SIG is not restricted to Canadian members but is open to anyone with an interest in the special needs and concerns of Canadian STC members.

Areas of interest

The Canadian Issues SIG explores the following areas of interest:

- Increasing the technical communications profile and reputation across Canada
- Monitoring, helping shape, and publicizing technical communication education in Canada
- Helping evolve standards to encourage a consistency in the technical communications courses offered across Canada
- Communicating the value of technical communication to business, industry, and academe
- Enabling educational institutions, industry, and practitioners to share ideas about technical communication
- Promoting a professional development program for Canadian technical communicators by making it easier to advertise such programs

Goals

The following are the goals of the Canadian Issues SIG:

- To link Canadian chapters, which are spread out geographically, and which lack a unified voice in STC internationally
- To provide opportunities for Canadian members to communicate about needs, concerns, and issues that are unique to Canada by virtue of geography, economics, or politics
- To provide a venue for promoting professional development activities for Canadian members

If you have any questions about the Canadian Issues SIG, please telephone me at 204-632-2345 or e-mail me at acampbell@rrc.mb.ca. ✉

Honor Fraternity Established for Two-Year and Certificate Programs

STC has established an honorary fraternity, Alpha Sigma, to recognize students in two-year and certificate programs. Because the number of these programs is growing, more and more students are entering the field of technical communication and contributing to the Society's activities. Alpha Sigma complements Sigma Tau Chi, the STC honorary fraternity that recognizes baccalaureate and graduate students.

Students who apply for membership in Alpha Sigma must have a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or above, demonstrate active participation in STC, and have the potential to contribute to the profession.

Details and applications are available on the Society web site at http://www.stc.org/sigma_application.html. The completed application packet for either fraternity must be mailed by 1 November 2001 to Elizabeth Overman Smith, Department of English, 9030 Haley Center, Auburn University, AL 36849-5203, smitheo@auburn.edu. ✉

Where Do Your Dues Go?

by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor
with considerable content from Bonni Graham, Region 8
Director-Sponsor

Have you ever wondered what happens to those membership dues you send to the Society office every year?

As you might expect, some of the money serves as operating capital for the Society office. The office's full-time staff of professionals, led by Executive Director Bill Stolgitis, provides a variety of services to support chapter, regional, and societal leadership in the quest to serve STC members fully and effectively. Other money supports the publishing of STC's member publications, including *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*, and helps offset out-of-pocket administrative costs for Society-level leaders and volunteers. And, being a responsible organization, STC puts some of the money away for a rainy day.

But did you know that STC gives much of the money away? (Don't be concerned about the Society being overly generous with your hard-earned money; as you'll see, it's all for worthy causes.)

One of STC's biggest money giveaways is a dues rebate. The STC office sends this rebate each year to your local chapter, with the exact amount determined by the number of chapter members. Each chapter then uses this money—along with any other money it might generate from other sources—to provide local educational and networking programs; maintain chapter communication devices such as listservs, web pages, and newsletters; and support all the other chapter activities that help you learn and grow in your chosen profession of technical communication.

STC also sets aside a portion of the giveaway money for targeted gifts to chapters and individuals. This money takes the form of grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships.

Merit grants fund one-time activities that will not generate income. A chapter or group of chapters may request a merit grant to support any activity (with the exception of hosting an STC Annual Conference, which has its own funding avenues) that they consider worthwhile and that advances the stated goals of STC.

Financial recovery/special needs grants help chapters recover from unforeseen or unusual financial difficulties.

Chapter loans support activities that generate income for a chapter. Your chapter can request interest-free loans to support any activity that it deems worthwhile, with the exception of hosting an STC Annual Conference.

Research grants support academic research that benefits the Society membership. Grantees are expected to prepare a paper worthy of publication in *Technical Communication* by the end of that one-year period. Supported research must be a controlled activity through which grantees can learn and communicate new information to the STC membership at large and contribute to the general body of knowledge surrounding the profession of technical communication.

Special opportunities grants also support research that benefits the Society membership. These grantees are also expected to prepare a suitable paper for *Technical Communication*. Proposals may be submitted by student members, regular members (except voting members of the STC board of directors), and nonmembers of the Society. A special opportunity must be a controlled activity that can develop and communicate new information to the STC membership. Therefore, the development of proprietary curricula or proprietary information, while important and valuable, would not qualify for an STC special opportunities grant. However, developing new curricula, a pilot program, or innovative teaching methods that could be shared could qualify for a special opportunities grant.

Faculty internships provide funding for academic faculty to hold internship positions in industry, strengthening the industry-academe connection. An internship is defined as paid, full-time, short-term employment. The faculty internship program provides a stipend that enables full-time technical communication faculty with limited industry experience to accept internship positions in the technical communication industry.

Teaching fellowships for practicing professionals complement faculty internships: these stipends enable practicing professionals in the field of technical communication to serve as adjunct or visiting faculty in colleges or universities. A fellowship is a short-term teaching assignment (a minimum of one academic quarter or semester) for practicing professionals. The teaching fellowship program provides stipends to encourage employed technical communicators to accept adjunct teaching positions in their areas of specialization.

Scholarships in technical communication award money to deserving students, helping to educate new generations of technical communicators and fostering the growth of our profession. Undergraduates or graduates in a technical communications program at an accredited university are eligible to apply.

The Board of Directors must approve all STC grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships. At the May 2001 meeting in Chicago, the board awarded one special needs grant, five merit grants, one special opportunities grant, and one teaching fellowship. These expenditures demonstrate STC's commitment to supporting chapters and members and furthering the development of theory and practice of technical communication.

Want to learn more about STC grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships? Go to http://stc.org/admin_docs.html and scroll down to "Guidelines for STC Programs, Grants, and Loans." There you can find information to help you determine exactly what type of STC money you or your chapter is qualified to receive. If you can't find the information you're looking for there, just ask Chris.

Note: You can reach Chris by e-mail at cjbenz@unforgettable.com or by telephone at 919-479-4891 (home), 919-484-0588 ext 220 (work), or 419-730-6370 (home fax). ✉

Give Something Back— Become an STC WDC Mentor!

Over the years I've heard many long-time STC members say that they're not getting as much out of STC. Now you can—by becoming a mentor for other STC WDC chapter members. We're not looking for experts (few people classify themselves that way), but we are looking for people who are willing to answer questions on a specific familiar tool or skill for fellow STC WDC chapter members. This service will be available only to STC WDC chapter members; contact information will not be published outside the chapter. When you become a mentor, chapter members may phone and/or e-mail you if they have a question about your chosen mentoring area. Because many of our mentors have jobs that require them to travel, we will ask chapter members to allow up to one week for a response.

Members who are enrolled in the program may have access to a *list of resources* and other material related to the program. This information is in a password-protected directory. Access to the directory will require your STC membership number and a password that will be supplied to you when you enroll.

If you are an STC senior member who is interested in becoming a mentor, please fill in the *enrollment form* on the chapter website with your contact information and specify the tools and skills for which you are willing to be a mentor. If you have comments or questions about the Mentoring Program, please contact Connie Kiernan at connie.kiernan@att.net or phone 301-352-4336. ✍

Interested in Telework?

The Washington Area Conference on Telework is scheduled for Tuesday, 23 October, from 8:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. at Lowe's L'Enfant Plaza, 480 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC. Learn about the state of telework, meet experts who are running successful telework programs, and learn how to benefit from federal and state incentives by adopting or expanding telework programs. Registration is \$75 and includes pastries and coffee in the morning, a seated networking luncheon, and a closing reception and mixer. For more information, call Mary Bray at 301-745-5601 or e-mail her at mjbray@aol.com. ✍

Join Now!

Tell your friends about STC! New members who join in October, November, or December of this year are paid in full for 2002. ✍

Region 2 Is Realigned

by Carolyn Kelley Klinger

Thea Teich, STC 2nd Vice President for Chapter Affairs, recently announced the realignment of chapters within regions in STC. These changes add a bunch of cool chapters to our region! As of January 2002, Region 2 comprises

Belgium
Carolina
East Carolina State (ST)
*France
Israel
James Madison (ST)
James River
Metro Baltimore
Metrolina
*The Netherlands
North Carolina (ST)
Piedmont
*Sweden
*Transalpine
*United Kingdom
Washington, DC
West Virginia

The chapters preceded by a star are new to our region. (ST) means it's a student chapter.

The only chapters we lost are Philadelphia Metro, Pittsburgh, and New Jersey. Looks like Chris has some European travel coming up! ✍

A Thought

Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking.

—Marcus Aurelius

GIS for Technical Writers

by Judy Jewell
Willamette Valley Chapter

It's easy to define GIS with a quick throwaway line, "Oh, you know, it's fancy computer mapping." But just as technical writing is more than the easily blown off, "oh, computer manuals and stuff," a GIS, or geographical information system, is more than just a fancy map.

Old-fashioned paper maps are based on visual measurements. For instance, when you draw a map of how to get from the freeway to your house (does anybody still draw these maps?), you're relying on your visual memory of that route. Cartographers have traditionally used more sophisticated ways of measuring distances and elevations, but traditional maps are basically generated in the same precisely artistic way as they were when Lewis and Clark mapped their route 200 years ago.

What makes GIS so cool?

A GIS-produced map has databases at its core. Layer upon layer of data determines the look of the map. One layer may contain information about roads, with another focusing on rivers, and a third showing contour lines or buildings. Each data point corresponds to a precise physical location. Moreover, access to the underlying databases are just a click away from the on-screen map. For instance, you can pull up a tax lot map and click to see how much your next-door neighbors paid for their house.

Whenever there's data, there exists a primal human urge to manipulate it, and smart data manipulation is what makes desktop GIS such a powerful tool for businesses, environmental scientists, public health analysts, and urban planners. By querying the database (sort of like doing a Boolean search), a GIS user is able to refine the look of a map, and look for spatially-based relationships.

A public health study

In one ongoing Massachusetts study, addresses of 2600 Cape Cod women with breast cancer were geocoded (linked to specific map coordinates) and combined with various land-use databases. One layer of data focused on areas of past and present heavy pesticide use, including areas that are now residential. Another database identified areas where groundwater used for drinking may have been contaminated by septic tanks.

In this study, GIS factored in multiple variables such as specific qualities of the possible pollution source, distance and direction of the source from the subject's residence, and whether there were intervening factors, such as a forested area, that may have reduced a subject's exposure to a source. At this point in the study, it does not appear that the Cape-wide excess of breast cancer can be explained by the local military reservation, radar station, or nuclear power plant. Other environmental factors are still being studied, with particular emphasis on small areas with a markedly increased incidence of breast cancer.

What's in it for you

Maybe, as a technical writer, you'd like to enhance your documents with a few classy maps. GIS-produced maps can make tremendous graphics for any technical document that has to do with place or spatial relationships. And while most government agencies and environmental engineering firms have in-house GIS experts, a very basic knowledge of GIS will get you an inordinate amount of respect from these folks.

One software company, ESRI, dominates the GIS world. Their desktop GIS program, ArcView, is just arcane enough that it helps to take a class to learn its ins and outs. Portland Community College's geography department offers an introductory class twice a year (the summer class is a week-long intensive), but online classes from ESRI are much handier and quite reasonably priced.

For more information, including good GIS links, visit <http://www.esri.com>. For details on the Cape Cod breast cancer study, see <http://www.silentspring.org>.

Judy Jewell is currently updating Lonely Planet Pacific Northwest. Lonely Planet recently switched its mapping from AutoCad to ArcView, and Judy found that by just saying the word "geocode" she became the chief cartographer's new best friend. ✍

Editor's Soapbox

by Doreen A. Mannion

911. Nine eleven. 9-11. 11 September 2001; certainly no ordinary September day.

Sometimes I wonder whether I'm fortunate or bipolar having been born to a pessimist and a Pollyanna. One parent sees the glass half-empty, one sees it half-full, and most of the time I find myself asking, "Where IS this glass?"

Because of the wild ride life has taken me on, the past few years I've been known to tell anyone who will listen, "Every day you wake up is a good day." If the option is not waking up, well, I'm selfish enough to not yet want to give up my family, my friends, my creature comforts, my career, etc.

Although I've tried to treat each day as though it might be my last, Tuesday, 11 September 2001, is the closest I've ever come to believing it all was about to end.

Certainly many of you suffered more on that day than I; all of my Pentagon friends escaped unharmed, my New York City friends and relatives are all accounted for, and my co-workers came through physically unscathed. None of us can imagine the terrifying ride the passengers and crew on those hijacked planes experienced; I've already heard more details of it than I care to know. My uncle volunteered in NYC immediately after the terrorism; he was in Vietnam and said he never thought he'd experience anything worse than that, but he did.

You would think something like this would help everyone put things in perspective, perhaps more civility on the Beltway, perhaps rudeness gone from the grocery check-out line? But after the fear, the shock, the anger, does anything positive come from it?

Thinking it might be my last hour, I made three phone calls that Tuesday. The first was to my partner. The second to my parents. The third to my best friend who had just started working in downtown DC the day before. My office is in the flight path of Dulles Airport and the media was reporting yet another hijacked plane was circling Dulles.

I don't want the bad guys to win. I want National Airport to re-open. I want to fly without fear; I'm an airline brat who has been flying since I was 6 months old but right now you couldn't pay me enough to get on a plane.

I feel like an outsider because I haven't reached anger yet. So many people—friends, family, politicians, media, co-workers—are extremely angry. Many are calling for revenge. I would prefer justice. My 14-year-old stepson said it well when he heard talk of war on the radio. "That's stupid," he said. "What's stupid?" I inquired. "They bombed us. We bomb them. They bomb us again. Stupid."

I couldn't argue.

The events of 11 September made me realize how lucky I am and how many things I've taken for granted. I have an amazing family and terrific friends. I'm healthy. I've got great creature comforts. I like my job. I can write to the editor of my local paper and say whatever is on my mind and I can't be locked up or executed for that.

If 11 September teaches us anything at all, please let it teach us to be thankful for what we do have. Let it remind us of some basic principles.

- Say please and thank you.
- Don't chew with your mouth open.
- Tell those you love that you love them every chance you get.
- Eat dessert first. ✍

From the President

Coming Full Circle

by Carolyn Kelley Klinger

My fascination with maps began when I was 14. Shortly after my birthday in 1981, my parents laid it on my two siblings and me that we were moving to Europe the next summer for a year so that my father could participate in an international scientific research exchange. They had not yet decided if we would wind up in Grenoble, France, or Bonn, Germany.

As my parents wrestled with the pros and cons of a mountainous resort town far from a major city versus the capital of West Germany at the time, I turned to my latest best friend, the *World Book Encyclopedia*. While studying the various agricultural exports of each country, I realized that no matter where we went, I had still taken two years of German so far and German is spoken for the most part in Germany. So I announced my position to the family, only to find that my mother's Ph.D. in French was bound to be the more impressive determinant.

After *much* discussion, we wound up in neither town but at least in Germany, in a little farm town called Jülich near the larger town of Aachen and the border of Belgium and Holland. The biggest surprise appeared approximately seven months after our arrival in Germany—a fourth sibling, Jennifer. My German vocabulary benefited greatly from my mother's pregnancy. I found that if I approached a new classmate with the well practiced line translated as "my mother is pregnant," that I automatically got to sit with someone at lunch where I could practice my other German phrases that with any luck held a little more variety.

Although I'm skipping over numerous years after that very influential one, suffice it to say that my decision to go for a Master of Arts in Geography was no big surprise to my family. It followed my Bachelor of Arts degrees in German and International Studies, which weren't exactly a shock to anyone either. My career started out, innocently enough, as a computer mapmaker, specifically, a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Analyst. If you are not familiar with GIS, read the article borrowed from the Willamette Valley Chapter, "GIS for Technical Writers," on page 9 in this issue.

Alas, at some point reality sets in. Being a GIS Analyst at my first employer after graduate school was not what I hoped it would be. The lunch hours I spent answering phones for the receptionist started to grow longer as her absences increased. Although I was grateful to be working "in my field," I soon grew tired of the phone routine and did some soul searching. I realized that what I liked best about that job was writing the chapter on "Introduction to GIS" for a manual supporting our company's software. I checked the *Washington Post* classified ads and saw that a company in Virginia was looking for an entry-level technical writer with a background in desktop mapping. Could it be true? Were my eyes deceiving me? It might as well have said: "looking for Carolyn Kelley (the Klinger didn't get appended until six years ago), right here, right now."

So began my career in technical communication. I know that it is not unique in its winding path through another profession. What *is* unique and immensely satisfying is that my current job, landed through networking at the STC Annual Conference this past May, involves both technical communication and GIS. I work for a small consulting company that develops custom GIS applications. On any given day I may write a requirements document, develop HTML-based help, manage a geographic database, or create a map. Without any planning on my part, my two career threads have merged.

Some of us have found that our dream jobs are not what we thought they would be. Either we've been laid off due to company downsizing or folding, or our day-to-day work lives do not include the attraction we thought they would. Some of us have found a friend in compromise. We say to ourselves "I'll just take/keep this job until a position opens up at that other company." Or we search and search and remain unemployed or underemployed. What I have learned in my relatively short career is that all experiences enrich us in some way. We may not now know what gain there is in our current situation, but with our eyes opened up to "the next right answer," to paraphrase Dewitt Jones (<http://www.dewittjones.com>), photographer and motivational speaker, we will find it. ✍



CAPITAL LETTER

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