

BLUE PENCIL



Highlights from Chicago: One STC Member's Perspective

By Christina Downs

At first, it was hard to enjoy myself because I was worried about my own presentation, which wasn't until 4 on Monday. But Dewitt Jones, the conference opening speaker, really helped put me at ease with his motivational words about "passion" and "action."

Jones believes life requires four things for you to be both successful and happy: Vision, Passion, Purpose, and Creativity. You need to "fall in love" with the world and with what you do. You need to move from "imagination" to "imagination" — DO IT YOURSELF! He also stressed that there is more than one "right answer" and that you can't be afraid to make mistakes. Don't stop after the first right answer, or you'll miss out on something else good.

Jones' words were the most memorable thing I took away with me from the conference. I shared his wisdom with my friends and family, in hopes of motivating them into finding their passion in life, as well.

I only attended one day of the conference, so my experience was probably a little different from that of the "full-time" attendees. But I was still pleased to have the experience of presenting, attending other sessions, and meeting so many people in the industry (some famous, too!). It was amazing to be in the company of such talented people (such as Ginny Redish) and to see other technical writers, editors, information designers/architects, etc., in action.

Conference Session Materials:

http://stc.org/48thConf/48th_post.html

Conference Summary and Photos:

<http://stc.org/conferences.html>

There's been some debate recently over what we should call ourselves — information designers or information architects (or maybe just plain old technical writers), and what we should call the information design profession — information design or information architecture. The April issue (Volume 5,

(Continued on page 4)

Blue Pencil Logo Contest

Next season, we are taking the Blue Pencil online. For its new online look, we're looking for a new logo. So get your creative hats out, and design what may be the next Blue Pencil logo!

Contest winner will receive a Borders gift certificate and recognition in every issue of the Blue Pencil. This is a great opportunity for a new or established graphic designer or technical illustrator to gain exposure!

Electronic or hardcopy submissions accepted.

Deadline is August 1, 2001.

For more details, please contact Blue Pencil editor Chris Downs at stcdowns@aol.com or 724-532-3669.

Contents

Highlights from Chicago: One STC Member's Perspective.....	1
President's Column.....	2
Independent Consultants SIG to meet in July.....	3
People News.....	4
May CIC SIG Meeting: Web Resources for Finding Work.....	5
Region 1/Region 2 Conference: Communicators in Concert.....	6
Region 4 Conference Call for Papers.....	6
STC's 49th Annual Conference Call for Proposals.....	6
Conference Photos.....	7
Bill and JoAnn Hackos Workshops!.....	8
Blue Pencil is Going Online!.....	10

**2000-2001
STC PITTSBURGH OFFICERS**

PRESIDENT

Heather Lum
412-243-3151 (W) hlum@pobox.com

VICE PRESIDENT

Mary Ecsedy
412-422-0213 (H) ecsedy.m@worldnet.att.net

SECRETARY

Nancy Carpenter
412-820-2221 (W) n.g.carpenter@usa.net

TREASURER

Dave Ross
412-492-7899 (H)

REGION 2 DIRECTOR-SPONSOR

Chris Benz
919-226-0060(W) Chris.Benz@e-pubcorp.com
919-479-4891 (H)

COMMITTEES**MEMBERSHIP**

Nancy Pearson
412-552-2022 (W) nancy.pearson@usbank.com

MEMBER LIAISON

Chris Keefer
412-384-1966 (H) keefercj@adelphia.net

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

Noelle Conover
412-571-0259 (W/H) nconover@sgi.net
412-571-2437 (Fax)

PUBLICITY

Bill O'Donnell
724-941-6346 abdul@sgi.net

MEETING COORDINATOR

Darlene Mullenix
412-288-8676 dmullenix@federatedinv.com

HIGH SCHOOL WRITING COMPETITION

Jennifer Bonelli jbonelli@kiski.net

PUBLICATIONS COMPETITION

Carol Zera
412-837-9033 (W/H) czera@msn.com

CONSULTING & INDEPENDENT CONTRACTING SIG

Alan Houser
412-363-0387 arh@groupwellesley.com

SPEAKERS BUREAU/HISTORIAN

Janis Ramey
412-833-5548 (W/H) ramey@technical-writing.net

CHAPTER WEB SITE COORDINATOR

Karen Attubato
412-362-3518 (W) AutografWD@aol.com

PAST PRESIDENT

Marlene Miller
412-288-6401 (W) mmiller@federatedinv.com

BLUE PENCIL

Blue Pencil is the official newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Pittsburgh chapter. It is published monthly from September through June by the Pittsburgh chapter to inform and promote communication within the chapter and the Society. Material contained in this publication may be reprinted by other STC chapters, provided credit is given. Please send a copy of the reprint to the editor. Readers are invited to submit ads, short articles, news, reviews, and other material of interest to technical communicators by the 10th of the month prior to publication to:

Christina Downs, Blue Pencil Managing Editor
Email: stcdowns@aol.com, Phone: 724-532-3669

President's Column

by Heather Lum

We enjoyed a good program year thanks to the dedication, hard work, and innovation of our chapter's volunteers. Here's a big thank-you to all board and committee members, who agreed to continue in their offices and positions for the 2001-2002 program year. Mary Ecsedy and I committed to serving as vice president and president for two-year terms, so we're half way through our STC leadership odyssey.

At the STC Pittsburgh chapter board meeting in March, officers and committee heads discussed several issues and made decisions where action was necessary:

- Help! We need additional meeting locations. It has become increasingly difficult for our chapter to find a meeting place that supports presentation requirements and doesn't charge a hefty fee (upwards of \$150 for the meeting room). Some of our old standbys, like Point Park College's Faculty Dining Room and Clairvoyance, are no longer available. The SEI and Federated Investors have hosted several meetings thanks to chapter members who work for Carnegie Mellon and Federated. While we plan to hold a few upcoming meetings at the SEI and Federated, we badly need additional options.

Consider sponsoring an STC meeting next program year. Sponsoring typically involves no more than investigating whether your company allows employee-sponsored professional organizations to use its facilities, requesting the use of a room, and taking responsibility for the meeting from your employer's perspective by attending it. Contact Mary Ecsedy or Meeting Coordinator Darlene Mullenix if you would like to sponsor a meeting, or if you know of a place with a private room our chapter could use for little or no fee.

- Blue Pencil to go online. Blue Pencil Editor Chris Downs will experiment with scaling the printed newsletter back to a single

page or postcard that provides upcoming meeting details and article highlights. The full newsletter will be available online. (See related article on page 10.) Why the change? To reduce printing and mailing costs, and to take advantage of the online environment that so many of us spend our professional time urging others to use. The complete *Blue Pencil* will still be available in print to members who request that it be mailed to them.

- Keeping the web site up-to-date. Keeping our chapter's web site up-to-date is critical, and the board discussed ways to provide our site manager with help. Over the summer, we will experiment with allowing the people responsible for particularly active, time-sensitive content to make updates themselves. Currently, site manager Karen Attubato makes all updates, including those to frequently changing content like employment opportunities and meeting announcements and details. The site has grown to the point that there's too much activity for one person to handle.

- Incentives for new members. The board agreed to resume the chapter's previous practice of including a \$5 meeting coupon in new member kits. We also agreed to reinstate the two-for-one program, where a member can bring a prospective new member for free.

- More dinner-less meetings. The chapter experimented this past year with holding fewer dinner meetings. Most respondents to last September's member survey indicated that the dinners were not important to them. Reflective of survey results, we had good attendance at the meetings that didn't feature dinner, so we will continue to hold dinner-less meetings next program year. Having meetings sans dinner opens up meeting location possibilities, and also saves our chapter money.

(Continued on Page 2)

President's Column

(Continued from page 2)

- **Got a fundraising idea?** While our chapter's budget is healthy, it continues to diminish slowly year after year. Membership fees and funding from STC national do not cover our chapter's operating costs. The chapter's greatest expenditures are typically newsletter printing and mailing, and monthly meeting costs. Do you have an idea for an event or service STC members could provide that would help raise money for our chapter? If you do, I would love to discuss it with you.

Keep checking the Web site (www.stcpgh.org) for information about the first fall meeting. Enjoy your summer, and see you next fall. ✍

Independent Consultants SIG to meet in July

The Pittsburgh STC Consultants and Independent Contractors Special Interest Group (CICS SIG) met on May 17, 2001. The meeting featured a mini-presentation and hand-out by Nancy Wetmore on "Web resources for finding work." (See the list on page 5.) Jim McCarty also contributed a list of his favorite web resources.

If you are currently a freelance writer, contractor, or independent consultant, or are considering the independent lifestyle, please join us for our next meeting on July 19. Location and time are to be determined. For details about the meeting, see the calendar section of the Pittsburgh STC web site at <http://www.stcpgh.org/calendar/index.htm>, or contact CICS SIG coordinator Alan Houser, arh@groupwellesley.com, 412-363-3481.

STC CICS SIG meetings are open to STC members and non-members. There is typically a \$5 charge to cover food and refreshments. If you have any topic ideas or if you would like to present at a CICS SIG meeting, please contact Alan Houser.



XML is our
only business...

Conversion
Training
Consulting

1.724.942.1912
clearlyonline.com
info@clearlyonline.com



**Documentation services
for technology industries™**

Authoring: User manuals, online help, setup/
administration guides, marketing collateral

Technical: Electronic document delivery,
desktop publishing, source format conversion,
single-source publishing, SGML/XML support,
usability testing, documentation process
consulting

Training: FrameMaker+SGML, XML

933 Wellesley Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15206
Tel: 412.363.3481
Fax: 412.363.3482
www.groupwellesley.com
info@groupwellesley.com

Carnegie Mellon

M.A. Professional Writing

- Technical Writing
- Professional Writing
- Document Design
- Online Information Design

15 month program
Financial aid available

For more information, or to
attend a free, one-day
information design
workshop, contact

Dr. Karen Schnakenberg
Director, MAPW Program
krs@andrew.cmu.edu
412.268.2659



People News

NEW MEMBERS:

Amy A. Axworthy
 Michael E. Barclay
 Lydia B. Daniels
 Beth F. Hartzell
 Anne F. Jackson
 Ann L. Kopchik
 Mary Louis Ray
 M. Susan Rowles
 Bryce A. Walat
 Lori A. Williamson

NEW SENIOR MEMBERS:

Jennifer S. Bonelli
 Michele C. Link
 Jennifer B. Monseau
 Millie S. Sass

CHAPTER MEMBERSHIP:
193

TOTAL STC MEMBERSHIP:
21,301

Highlights from Chicago: One STC Member's Perspective

(Continued from page 1)

Issue 2) of *Design Matters*, the Information Design SIG newsletter, summarized the views from a number of prominent professionals, including Saul Carliner, Andrew Dillon, Jesse James Garrett, Thom Haller, Bob Jacobson, Whitney Quesenbery, Nathan Shedroff, David Sless, Christina Wodtke, Karen Schriver, Lou Rosenfeld, and Richard Saul Wurman. Some experts call themselves information designers; others, information architects; still others, something else entirely. They all have an opinion on whether a name is even important in the first place. And they all give compelling evidence, particularly anecdotal, to support their cases.

Personally, I like “technical writer” — which I’ve used consistently over the past six years — partly because that’s been my job title everywhere I’ve worked, but also because I like the title. I’m a writer at heart, so I like keeping that in my job title. But the title “technical writer” can’t begin to represent the diverse skill sets and the diverse jobs of so many of the “information designers” in the “technical communication” field. Technical writer is merely one label, which accurately describes what I’ve been

doing so far in my career (mainly software documentation). I probably won’t be able to say the same ten or twenty years from now.

Whatever we call ourselves, we all understand each other to some degree. And we all have one major goal (for the most part): To make things clearer for our audiences. When I was in Chicago, it was interesting seeing how different people at different companies went about this in different (or the same) ways! The tools we use to accomplish the same (or similar) tasks; our relationships with subject matter experts and developers; the stages we’re at in our documentation and software development processes. Some of us do similar work but do it differently. Some of us do completely different work but do it using similar tools or processes. Coming back to the words of Dewitt Jones, there is no one right answer.

I only attended two sessions at the conference (I was presenting at the third time-slot on Monday), but I have since gone through many of the presentations and papers in the “Conference Session Materials” section of the STC site. And I am fascinated by the expertise out there. I looked particularly closely at the presentations dealing with usability and embedded Help, two areas we’re interested in at work right now. Some personal interests include indexing and science writing, and I also skimmed through the handouts for most of the online Help sessions. Following are the titles of some sessions that stood out for me:

- Usability testing.
 1. 99-Second Usability Tips (I attended this session — it was fun.),
 2. Whose UI Is It, Anyway?,
 3. Usability LIVE: Techniques for conducting evaluations and impacting product design,
 4. What Is Usability?

(Continued on page 9)

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

P.O. Box 133
 Pittsburgh, PA 15230
 Contact: Heather Lum
 Phone: 412-243-3151
 hlum@pobox.com

National Office

901 North Stuart Street
 Suite 904
 Arlington, VA 22203-1822
 Phone: 703-522-4114
 Fax: 703-522-2075

May CIC SIG Meeting: Web Resources for Finding Work

Compiled by Nancy Wetmore

Web Sites:

- <http://www.1099.com/c/de/li/links.html>

Magazine is no longer being updated, but links are good.

- A.C. Coy

A "national technical consulting and recruiting company with its corporate headquarters in Pittsburgh."

<http://www.accoy.com/msie.html>

- AQUENT

"AQUENT supplies companies with Graphic Designers, Web Designers, Production Artists, Presentation Graphics experts, Writers, Illustrators, Project Managers, and Desktop Support talent on a freelance, permanent, and try-before-you-hire basis."

<http://aquent.com/>

- Dice.com

"Welcome to dice.com, the leading online Information Technology (IT) job board with high tech permanent, contract and consulting jobs. And home to a world of career development resources and technical expertise to the world's IT professionals."

<http://www.dice.com/>

- eLance

"Use eLance to sell your professional services and deliver them online. eLance support features include Work Space file-sharing, international Billing and Payment and Resources. Create service profiles in categories that match your profession, then browse the project marketplace and bid for contracts. Buyers may also invite you to bid on their projects."

<http://www.elance.com>

- Freelance Writers (About.com)

<http://freelancewrite.about.com/careers/freelancewrite/mbody.htm>

- guru.com

"All over the world, millions of ambitious professionals are heading out on their own. They work as Web designers or Linux programmers, strategists or public relations specialists, writers or virtual CEOs. They describe themselves as consultants, freelancers, moonlighters, or hired guns. Their clients are Fortune 500 corporations, local businesses, fast-moving startups, and

anyone anywhere who needs serious brainpower."

<http://www.guru.com/>

- <http://www.iabc.com/homepage.htm>

- Monster.com

Editor's Note: A search 5/16/01 in Pittsburgh, subcategory Writer, listed 11 jobs.

<http://www.monster.com/>

- <http://www.net-temps.com/>

- <http://pittsburgh.bcentral.com/pittsburgh/>

- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

<http://classified.post-gazette.com/employment/>

- Society for Technical Communication

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

- Pittsburgh STC Chapter

<http://www.stcpg.org/employ/index.htm>

Essential: Post your 50-word personal summary.

<http://www.stcpg.org/employ/list.htm>

- Pittsburgh Technology Council

<http://www.pghtech.org/careers/>

- TECHWR-L mailing list website

<http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/employment/>

- Telecommuting Jobs

<http://www.tjobs.com/>

- Pittsburgh-Employment.com

<http://www.pittsburgh-employment.com/>

Mailing Lists

- pgh.jobs

pgh.jobs.offered

pgh.jobs.wanted

Links from 1099 "Just for IPs" (Independent Professionals)

- Career Magazine

"Skip over the wage-slave stuff, and concentrate on the many columns geared at specific IP fields."

<http://www.careermag.com/>

- The Contract Employee's Handbook

"The Contract Employee's Handbook is a veritable gold mine of information that can help you:

* Find your next assignment and the one after that..., * Increase your earning power..., * Deal effectively with employment agencies..., * Manage your money... * Build your own benefits package..., * And much, much more."

By James R. Ziegler, Ph.D.

<http://www.cehandbook.com/>

- Computer Consultants @ www.ezboard.com

"A very active discussion forum for computer consultants."

<http://server3.ezboard.com/bcomputerconsultants>

- Free Agent Nation

"Dan Pink, a writer who specializes in the growing IP movement, hosts this site that discusses IP issues. Get legal, business, and health insurance information, or talk to other IPs in a conference area."

<http://www.freeagentnation.com/>

- Home Office Magazine

"Articles covering the problems and pleasures of working at home."

http://www.entrepreneur.com/Your_Business/YB_Static/1,3097,homeoffice,00.html

- Janet Ruhl's Computer Consultant's Resource Page

"For the geek IP."

Editor's Note: Same URL as above.

http://www.entrepreneur.com/Your_Business/YB_Static/1,3097,homeoffice,00.html


- Madalyn's Marketing Links

Maintained by the University of Delaware MBA Program.

<http://www.udel.edu/alex/mba/main/madalyn/MARKET.HTM>

- Working Solo

"Author Terri Lonier's site offers many resources for independent professionals. Learn about the latest business books, find information on starting a business, and keep abreast of news that affects IPs."

<http://www.workingsolo.com/> 

Region 1/Region 2 Conference: Communicators in Concert

The STC Region One/Two Participatory Conference

By Rich Maggiani, Conference Manager

Regions One and Two invite you to attend a conference that emphasizes participation. Session leaders will present a wide range of insights, tools, and techniques, and devote at least a third of the session's time to audience involvement. You will then participate in discussions with these session leaders and your peers. We envision a lively dialog in which our collective thoughts, ideas, information, and experience raise everyone's expertise and awareness of the challenges and opportunities found in technical communication.

As technical communicators, we must keep pace with an ever-changing business environment. To remain competitive, we must master emerging skills and technologies while managing our careers in a highly demanding field. This is especially true today, when an uncertain economic future requires every firm to consider carefully the business practices, direction, and resources needed to meet their goals.

Communicators in Concert: A Participatory Conference can help you find answers. It will be held from Thursday, January 17 through Saturday, January 19 at a site (still to be determined) in northern New Jersey. Thursday is scheduled to be STC Leadership Day; all members currently in STC leadership position and those interested in becoming leaders are encouraged to attend. Friday and Saturday are scheduled for concert sessions.

Convenience was a key factor in our early planning. Thus, we chose a date that would

not conflict with any other STC regional event. We selected northern New Jersey because it offers a central location and ease of access. In addition, the conference hotel will be served by public transportation.

For your entertainment, Friday evening will feature a dinner/dance with a live performance by a local ensemble. The following Monday, January 21, is a holiday (Martin Luther King Day), so you can take time to explore New York City. Conference planners will provide information on area attractions and events.

If you would like to be a session presenter and help build the foundation for this exciting event, submit your proposals to Mary Precourt at mary@pdicreative.com before July 16. You have probably received our Call for Proposals in your email. If not, email the conference manager, Rich Maggiani at rich@pdicreative.com and he will send you the form.

So save the date. And talk up the conference among your peers. The greater the attendance, the greater the participation, the greater the value.

STC's 49th Annual Conference Call for Proposals

The call for proposals for STC's 49th Annual Conference was mailed as an insert with the April 2001 issue of Intercom. You can also access information and instructions for submitting proposals on the STC Web site. The deadline for the Society office to receive proposals is August 1, 2001.

The conference will be held May 5-8, 2002, in Nashville, Tennessee. The conference theme is "Leading the Technical Communication Revolution." For more information, please contact Buffy M. Bennett at buffy@stc.org.

Region 4 Conference Call for Papers

Call for Papers: Region 4 STC Conference

"Exploring Technical Communication and the User Experience"

Saturday, November 3, 2001

Hosted by the Southeastern Michigan Chapter

There's a growing industry awareness of the need to make software products more user friendly and to make e-commerce web sites that promote positive user experiences. Today's technical communicators want to explore these issues — and many others — at the 2001 STC Region 4 Conference to be held November 3, 2001, in the Ann Arbor, Michigan metro area.

Join us this fall and submit a presentation proposal today!

Submission Deadline: August 1, 2001

Submit session proposals online at: <http://www.stc-sm.org/region4.html>

Conference Photos



Big Winners

Pictures were downloaded from <http://stc.org/conferences.html>

Outgoing/Incoming STC Presidents



RAMEY
TECHNICAL
WRITING

Complete technical writing service from planning to publication

- Manuals
- Users Guides
- Reports
- Articles
- Brochures
- Technical Sales Support
- Catalogs
- Proposals
- Training Materials
- Newsletters
- Periodicals
- Procedures
- Presentations
- Courses & Seminars
- Publications Planning
- Online Documentation

412.833.5548

ramey@technical-writing.net (e-mail)
<http://www.technical-writing.net> (website)

Exhibits



Bill and JoAnn Hackos Workshops!

Managing Your Documentation Projects

When: July 9 and 10, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Location: American Red Cross in Falls Church, VA

Instructor: Bill Hackos

In this workshop, you will learn to:

- Develop a plan and follow through.
- Know what has to happen and when.
- Avoid procrastination.
- Track what everyone is doing and when they are supposed to be finished.
- Appreciate the need to pay attention to the details.

User and Task Analysis for Information Design

When: July 17 and 18, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Location: Extensity, Inc. in Emeryville, CA

Instructor: JoAnn Hackos

In this workshop, you will learn to:

- Apply inexpensive usability methods that yield critical design guidelines.
- Employ user workflow and taskflow to plan efficiently.
- Create a user model you can use during the life of the project.
- Make task analysis a tool for rapid prototyping.
- Conduct interactive interviews to discover what users really need.
- Create a user study plan from a standard template.
- Stay focused on users' issues.
- Decide who to study and how many.
- Choose the right technique to fit your time and budget.

...and much, much more!

Structured Writing for Single Sourcing

When: August 1 and 2, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Location: Freddie Mac in McLean, VA

Instructor: JoAnn Hackos

Well-structured content is the key to single-sourcing and is a necessity for moving to an XML authoring environment. Learn how to design flexible structures for the types of information your users need. Discover how to write using XML tags. Edit text for consistency, and manage the writing process in a single-source environment.

In this workshop, you will learn how to:

- Apply user profiles and task analysis to your Information Model.
- Identify and develop individual information types and determine what content units belong to each type.
- Apply minimalist principles and practice minimalizing content using your own materials.
- Assign XML tags and metadata to label content units.
- Write consistently so that content units and modules are reusable and easily translated.
- Eliminate duplication and near duplication.
- Modify existing content to accommodate multiple users and revisions.

*There are only 25 seats available to assure you receive individualized attention. Secure your seat by registering today!

For complete course descriptions, visit www.usabledesign.com.

** This is your chance to receive information design and human productivity expertise from JoAnn and Bill Hackos of Comtech Services! **

**YOU PUT BLOOD,
SWEAT AND TEARS
INTO YOUR WORK.
SO DO WE.**

Call for information about our new, state-of-the-art digital equipment and how it can help make your technical projects shine.

Sir Speedy[®]

PRINTING • COPYING • DIGITAL NETWORK

20411 Route 19, LaSalle Plaza

Cranberry Township

Voice: 724-776-2711

Fax: 724-776-3522

SS7118@aol.com

STC Member

TechComm Technical Writing

Experienced Technical Writer
Experienced Researcher

- Research Proposals
- Grant Proposals
- Contract Proposals
- Research Reports
- Articles
- Monographs
- Training Materials

Telephone: 412-343-2508

Telefax: 412-531-4796

blieberman2@compuserve.com

Highlights from Chicago: One STC Member's Perspective

(Continued from page 4)

- Embedded Help.
 1. Integrated User Assistance and Embedded Help - Without Limits (I attended this presentation), 2. Designing Embedded Help - Step by Step.
- Indexing.
 1. How to Edit an Index, 2. Online Indexing Revealed.
- Online Help in general.
 1. Linking Strategies for Online Help and Web Sites, 2. When Users Hate Help (I just love that title!), 3. Helping a Crowd: Online Help in Windows 2000 Server (this one is related to the topic I presented — it's a specific implementation of adapting Help for multiple users, while ours was a more general study).
- Technical communication, information design, or professional development.
 1. Tell Me, Show Me, Let Me (Bill Horton), 2. Blunders 2001 (Bill Horton), 3. Meet Me in RIO: Implementing Reusable Information Objects, 4. Editing Your Own Work, 5. Get to the Point! Go Plain English!, 6. The Perfect Fit: Understanding Work Styles, Learning Styles, and Technical Abilities.

There were, of course, many other interesting, useful, and professional presentations and papers. The ones on my list are only a few that caught my eye on first glance, or that fell within the realm of topics I was looking for at the time.

My own paper, which I co-wrote and co-presented with fellow STC member and Carnegie-Mellon class team member Anne Jackson, dealt with designing online Help for multiple audiences. While there is a lot more to be done in this area, and while our project only scratched the surface, it was exciting to be presenting on a topic that so many attendees seemed interested in. If you'd like to read our paper, it's on

the STC site. (The paper is at http://stc.org/48thConf/postconf/DownsJackson_Paper.pdf, and the presentation is at http://stc.org/48thConf/postconf/DownsJackson_Present.pdf.)

All in all, being in Chicago was a great way for me to become more involved with the technical communication community. I thought I had been involved, but attending the national conference showed me there is so much more to do, and especially to learn. There are so many others out there, beyond each of our own jobs and cities and lives — being at the conference really drove that point home for me. Designing usable interfaces and instructions touches many disciplines, bringing together technical writers, graphic designers, usability professionals, software developers, and management, just to name a few. And some individuals have actually worn multiple hats, either at the same time or at different instances in their careers.

This “jack of all trades” attitude makes the profession particularly rewarding, even if your goal is to specialize in just one thing. Technical communication has room for both specialists and generalists, and everything in between.

We are a hard-working, dedicated group of people who care about what we do. It's exciting to be a part of the technical communication industry at a time when it is really being recognized as a respected profession, and at a time when technology is advancing so quickly that we are needed even more than ever.

Dewitt Jones would be proud — because I've found my passion in life.

It's not an easy life, being a technical writer (or an information designer). There are tight schedules, shifting priorities, changing deadlines, and you're always learning something new. I wouldn't have it any other way.

*Christina Downs has been a technical writer for over six years and is currently working at Ansoft Corporation. Chris is also the Managing Editor of the **Blue Pencil**. She can be reached at stcdowns@aol.com or chrdowns@aol.com. Also check out her website at <http://members.aol.com/chrdowns/frameset.html>. *



Anne Jackson and Christina Downs

Blue Pencil is Going Online!

Starting with the September issue, we are going to try an online newsletter format for the Blue Pencil. You will continue to receive a single-page or postcard-sized "teaser" containing the meeting notice and highlights from the issue. The full issue will be available online in either HTML, PDF, or both.

We're still working out the details and would welcome suggestions from readers regarding format, tools, layout, and any other ideas you might have. (We're also looking for a new logo to go with the new online look -- don't miss the logo contest announcement on page 1!)

Some reasons we decided to move online include the cost of printing and mailing, various production issues involved with the printing, and the fact that in today's technologically advanced world, the STC, of all organizations, should have an online image for its newsletter.

Depending on the reaction from you, our readers, as well as the possible cost savings, we will decide after a few issues whether to keep the newsletter online or return to a print version.

I also may need some assistance with producing the newsletter next year. If anyone is interested in helping out in some way (doing layouts, soliciting material, printing teasers, writing articles, etc.), please contact me at stcdowns@aol.com or 724-532-3669.

We're excited about the new direction we are taking the Blue Pencil and hope that you will support our efforts to continue providing you with a valuable resource.

I would also like to thank everyone for your support, as well as your patience, during my first five months as newsletter editor. I've learned a lot over these past few months, and I know there have been

some bumps along the way. I appreciate your understanding, and I know things will continue to improve.

A special thanks goes out to Nancy Ott (the previous editor) for making the transition smooth, and to Jon Szish for helping with the layouts. Unfortunately, Jon will be unable to continue as Editor next year. Jon, I thank you for the time you were able to give over the past few months. I couldn't have done it without you!

Thank you everyone. Have a nice summer! See you next season.

- Chris Downs, *Blue Pencil Managing Editor*, stcdowns@aol.com, 724-532-3669. ✍



P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230

Summer, 2001



Annual Conference Wrap-Up (Picture of Opening Session)