BLUE PENCIL

Temporary inconvenience, permanent improvement

I think that Penn Dot coined the phrase "Temporary Inconvenience – Permanent Improvement", but it also has merit here! The membership listing on our web site is undergoing a major overhaul.

The names on our web site will be replaced with the listing that we received from the National Chapter of STC. The major difference that you will see is that the names of those who have not renewed their STC membership will be removed.

The new list should be available sometime this month.

Once the new list is published, we will be asking all Pittsburgh Chapter members to verify their address information. If you have recently changed your mailing address or email address, and have not notified the National Chapter, your old address may still be listed.

Changing your address information with the National Chapter is just a click away! Here's how:

1. Log on to the STC website at http://www.stc-va.org/.

2. Click on the **Membership** tab.

3. Click on **Address changes**.

4. Enter both your current information and your new information in the space provided. You will need your membership number, which is the five-digit number above your name on all society-level mailings (such as *Intercom* and the *Journal of Technical Communication*).

5. Click **Submit Address Change**.

Once you have changed your information, the National Chapter prepares a list and sends it to us. We revise the information on the web site. They also produce the mailing labels for the newsletter, so changing your address with the National Chapter will ensure that you receive *Blue Pencil* at your new address.

Thanks for your patience!

Report on the Fall 2000 Board of Directors Meeting

by Thea Teich, Region 4 Director-Sponsor, with minor edits by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

The STC Board of Directors met in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, September 14-17 and covered a great deal of ground, including:

■ Forming a policy about chapter formation outside the United States and relationships with existing technical communication organizations in other countries

■ Branding and corporate identity

■ Web site hosting for chapters

■ Approving numerous loans to chapters and merit grants. Congratulations to these many chapters with so many innovative and important programs in the works!

These major issues were addressed along with the "regular" STC business of, among other subjects, chapter affairs and program

Contents

President's Column

by Heather Lum

If you haven't visited the Pittsburgh chapter Web site recently, take a few minutes to pay it a visit at http://www.stcpgh.org. Web site manager Karen Attubato completed a redesign of the site in September, releasing it in conjunction with the online version of the member survey (which, if you never filled one out, you can still complete).

Chapter Web site redesign
Over the summer Karen replaced Bob Mohr, who successfully grew the site for several years, adding sections and implementing features like the search as new needs were identified. Karen made the most of her unfamiliarity with the site, and her first order of business was to step back, assess what the site had grown into, reorganize the extensive content, and plan a redesign to contain it.

The redesigned site features two frames, and a misleading photo of one of Pittsburgh's inclines on a *sunny* day (the misleading part). On the home page, the left frame functions as news brief column, which Karen updates regularly to provide jumps to timely details about upcoming meeting, other events, and the software tool of the month.

The right frame contains a graphical navigation bar at the top, identifying the different areas of the site. Once you click past the home page, the left frame's content is replaced by the navigation buttons, and the right frame displays the content for the section you've chosen.

■   The Calendar section succinctly lists upcoming meetings, deadlines, and other events in chronological order, with links to details about each.

■   Thanks to Nancy Pearson's data scrubbing efforts, the Members section has been updated to mirror member information as communicated by the STC national office each month. Be sure to review your listing for accuracy. If something is incorrect, visit the national site at http://www.stc-va.org/addresschange.html and submit an online change, which Nancy will receive. If critical contact information such as your email or phone number changes, email Nancy in the meantime if you would like her to update the information on the chapter site right away. (If you aren't listed as a member on the Pittsburgh chapter site and you think you should be, check your membership status with the STC national office.)

■   Noelle Conover and Karen have been working together to reorganize the Employment section, which is where you should post your bio if you are a member available for contract work or a salaried employee position. (Note that the Members section is not the place to advertise your availability, skills, or experience.) The Employment section is also where you can find a listing of job opportunities.

Tools and resources
Karen, a ServiceWare employee, is a fairly recent transplant to Pittsburgh from Silicon Valley, where she worked most recently for Oracle Corporation. She's been involved in multimedia development since the Internet received its Web facelift in the early '90s.

Karen's primary tools for maintaining the Pittsburgh site include Adobe Photoshop for graphics, and HomeSite for coding and scripting. Some of her favorite technical resources include Web sites such as http://www.webmonkey.com (lots of sample code), which has saved her many times, and CNET's http://www.builder.com. Karen recommends Laura Lemay's books, which include "Teach Yourself Web Publishing with HTML 4 in 21 Days."

For design, Karen's favorites are Lynda Weinman's books "Designing Web Graphics," "Deconstructing Web Graphics," and Lynda's Web site, http://www.lynda.com.

Word Smith: Favorite features

by Bob Mohr

Over the years, Microsoft Word has swelled with features. There are dozens worthy of discussion, but this column only permits a few. The features discussed this month are some of my favorites. Perhaps after reading about them, they will be yours too.

Quick and Easy Formatting

You can apply the formatting from one bit of text to other bits of text without using styles. Highlight the formatted text and press **Shift**+**Ctrl**+**C**. Next, highlight the text to be formatted and press **Shift**+**Ctrl**+**V**.

Here's a quick way to create a new paragraph style: Apply the appropriate formatting to a paragraph, then highlight it. Next, click in the Style drop-down box, type a name for the new style, and press Enter. The new style is entered in the list of styles.

Character Styles

Every Word user relies on paragraph styles, but what about character styles? They are an excellent way to save you a great deal of time and improve consistency.

For example, suppose each cross reference in a large document is to be italicized, colored blue, and underlined. Highlighting the reference and applying the formatting requires at least four mouse clicks. Applying a character style with the same formatting requires only one or two. Multiply this difference by the number of references in a document, and it could be substantial. But there's another advantage to using character styles. Suppose you wanted to change the color from blue to red, or you want to bold all of the references? Simply change the style's attributes and every occurrence of the character style will change.

Document Map

The Document Map provides a kind of two-dimensional view of your document. It's part outline view and part page view. When you choose **View** > **Document Map**, the screen splits vertically with an outline view of the document's style hierarchy on the left and a page layout view on the right.

When you click on an outline level in the left side, the right side immediately changes to display the corresponding section of the document. You can also click on the + and – signs to expand and contract the outline view. Right-clicking in the outline view displays a pop-up menu with more options.

Advanced Search and Replace

Everyone uses search and replace, right? But did you know you could also search for and replace 21 special characters and 7 format options? The next time you open the search and replace dialog box, click the **More** button. The dialog box expands slightly and you'll see two more buttons: **Format** and **Special**. Experiment with these. You'll be amazed at what you can do with them to save time.

AutoCorrect

At first glance, you might think AutoCorrect is just a clever way to catch spelling errors—and it is—but it can do much more. It's also a great way to reduce keystrokes:

■ Use it for acronyms so you don't have to use the Shift key so much. For example: enter usaf as the **Replace** text and USAF as the **With** text.

■ Use it to complete phrases: For example: enter abcco as the **Replace** text and ABC Company, Inc. as the **With** text. This is often faster than the AutoText feature, depending on what you want to replace.

■ Use it with pre-formatted text to save additional keystrokes. For example, I once worked on a project called TRAC^{2}ES. Superscripting the 2 every time the project name was used got tiresome. The solution was to create an AutoCorrect entry that included the superscripted 2. Here's how:

1. Type the word (or phrase) that will become the **With** text and format it, such as TRAC^{2}ES.

2. Select the word (or phrase) and let it remain highlighted while you perform the next step.

3. Choose **Tools** > **AutoCorrect**. When the box opens, Word will display the highlighted words, from step 2, in the **With** box.

4. Click the **Formatted text** button.

5. Type your **Replace** text entry. In my case, I used t2. Thereafter, any time I typed t2 it was immediately replaced with TRAC^{2}ES.

Spelling Errors

If you've ever spent time sifting through a document looking for those red squiggly lines under a misspelled word, you should know there is a faster, more accurate way to find them. Double-click on the book graphic shown in the status bar. When you do, Word will jump to the next misspelled word, highlight it, and display the Spelling menu.

File Size

And finally, it seems we have to pay a price for Word's many features. A condition that plagues many Word users is file bloat. Documents well over a megabyte in size can be sluggish to work with and prone to corruption. But, there are steps you can take to reduce file sizes:

■ Link graphics—do not embed them—whenever possible

■ Turn off fast saves

■ Turn off change tracking when not needed

■ Turn off versions when not needed

■ Save the file as a different name

People News

NEW MEMBER

Jeffrey Collins

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP

205

TOTAL STC MEMBERSHIP

22,251

President's Column

Where to send site content and your suggestions

If you have news, an event, or other information to contribute to the site, send it to Karen as an email message or a Word document. She prefers that people not send HTML files, since many applications add unnecessary tags during the file conversion process.

Karen's turnaround time for posting content is within seven days of receipt, and she can often post within a day or two.

- Send general information to Karen at autografwd@aol.com as soon as you get it and let her know if it's timely and needs to be posted ASAP. This procedure includes information that you are also sending to Nancy Ott for publication in the next *Blue Pencil.* Remember—with the Web, you are not bound by a monthly publishing schedule.

- To post information in the Employment section, send it to Noelle Conover at nconover@sgi.net, who coordinates with Karen.

- To request a change in the Members section, contact Nancy at nancy.pearson@usbank.com with your request. Also, make sure you submit the change to the STC national office; follow the steps in the article "Temporary inconvenience, permanent improvement" on page 1.

Karen notes that the site redesign is still a work in progress, so please send your feedback and suggestions to her at autografwd@aol.com.

Editorial Calendar

December, 2000 — Usability/Holiday issue. *Deadline 11/15/00.*

January, 2001 — Presenting your portfolio. *Deadline 12/15/00.*

February, 2001 — Java technology, part 1 (Java programming language). *Deadline 1/15/01.*

March, 2001 — Java technology, part 2 (Components). *Deadline 2/15/01.*

April, 2001 — Indexing. *Deadline 3/15/01.*

May, 2001 — Writing for the World Wide Web. *Deadline 4/15/01.*

Summer, 2001 — Annual conference wrap-up. *Deadline 6/15/01.*

Advertisements

STC Pittsburgh members may place a free business card-sized (2 1/4 inch x 3 1/2 inch) ad for their products or services in each issue; non-member cost is $25 per ad, per issue. For larger ads, please contact the editor. Ads received by the deadline will be included in the next month's issue.

Guidelines

Send your submissions to:

Nancy Ott
Editor, Blue Pencil
117 West 8th Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15215
412-667-4985 (W), 412-784-0254 (H)
nott@transarc.com

Electronic submissions (email or diskette) are preferred. I can accept most word processing and graphics file formats and can scan hard copy artwork. Contact me if you have any special requirements.

Report on the Fall 2000 Board of Directors Meeting

(Continued from page 1)

areas, including research, special interest groups (SIGs), professional development, competitions, conferences, communications, and external affairs. Because this article needs to be relatively short, I cannot describe these subjects in detail; several of them could easily be main topics of articles. So, please contact Chris if you have any questions.

Committee and Program Updates

■ The board authorized the STC office to conduct a membership drive using the services of a professional marketing company.

■ STC will become an affiliate member of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). The annual fee for this is $5,000. W3C determines standards for Web-based communication, among other wide-ranging concerns of specific interest to STC.

■ The board acknowledged three new chapters approved by the Executive Council over the summer:

  □ The San Luis Obispo Chapter in Region 8

  □ The Texas A&M Student Chapter in Region 5.

  □ The Netherlands Chapter in Region 4

■ The Instructional Design & Learning SIG was approved with an initial budget of $1,900.

■ Denver, Colorado, will be the location of the 52nd STC Annual Conference in 2006.

■ Minneapolis, Minnesota, will be the location of the 53rd STC Annual Conference in 2007.

■ Freya Winsberg of the Phoenix Chapter was appointed program manager for the 50th STC Annual Conference (Dallas, 2003).

■ The Conference registration fee for members for the 48th STC Annual Conference in Chicago in 2001 will be $420. The discounted rate for speakers will remain $350.

■ Edward Carbrey, Boston Chapter, was appointed manager of the Jay R. Gould Award Committee.

■ Dale Erickson, Lone Star Chapter, was appointed manager of the New Media Delivery Systems Committee in the Communications area.

■ Jon Baker, Boston Chapter, was named manager of the New Media Publications Committee in the Communications area.

■ Jack Molisani, Los Angeles Chapter, was named manager of the Chapter and Regional Conferences Committee in the Chapter Affairs area (2nd Vice President).

■ Amy Burdan, Hoosier (Indiana) Chapter, was named manager of the Scientific Communication SIG.

■ Roy Hartshorn, Toronto Chapter, was named manager of the Canadian Curricula in Professional Development Committee in the Professional Development area.

Merit Grants and Loans to Chapters

■ A merit grant of US$3,000 was awarded to the Central New York Chapter to implement a comprehensive revitalization/growth plan.

■ A merit grant of US$3,000 was awarded to the Mid-South Chapter to build its scholarship fund.

■ A merit grant of US$3,000 was awarded to the Atlanta Chapter to build its scholarship fund.

■ A merit grant of US$1,200 was awarded to the Hoosier Chapter to develop the Insight Award to recognize Indiana corporations and organizations that innovatively use the skills and capabilities of their technical communicators.

■ A multichapter loan of US$6,000 was given to the Mid-Valley and Willamette Valley Chapters to host the Region 7 conference in Portland, Oregon, in October 2001.

■ A merit grant of US$3,000 was awarded to the Alberta Chapter to construct a portable display to be used at the all-Canada Smart 2000 Conference and Exposition in November 2000, and at regional professional, educational, and community events.

■ A merit grant of US$2,070 was awarded to the Alaska Chapter to construct a portable display for use at regional professional, educational, and community events across Alaska.

■ A chapter loan of US$3,000 was given to the Los Angeles Chapter to seed a multichapter, self-sustaining technical publications, online communication, and art competition in Southern California.

■ A merit grant of US$1,500 was awarded to the East Bay Chapter to further develop its Technical Literacy Program.

Report on the Fall 2000 Board of Directors Meeting

Budget
The board approved a budget for FY 2001 of $4,725,250 in income, $4,711,849 in expenses, and $13,401 in net surplus.

Policy Regarding Chapters and Membership Outside of the United States
The following policy statement was adopted by the board to reflect the current state of affairs regarding members outside the U.S.:

1. At the Society level, STC does not actively initiate the formation of chapters. STC provides information from the Society office to any individual who inquires about formation of a chapter. The Director-Sponsor of record is copied as a point of contact for the requestor.

2. STC is a member of INTECOM, an international consortium of technical communication societies. As a courtesy to that membership, in response to a chapter formation inquiry from outside the United States, STC will, in the Society office's response, advise the requestor of existing organizations in the requestor's country. The contact person of record of the member INTECOM organization and the STC INTECOM representative will be copied, as applicable.

3. Chapters shall be admitted when 15 members of a given geographic area petition for chapter status in accordance with STC bylaws.

4. Once a chapter is formed, STC will provide an equal level of support with the following exception: In terms of professional/government relations, STC shall focus on the United States as the Society is incorporated in the United States.

5. In terms of membership, if there are extraneous costs associated solely with the residence of a member outside the United States, these costs may, as deemed necessary by the board of directors, be passed on to the affected member.

Branding and Corporate Identity
The board approved a new logo and stationery program for the Society. Before the end of the year, chapter presidents will receive specific and detailed corporate identity information; in other words, how to use the new logo and various design elements

in chapter stationery and hard and electronic copy materials.

As most of you know, Past President Mary Wise announced the new STC mission statement, ***Designing the Future of Technical Communication,*** at Leadership Day at the Orlando conference. Another external brand tool is the organization's "story," a brief explanation of what the organization stands for, who its members are, and how it views its future. The STC board approved the STC story—our consistent "face" we present to the rest of the world. While it is not meant to replace the more extensive literature we provide to prospective members and others, the story is the "elevator message" we can use to briefly explain who and what we are.

STC Story
Through information sharing and industry leadership, STC helps professionals design effective communication for a technical world. Because technology touches everyone, STC promotes public welfare by encouraging the development of better-educated professionals whose jobs are to make complicated information usable by many.

The organization's growth has mirrored our growing dependence on technology. Initially, STC was primarily made up of engineers who, among other activities, wrote instructions and descriptions of how electrical and mechanical products worked. A profound change took place as the pervasiveness of technology and the need to understand it became an integral part of our everyday lives. With the emergence of the Internet and online communication, our members now focus on supporting all aspects of the rapidly evolving world of technology.

The organization began because those working in the field recognized themselves as professionals with unique training and career issues. Today, STC is nearly 50 years old, with 150 chapters and 25,000 members worldwide. It is the largest organization for technical communicators. STC offers industry leadership and the education, networking, and information required in a world where change is "the way it is."

As the branding effort moves forward, you will be hearing more about it via Society publications, presentations, and so on.

Web Site Hosting for Chapters
For the past several years, the board has been dealing with a number of difficult issues related to decentralized versus centralized hosting of chapter Web sites. Recent problems and service difficulties as

Reasons why English is hard to learn

The bandage was wound around the wound.

The farm was used to produce produce.

The dump was so full that it had to refuse more refuse.

We must polish the Polish furniture.

He could lead if he would get the lead out.

The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.

Since there is no time like the present, he thought it was time to present the present.

A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.

When shot at, the dove dove into the bushes.

I did not object to the object.

The insurance was invalid for the invalid.

There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.

They were too close to the door to close it.

The buck does funny things when the does are present.

A seamstress and a sewer fell down into a sewer line.

To help with planting, the farmer taught his sow to sow.

The wind was too strong to wind the sail.

After a number of injections my jaw got number.

Upon seeing the tear in the painting I shed a tear.

I had to subject the subject to a series of tests.

How can I intimate this to my most intimate friend? ✎

Report on the Fall 2000 Board of Directors Meeting

(Continued from page 6)

stc.org's bandwidth needs have exceeded what our current ISP can provide makes this issue urgent as well as extremely important.

Over the next few months, committees in the Communications area, managed by the Assistant to the President for Communications Lory Hawkes, will be developing and implementing a transition plan that will enable chapters to select their own ISPs and maintain their own Web sites in a decentralized system. Such a system means that, within some general guidelines (we do have to present a fairly consistent "face" to the world; see Branding above), chapters will have greater creative latitude and capabilities to develop and change their Web sites. ISP and other costs associated with Web sites have decreased considerably over the years, so most chapters will be able to maintain their sites with their chapter funds.

Small and new chapters, which might not have enough funds, are eligible for grants for Web site startup under the existing merit grant program; contact Chris for more details. Please be assured that moving chapter Web sites from the volunteer-run STC.org site to ISPs selected by individual chapters will occur according to a careful transition plan, and chapter leadership will be involved.

Again, the issues mentioned in this article are far-reaching and important, but the discussions here are necessarily brief. Please contact Chris if you have any questions or comments.

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). ✎

Meeting highlights: October 18, 2000

by Nancy Carpenter, Chapter Secretary

Our second annual Employment Networking Meeting was held on October 18 at the Software Engineering Institute in Oakland.

Eight "employers" held roundtable discussions in five 15-minute sessions. To start the sessions, Noelle Conover gave each discussion leader a list of the questions that people have asked her over the years. We were privileged to hear the following speakers:

- Joyce Query on running a new company. Joyce is president and CEO of I2 and TechWrite, a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, and former writer for Federated Investors. TechWrite prepares online, software, equipment, marketing and ISO 9000 documentation. I2 offers knowledge and information management services.

- Alan Houser on becoming a consultant. Alan has a B.S. in electrical engineering and an M.A. in professional writing from Carnegie Mellon University. After working for over 10 years in the software industry, Alan and his business partner formed a technical writing consulting firm, Group Wellesley. They specialize in meeting the documentation needs of small-sized to medium-sized high-tech companies. They also offer specialized skills, such as XML expertise, documentation tools support, and usability testing.

- Lynn Rowles on running a marketing communications department in a large corporation. Lynn is manager of marketing communications at Adelphia Systems, has a B.S in professional writing and communications from Carlow College, and a masters degree in corporate communications from Duquesne University.

- Ray Janicko on running a technical communications department in a large corporation. Ray is manager of technical communication services at Federated Investors, Inc. He has an MFA in non-fiction writing from the University of Pittsburgh and has been in technical communication for over 13 years. His staff of six technical communicators provide printed and online documentation for internal and external users of Federated's systems and services Most recently, they assisted in redesign and deployment of the corporate intranet, and are working with the training and development department to implement online training over that intranet.

- Jean Siegel on running a technical communications department in a small, fast-growing, high-tech company. Jean is manager of the documentation department at Clairvoyance. She has a B.S. in biology and writing from Carnegie Mellon University and has been a technical writer for 15 years. Her writers are active members of the software development team.

- Pam Schmidbauer on working with freelance technical communicators. Pam is working on her masters degree in mass communications at Point Park College. She began her career in journalism, was a news producer for 10 years, and ran her own freelance public relations/media relations business. She now is an agent/manager at Aquent, a talent agency for creative, web, and technical talent. She still does some freelance work.

- Terry Sue Sweatt on recruiting technical communicators for both full time permanent and part-time and temporary contract work. Terry Sue is director of career development at AC Coy, a technical recruitment firm. She has been with AC Coy for 15 years, and presently is responsible for training and supervision of 6 recruiters and 12 support personnel. She has a BA in English and African American Studies from Syracuse University.

- Nancy Ott on preparing a technical writing portfolio. Nancy is a technical writer with the IBM Transarc Lab and is editor of *Blue Pencil*, the monthly newsletter for the Pittsburgh chapter of STC. She has degrees in mechanical engineering and engineering and public policy from Carnegie Mellon University and writing from the University of Pittsburgh, and has been a technical writer for 11 years.

These speakers brought enthusiasm with their expertise. They gave us a good idea of what skills are needed both to do our work and to search for work. Although intended as an employment networking event, this meeting also provided insight into a wide variety of the work that we do, showing that "The Technical Writer In Its Natural Setting" would be a copious volume indeed! ✐

New XML mailing list for writers

XML-DOC is a new online mailing list for documentation professionals and anyone else interested in discussing the application of XML tools and techniques to the creation of documentation. Topics that are highly encouraged on the list:

- XML-based content/document management systems
- Single-sourcing with XML
- DocBook, the SGML/XML DTD for documentation
- Transitioning to XML authoring from a FrameMaker environment
- Converting legacy documents to XML
- Publishing (transforming and delivering XML content)
- XML training and certification
- Document analysis and data modeling
- Profiling and customizing for multiple audiences and delivery formats

To subscribe, send a blank e-mail message to xml-doc-subscribe@egroups.com

You can also subscribe at the XML-DOC web site, http://www.egroups.com/subscribe/xml-doc/. ✐

STC fellowship gives technical communicators a taste of teaching

Practicing technical communicators can try their hand at teaching — with a little help from STC's teaching fellowship program.

Under the program, STC will award stipends to technical communicators so that they can take on short-term teaching assignments. The goals of this program are to promote positive academe and industry connections, and to enable practitioners to help in the education and training of future technical communicators.

Fellowships last a minimum of one academic quarter or semester. Two teaching fellowships of $2,000 each are available for award. The stipend is paid directly to the practitioner in installments — one at the midpoint of the fellowship, and one after the fellowship has been completed and a final report submitted by the practitioner.

The deadline for applying for the fellowship for the fall semester is April 1.

To see more information about the fellowship program — including contact information and deadlines for applying — please visit the STC office Web site at www.stc-va.org. From the main page, select **Guides/ Brochures**, then scroll to **Guidelines for the Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals**. ✐

Networking works!

by Noelle Conover, Chapter Employment Coordinator

So you took the plunge and you finally decided to become a freelancer. Or perhaps you are sick and tired of the job you have and really want a new one. What do you do? How do you get the word out that you are looking for a contract or a new job? The key is networking. Yes, networking really works.

What is Networking?

According to Merriam-Webster, networking is the exchange of information or services among individuals, groups, or institutions. This exchange of information about contracts or potential employment can be very valuable to you. I have been a freelancer for the last six years. In that time, I have never had to advertise my services. I have worked for 17 different companies as a technical communicator. I can trace each contract back to some form of networking on my part. Think about networking and how it can work for you – it may surprise you. To help you get started networking, I will describe some things you can do to "spread the word."

Use the STC and other professional organizations

One of the best reasons to join the STC is to network. If you attend meetings, you can let others know of your availability. You can meet people who will someday need a sub-contractor or just the right employee. You will be that person. I obtained two of my most loyal clients from STC member referrals. If I had not joined STC and become involved in the chapter, I would not have these clients today.

The STC WebSite is another valuable tool to hunt contracts or jobs. I recently obtained a contract by using the National STC Jobs Database. A company posted an opening for a freelance writer and I responded by email. I got the job and completed the work without ever meeting the client in person!

The STC journals and magazine are also excellent source of information. Many companies, looking for technical communicators, advertise in these publications.

The STC employment Website is also an excellent resource. Jobs are posted each and every month to the site. Employers know that they can find excellent communicators on our site.

Don't forget about the Pittsburgh High Technology Council. Attend their breakfast briefings and stay abreast of their events for networking. The International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) is also an excellent organization, especially if you work in marketing communications.

Referrals

A referral is one of the best ways to get a new contract or a new job. If you are good enough to have a "satisfied" client, you should ask him or her for a referral. My first job as a technical communications freelancer was at a company called Formtek in 1994. That contract lasted over two years. I can trace contracts at six of my current clients to that single job at Formtek. If you do a good job, word gets around.

Repeat Business

Repeat business is great if you are a freelancer. You already know the client and the company. To obtain repeat business, it is important to maintain relationships with previous clients – call them once in a while to see what is going on. I did this last January when it was looking pretty barren for me. I had just finished several projects and no new ones were in the wings. So I started to call clients I had not heard from in awhile. I didn't get immediate work, but it paid off. One of my current clients hired me when the person I worked with at one of my former clients left and went to a new company. He remembered my call and called me!

Other Writers

One of the best ways to find contracts or employment is to maintain a network of fellow communicators that you trust. These should be other writers who share your work style. They should be able to help you when you get too much work (in the case of a freelancer) or help you when you need work. I maintain ties with several communicators that I have worked with in the past. Several times, my clients have needed additional workers and I recommended these folks. I know that if I needed work, I could count on them to help me too.

Mentor when you can

One of the best ways to network is to help others. For instance, offer to speak at your alma mater or at a student chapter of STC. I spoke recently at CMU, my alma mater, and I ended up with a potential client because of it. Offer to talk to a student or a fellow member in need of advice. Whenever you are asked, say "yes." It will always help you in the future.

Take classes in our field or in non-related field

You never know who you might meet in a class. You can meet people in any sort of class — perhaps they are in a hiring capacity. It is even better if the class is not in our field — if you are the only technical writer in the class, people will remember that!

Recruiters

When recruiters call me, I always take the time to listen to them. I have obtained several good contracts at big companies in Pittsburgh that I would not have gotten on my own because of recruiters. Don't be afraid to tall them exactly what you are looking for. Sometimes, they have to get a little creative, but it is worth it. One of my best clients came from a recruiter that initially told me she had no offsite, freelance work. However, when she obtained that kind of a contract – she called me and I got the job.

Newspaper

Don't discount the want ads. Most people today don't even bother to look. I do every

weekend for a number of reasons. I like to know what the trends are for communicators, who is hiring and I don't just look at technical writing jobs. If a company seems to be looking for a lot of developers, I jot down their name. There is a good chance that if they need developers, they will soon, need technical communicators. If you are really interested, be proactive and contact them. One of my former clients came from a two-line job advertisement in the paper for "technical trainers." I sent my resume and even though I had never officially been a trainer, I got the job. It wasn't a typical approach but it worked.

Smaller papers/Newsletters — such as High Tech Council Paper and Pittsburgh Business Times

Even the smaller papers are good sources of contract and job information. The Pittsburgh High Technology magazine and the Pittsburgh Business Times feature high tech and start-up companies in their articles. These are great sources of employment for technical communicators. The High Tech council also maintains an excellent job web site.

The only business magazine I subscribe to is a publication called Contract Professional. This is one of the best sources of information for a self-employed contractor. They have excellent feature articles and great reference information for networking.

Internet

Most freelancers and potential job candidates look on the Internet today. In addition to the traditional job hunting sites like Monster.com and DICE, there are smaller, more obscure sites that really cater to the technical communications professional, both freelance and employee. Some of these site sites include:

- www.stc-va.org — the national STC jobs database

- www.techwr-l.com — a site that developed from the mailing list by the same name

- www.guru.com — a great site for self-employed freelancers

- www.pghtech.org — the Pittsburgh High Technology Web site (had 18 technical writer positions as of 9/15/00)

- www.tjobs.com — Telecommuter resources

- www.elance.com — a new, innovative site that conducts contact bidding online

There are so many sites out there. Try typing "technical writer employment" in a search engine and see what you get. It is amazing.

Tell *Everyone* you know

Tell anyone who will listen what you do for a living. Once you get past the blank expression, tell them again what you do. I guarantee they will remember. Especially if the person you tell is *not* technical. I am PTA president at my kids' school. They all know I work from home, write those manuals that "no one" reads that come with computers, and that I can explain how to use Windows to them. I have worked for several of these people, setting up their computers and training their families on them.

Tell your neighbors, fellow church members, parents, etc., what you do for a living. Always have some business cards with you. And don't discount your spouse. They can network for you too! I got a job once from a person my husband met in Italian class. Turns out he needed a technical writer. You never know.

Do a good job! Word will spread

You will find that the best form of advertising is your work. If you do a good job, you will be surprised that the word spreads. So, whether you are a contractor, freelancer or employee, keep in mind that you should always be networking and always be selling yourself. You are your greatest asset! Good luck! ✎

Word Smith: Favorite features

(Continued from page 3)

Periodically saving the file as a different name is one of the best things you can do. Word stores internal information within a document. This information contributes to the size of the file. However, saving the file to a new name causes Word to drop most of that information, thereby minimizing the file size.

I always use **Save As** after a major edit session and append two digits to the name. For example, a document may start off as "chap1.doc," but after its first edit session, it becomes "chap1-02.doc"; the next edit session yields "chap1-03.doc" and so on. This scheme keeps the current file small and creates backup files in case the latest file becomes corrupted. I usually maintain two or three versions and delete the others.

If you think using Save As requires too many extra keystrokes or takes too much time, think again. F12 is a keyboard shortcut that activates the Save As dialog box. It's quick, it's easy, and it's a good habit to get into.

Next month I'll offer some tips for handling graphics. ✎

November meeting: Creating XML Documents with the Tools you Already Have

You have heard a lot about XML, but you're still not sure why you would want to use it. If you do decide to use XML, you have no idea what kinds of tools you need. Would you have to start over with a totally new authoring tool? Or is there an easier way to migrate to XML?

At our November meeting, Alan Houser, Principal of Group Wellesley (http://www.groupwellesley.com) will present a variation of a talk he recently delivered at the 2000 FrameUser's Conference. In "Creating XML Documents with the Tools you Already Have," Alan will discuss:

Why your organization might want to move to an XML-based publishing system. How to create XML documents with tools like Microsoft Word and Adobe FrameMaker. Good practices to start now if you are considering moving to XML in the future.

The meeting will be held at Clairvoyance

Corporation, 5301 5th Ave., in Shadyside (red brick bldg. — corner of St. James St. and 5th Ave.). Parking is available on St. James St. and additional sidestreets. For directions, please visit the Clairvoyance web site (http://www.clairvoyancecorp.com) and click on Contact Us. (We must request that there be no recruiting activity on the Clairvoyance premises.)

The dinner menu is a sandwich ring, broccoli and tomato salad, cole slaw and cookies. RSVP for dinner by Thursday, November 9, to Darlene Mullenix at (412) 288-8676 or dmullenix@federatedinv.com. You may choose to attend the meeting only at 6:30pm at no cost.

Cancellations must be called or emailed to Darlene or you will be expected to pay for dinner. If you miss the meeting and did not cancel your RSVP by the deadline, you WILL be charged for dinner. 🖉

<u>Date:</u> **Thursday, Nov. 16, 2000**

<u>Time:</u> 5:30–8:00 PM; program begins at 6:30 PM

<u>Location:</u> Clairvoyance Corporation, 53015th Avenue, Pittsburgh (Shadyside).

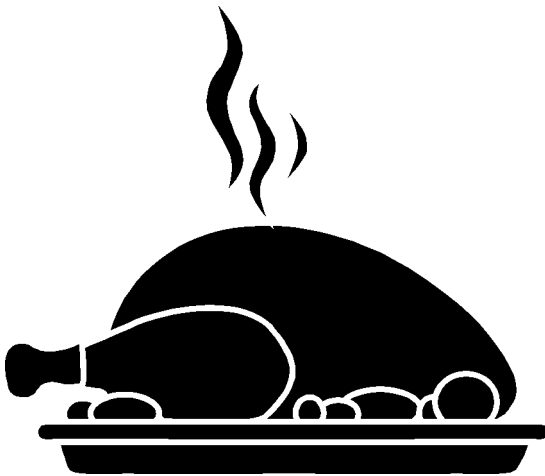<u>Cost:</u> $8 STC members, $5 students and unemployed; $9 all others.

<u>RSVP:</u> **By noon on Thursday, November 9** to Darlene Mullenix, Meeting Coordinator, 412-288-8676 or dmullenix@federatedinv.com

Pay at the door or mail to:
Darlene Mullenix, Meeting Coordinator
c/o STC Pittsburgh
P.O. Box 133, Pittsburgh, PA 15230
Make checks out to *STC Pittsburgh*. If you do not cancel your reservation by **Thursday, Nov. 9**, you will be charged for dinner.

STC society for technical communication

P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230

November, 2000

Networking works!