

# blue pencil



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## Blue Pencil: Changing with the Times

By Mary Ecsedy

The science of motion studies teaches us that when processes are speeded up, it becomes possible to discover causal connections and patterns that are unobservable at the slower rate of “normal” time. Whether the object of study is a flower blooming, cell mitosis, or the life cycle of a galaxy, a clear picture of the processes at work can only emerge when they are greatly accelerated because any changes over time are perceived more easily when they are speeded up.

This is also true in archaeology, which may seem slow and painstaking, but which is really an accelerated trip through the layers of the past. It may have taken a Neolithic village hundreds of years to change the styles of its pottery, for example, but the archaeologist sees the pattern of stylistic

changes emerging from under his brush during a week of digging.

As I mentioned in my President’s Column, several of us recently went digging through the accumulated strata of our ‘Blue Pencil’ newsletter, which is currently celebrating its 40-something-th anniversary. I’m sure that readers have noticed some changes in the publication over the past 40 years, but nothing dramatic. It was quite a different experience for Nancy, Chris, and me when we looked through several decades worth of back issues in a single sitting.

Some of the things we saw were cultural artifacts caught in its pages like insects in amber. For example, we were entertained by the small notice that the newsletter should start using the gender-neutral terms such as “chairperson” rather than “chair-

man,” as more and more women were becoming technical writers and getting active in the STC. In 1975, the newsletter boasted of a meeting discussing whether women would survive in technical communication; in the August 1987 issue, Caigan McKenzie Nolan, Martha Swiss, Carolee Ketelaar, Dennis Carlin, Bob Zabielski, and Larry O’Toole became ChairPERSONs; and even as recently as 1986, an entire meeting was devoted to the role of women in research.

The logo also reflected changes over time. In the summer of 1974, it went from a more sedate text and straight black-and-white pencil to a funky image of Pittsburgh’s skyline done in the style made popular in the early 70’s by the psychedelic artist Peter Max. (He did the animation for the Beatles’ “Yellow Submarine”.) In September of 1979,

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## STC Online

By Nancy Carpenter

Last century, our chapter of STC joined the information age, and we have a lot of people to thank for it. Or blame for it, when we get tired of computers. In the beginning, there were Elliott Evans and Larry O’Toole. Later, came Bob Mohr, Marlene Miller, Karen Attubato, Joan Bondira, and you might yet join this list.

By 1995, STC international, and some large local chapters had posted websites. Larry O’Toole began working on a site for us,

and Elliott Evans, who had been developing his own web pages, also offered this service to the chapter. After discussion with Ray Janicko and about a year of work, Elliott finalized our first site.

The site went live in the summer of 1996. It contained six pages – president’s column, officer and committee list, events calendar, *Blue Pencil*, employment corner with communicators available and help wanted sections, and members’ on-line contact information. We were hosted on the STC national site.

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### 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:

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## President's Column

### How These Two Issues were Developed

By Mary Ecsedy

*Reprinted from the December 2001 Issue of Blue Pencil*

I have a B.A. in Anthropology. At first glance this seems completely unrelated to the field of technical writing, but I wear my Anthropologist hat on a daily basis. Whether it's knowledge of human factors, linguistics, interviewing skills, cultural issues, or using "participant observer" techniques while working with developers or other "tribes" such as users, I use nearly everything I learned in school. However, I've never before had much chance to be an archaeologist, until now.

The December 2001 and January 2002 issues of the *Blue Pencil* are dedicated to celebrating the newsletter's 40th anniversary. In preparation for this occasion, Chris Downs, Nancy Carpenter, and I met over pizza after work at my house a couple of weeks ago to go through *Blue Pencil* back issues. Unlike archaeologists digging down through time with each layer of dirt, we began with the oldest issue (1959) and worked our way forward through time. We covered about 3 decades in a couple of hours, and the dig yielded many interesting things to the light of day. It was a remarkable experience that I hope you will all get to share while reading these issues.

It was truly fascinating to discover cultural artifacts, such as the changing logo styles, and the discussion about changing "chairman" to "chairperson," which took place in the early 1970's. We discovered that the content of the newsletter changed as the industrial base of Pittsburgh (and the U.S.) changed dramatically during the 70's and 80's. We saw evidence of changing technologies, such as references to word processors when those were so rare that the chapter featured a meeting that included a tour of one.

What we also saw, like any good archaeologists, was that not much has changed about people over time. Technical writers have always worried about keeping up with

changing technologies, addressing users' needs, working with developers, etc. It was comforting to see those core concerns expressed over time, in the midst of all the turmoil.

I hope you enjoy this trip into the past as much as I did, and that it gives you some encouragement as we struggle together toward an uncertain future.

Sincerely,

Mary Ecsedy

## Pittsburgh Blue Pencil Wins Award of Merit - 1975

*Reprinted from Blue Pencil, March 1975*

The Pittsburgh Blue Pencil has won second prize at the annual Society contest for newsletters representing chapters in the size range 50-100 members. The first five issues of the '74-'75 Chapter year (through January) were the basis for judging. Editor Ken McCoy reports his appreciation for the help and helpful criticism received. Editing, typing, and printing support have been excellent. He has learned much and derived great satisfaction from getting out the paper. In another column, see his call for help needed to boost the Blue Pencil to the top of the ladder. First prize for chapters in our group went to the Stimulus, newsletter of the 53-member East Ontario chapter. Our congratulations to editor Sam Estwick for his effective effort. We regret we haven't a copy of the Stimulus. Best of Show was captured by the Chicago Byline, under the editorship of Norm Linsell. It has been a special treat exchanging issues with the Byline, which consistently offers high-quality journalism in all departments - format, art, exposition, and relevance yet variety of content.

And Blue Pencil again won an award under editor Nancy Ott. See page 14.

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## STC Online

(Continued from page 1)

Since traffic is the life's blood of a website, and sharing information is near and dear to our hearts, Elliott began to post the archived *Blue Pencil* issues in HTML format. He wrote a script to read the Ventura Publisher files to HTML since browsers at that time could search only HTML documents. Elliott completed the archiving back to 1995. We welcome volunteers to take us further back into the *Blue Pencil* issues!

Our next webmaster, Bob Mohr, moved the site from the STC server to a new host, added a site search mechanism, incorporated frames and a table of contents (which changed the look and navigation in the site), and began the use of PDF versions of the newsletter.

The next webmaster Karen Attubato redesigned the site to today's look. Present webmaster Joan Bondira recently began her service to the site and will continue the flow of quality maintenance.

Bob also initiated the listserv for our chapter in 1998. The list began as an e-mail distribution list, administered by Marlene Miller. We sent postings to Marlene, and she would forward them to the group. This list graduated to a listserv, which Marlene Miller still moderates to keep content related to technical communication.

This century, that is, in June of 2001, *Blue Pencil* went online. Due to publication costs and production issues, we no longer distribute a printed version, although this could be changed by popular acclaim.

So STC has made a smooth transition to the twenty-first century. We are online and electronically in touch. And we plan to continue to move with the times.

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## A Lineage of Editors

The dates listed below are the dates when a major change occurred on the Blue Pencil staff (such as a new editor starting or staff members joining the team). Some of these dates are approximate, and we were unable to find names for some years. We apologize for any inaccuracies that may have slipped through. The current editors congratulate past editors on issues well done and appreciate the time they have taken to produce an excellent informational tool for STC Pittsburgh.

**1959:** H. E. McGannon

**December 1972:** Jon A. Berger

**September 1973:** Ron Field

**January 1974:** Ron Field and Tom Mailey

**Summer 1974:** Ken McCoy

**September 1976:** Robert K. O'Brien

**February/March 1978 - 1979:** Trisha Shannon

**September 1979 - 1980:** Cheryl Ritts

**September 1981:** Jean Frankenberg

**January 1982:** Jean Frankenberg and Arlene Shubock

**September 1982:** Arlene Shubock

**February 1983:** Nancy S. Kneip

**September 1983:** Connie Donaldson

**October 1984:** Tammy McClellan

**September 1985:** Ron Field

**May 1986:** Peg Bentley

**April 1987:** John Morley

**September 1988:** Michael Dolhi

**September 1989:** John Clark

**October 1992:** Ron Wodaski

**January 1993:** Bill Proudfoot

**November 1994:** Marlene Miller

**Summer 1997:** Nancy Ott

**January 2001:** Christina Downs and Jonathan Szish

**June 2001:** Christina Downs

**October 2001:** Christina Downs and Heather Lum

**November 2001:** Christina Downs, Nancy Carpenter, and Heather Lum

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## Announcement

### Pittsburgh Chapter Changes Region

By Mary Ecsedy

*President, STC Pittsburgh*

Due to some STC Region reorganization efforts, the Pittsburgh chapter is changing regions, from Region 2 to Region 4. This change goes into effect January 1, 2002.

The Region 4 Director-Sponsor is:

Mike Bates

[mpbates@software.rockwell.com](mailto:mpbates@software.rockwell.com)

If you have any questions about this change please let Mike or me know.

Thank you.

Mary Ecsedy



### Chapter Membership:

227

### Total Membership:

24,172

### New Members:

Susan A. Gatt

Donald A. Leright

Scott Palermo

Benjamin MRush, III

Chris Scott

### Members Transferring into Chapter:

Nancy A. Wydro

Kevin S. Lee

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## Letter from the Editor

### Looking Back and Forward in the Technical Communication Timeline

By Christina Downs

*Managing Editor, Blue Pencil*

Welcome to the second in our two-part series dedicated to the history and continuing development of the STC in Pittsburgh! While the December issue focused more generally on the STC and the technical communication industry in Pittsburgh, the January issue focuses on STC Pittsburgh communication media, including the website, the mailing list, and the newsletter.

*Blue Pencil* has recently gone online, and Chapter President Mary Ecsedy discusses some of the changes to the newsletter over the years. Nancy Carpenter, Chapter Secretary and *Blue Pencil* Production Editor, describes the history of the STC Pittsburgh website and mailing list. We've also included a list of *Blue Pencil* editors and pictures of logos from throughout the years.

We hope you enjoy our dedication series.

## Employment Issues Column

### What are you worth?

By Pam Schmidbauer

*Associate Area Manager - Aquent*

I recently read an article that said the technical communications field is in the middle of a growth spurt. Technical communication has become an increasingly essential occupation in business and government, and jobs can be found in almost any industry sector because of the need for users guides, instruction manuals, and training materials. Demand for technical writers is expected to grow because of the need to communicate new scientific and technical information to others. Industry expansion will provide most new jobs, although those who leave the occupation will also create many new jobs.

Technical writers often have to decide if they want to do contract work, or look for a full-time permanent position. Keep in mind that permanent work usually pays 10% - 15% less than contracting, but it includes vacations and holiday pay, health benefits and various other company perks like educational reimbursement. In the contracting world, companies often tell you that the contract is for "X" period of time but can let you go at anytime. Obviously, vacation pay, holiday pay and health benefits aren't part of the deal.

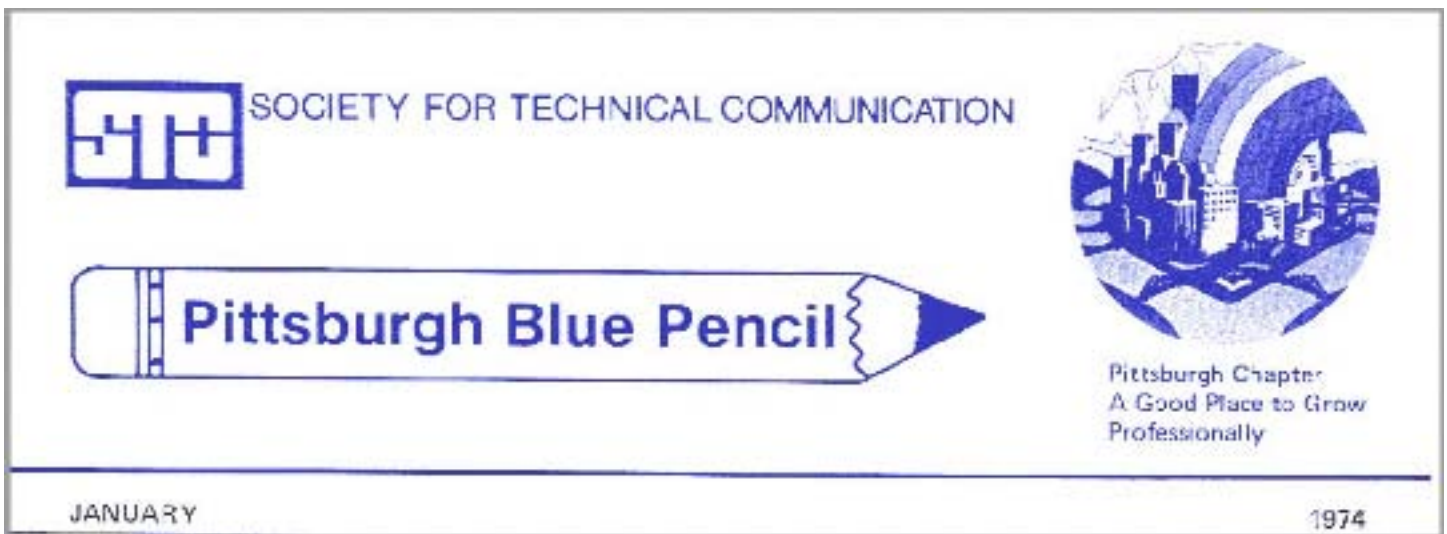
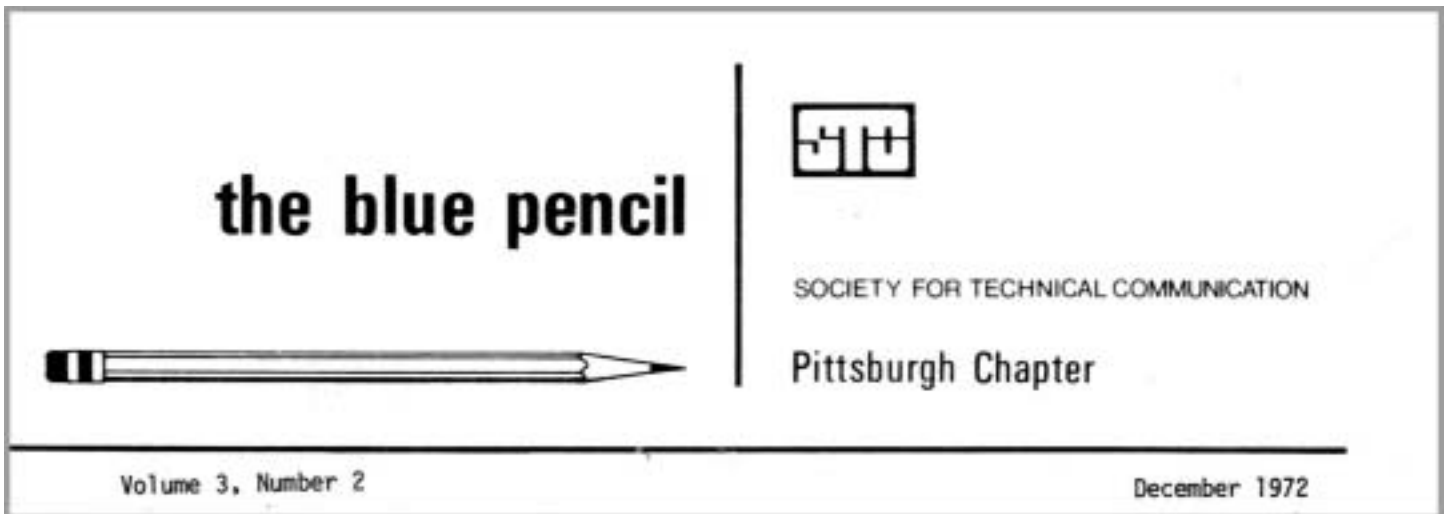
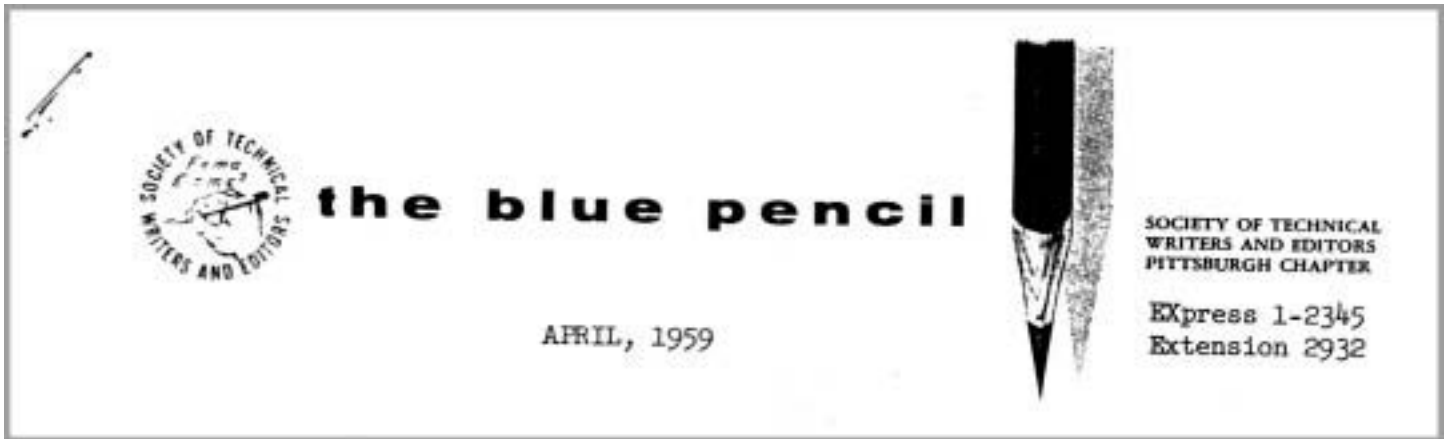
With all that in mind, it always helps to know your market value. Salaries in every field

vary depending on years of experience, skills and subject area. Freelance technical writers can make anywhere from \$25 to \$150 an hour, and up, depending on specialized skills. But it's not "easy money." Highly paid communicators have years of experience in the technologies they cover and are able to translate complex concepts into easily understood prose.

There are a lot of salary surveys out there, but I wanted to point you to a Proposal Skill and Price Guide that we use to help our client's figure out how much to pay for writers especially in the proposal area. Go to [www.aquent.com](http://www.aquent.com) and look under free tools and you will see where you can sign up to receive this guide. Keep in mind that this guide gives you national numbers. Pittsburgh generally falls in the mid to lower end of pay ranges.

*Pam Schmidbauer is Associate Area Manager at Aquent and can be reached at [pams@aquent.com](mailto:pams@aquent.com) or 412-322-4940. Aquent is the world's largest talent agency for creative professionals. Headquartered in Boston, Aquent leverages both the Internet and a network of 58 offices in 12 countries to provide independent professionals access to work, training, and the same insurance, retirement, and cash-flow management benefits enjoyed by traditional W-2 workers. <http://www.aquent.com>.*

# Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002



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## Tools and Tips

### Need a Graphics Tool? Look at Paint Shop Pro

When it comes to graphics software for tech writers, most people probably think of Adobe's PhotoShop. It's a great package. And why not? It has lots of features and it's popular. It's also expensive. Amazon lists PhotoShop for \$609 and \$199 for the latest version upgrade. PhotoShop also has a steep learning curve. However, an alternative to PhotoShop is a program called Paint Shop Pro by Jasc Software ([www.jasc.com](http://www.jasc.com)).

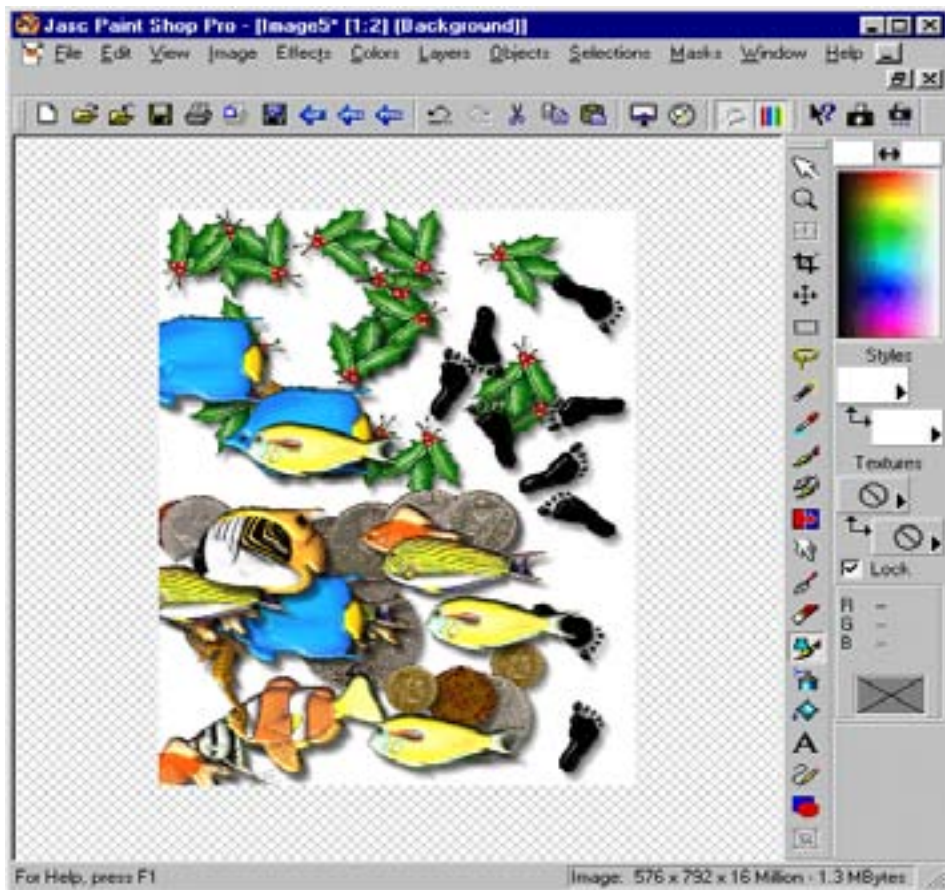
Paint Shop Pro (PSP) has been around for 10 years and has evolved to contain most of the features found in PhotoShop, including an animation tool, yet it remains easy to learn and use. Best of all, the cost of PSP is only \$69 (also at Amazon). That's one-tenth the cost of PhotoShop! Version upgrades are less than \$40.

Now, if you're a hard-core graphic artist who wrings every bit of PhotoShop and still craves more potential, then PSP may not be for you. However, if you're a tech writer whose graphic needs fall among the following, PSP may be just what you need without the complexity and expense of PhotoShop:

- Screen captures (with/without the cursor/mouse pointer included)
- Convert graphic files from one format to another (singularly or in a batch mode)
- Draw simple to moderately complex diagrams (using multiple layers if needed)
- Increase/decrease the color count in a graphic
- Scan images to create graphic files
- Touch-up or alter a graphic (copy and move, rotate, change color occurrences, etc.)
- Apply special effects (75 in all) to graphics (e.g., buttonize, blur, fade, textures, distortions, 3D, etc.)
- Use vector and raster objects
- Retouch, repair, and edit photos

- Optimize Web graphics (e.g., image slicing, rollovers, transparency, resolution, etc.)
- Create custom vector objects and store them in a library for later use

The Paint Shop Pro environment doesn't look much like the PhotoShop environment, though I did squish the screen a bit to fit this space:



**Figure 1: PSP environment and toolbars**

Although many of the icons look different from those in PhotoShop, most of the functionality in PhotoShop is also in PSP.

The multitude of images shown in Figure 1 were created with one of PSP's tools called the Picture Tube. Each tube (four were used in Figure 1) is a collection of images grouped together into a single file. As you drag the cursor and click the mouse, the images are "spilled" out of the tube. There are several ways to configure drawing the tube's contents, and you can also create your own tube files.

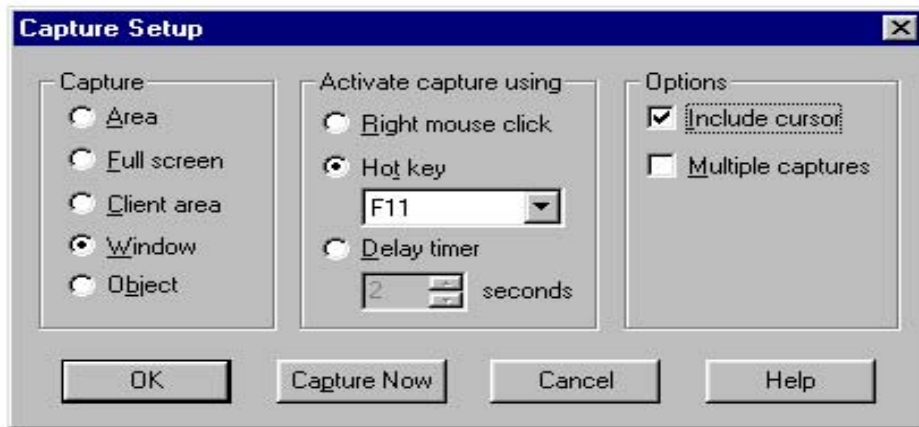
Screen captures with PSP are a breeze. Start by clicking the Capture Setup icon on the toolbar and choosing your capture settings as shown in Figure 2 on page 7.

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## Tools and Tips

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**Figure 2: Screen capture settings**

Notice the option to perform multiple captures. This is great when you're capturing a sequence of screen changes. I also use PSP to alter the captured screens. Sometimes a screen shot will contain sensitive information. Using PSP's text tool, I replace the sensitive info with bogus info.

If you have an artistic flair, you can do a great deal in PSP with vector graphics and vector layers. Figure 3 is an example of what can be done with vector objects and a little imagination.

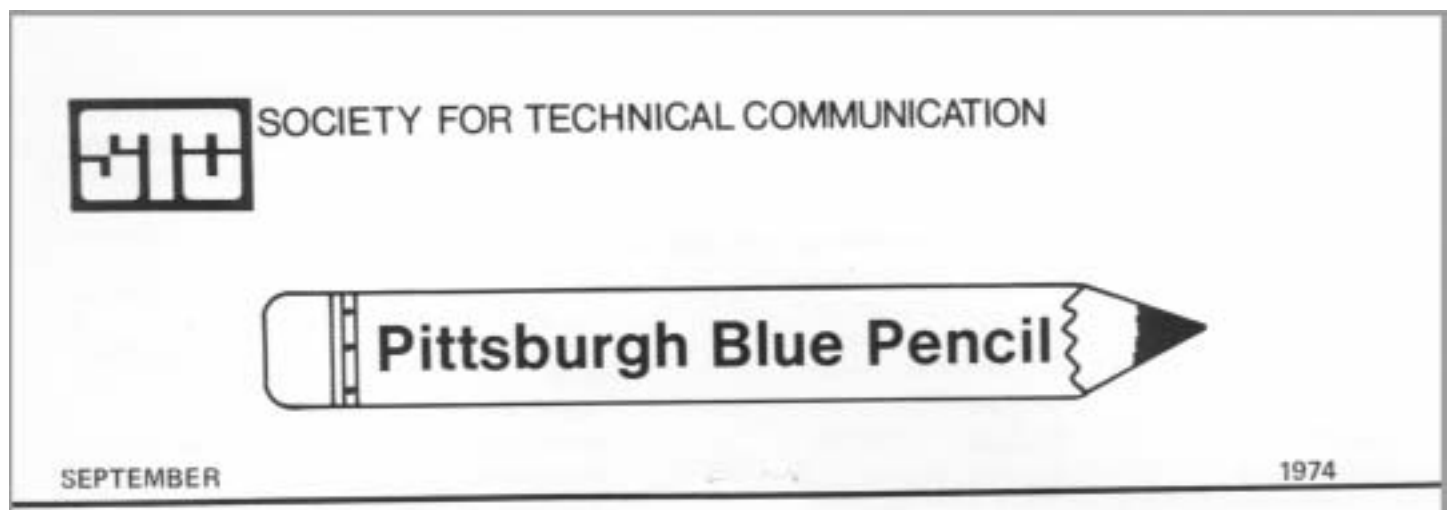
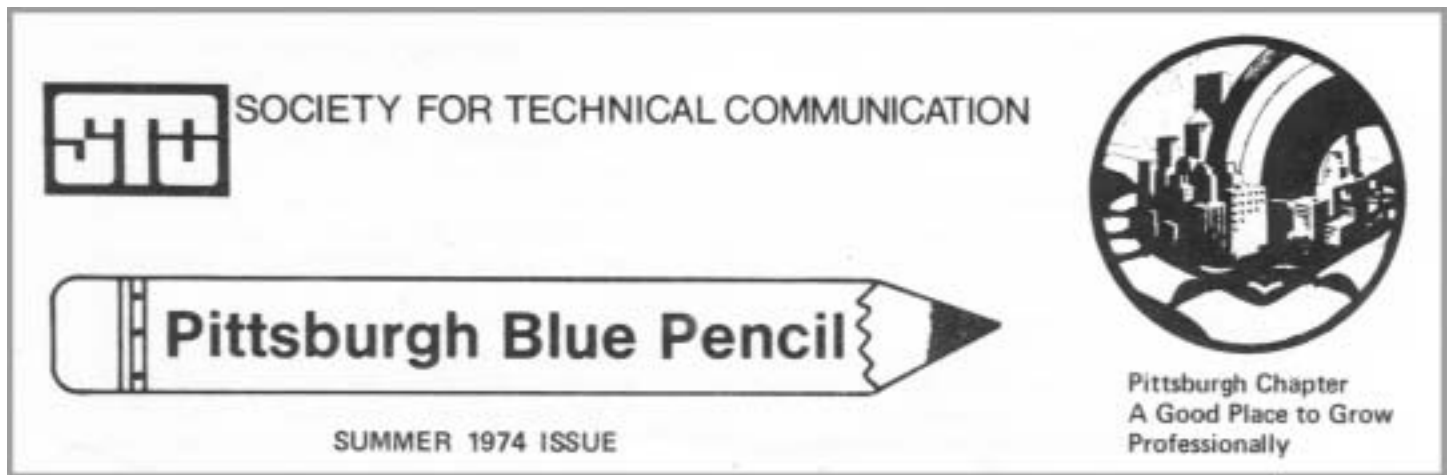


**Figure 3: Sample graphic made with vector objects**

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## Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

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## Blue Pencil: Changing with the Times

(Continued from page 1)

this switched to a more realistic drawing of the city stretched across the top of the newsletter. Then, in 1991, this again was replaced by a more sober “STC” logo primarily in text. In conversion to the online format, the logo just recently changed to its current drawing of a blue pencil, perhaps expressing nostalgia for our hard-copy output roots, or perhaps attempting a freer,

less sobering representation of techcomm in Pittsburgh. Reprints of these logos are scattered throughout this issue.

The fonts used in the newsletter also changed, shifting back and forth between a computer-style typeface and other fonts, such as Arial and Times, possibly signifying changes in technology or attitudes about design. There were also often

changes as new editors came on board, in logos and design and typeface, some slight and some dramatic, as *Blue Pencil* moved forward.

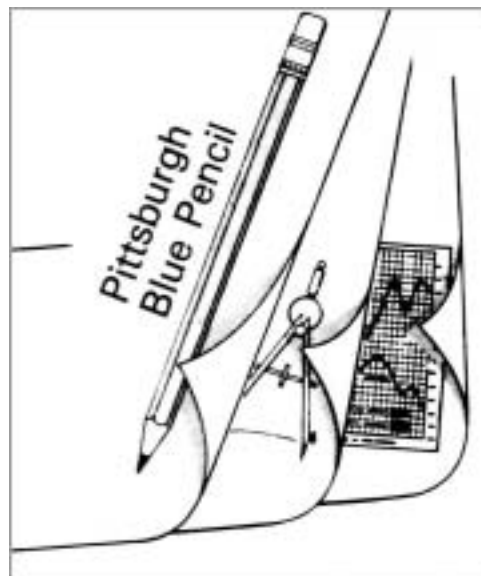
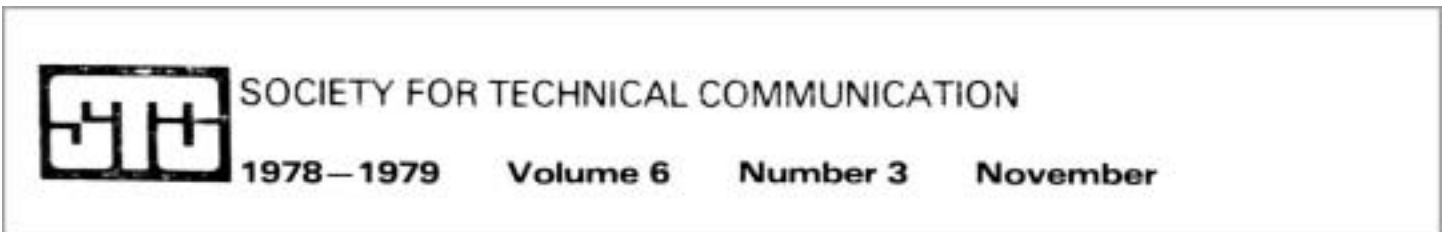
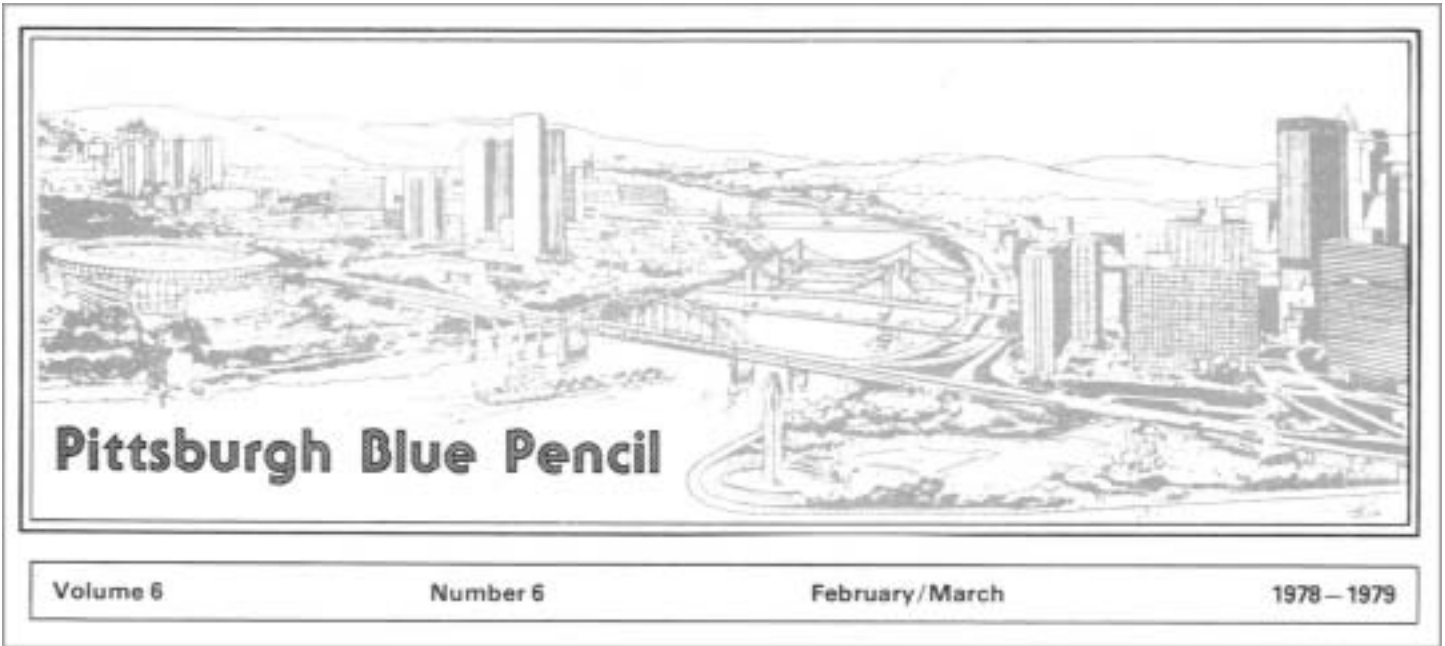
It was interesting to find evidence of technical changes within our profession, such as a meeting that featured a tour of a word processor at the beginning of the digital

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# Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

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## Tools and Tips

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Another feature is the batch file converter. I use PSP quite a bit to convert graphic files from a larger file format, such as BMP, to smaller formats such as GIF, JPG, or PNG. The batch converter is especially helpful here. Place all of the files you want to convert into a directory, then tell PSP which files to convert, select the new format, and watch it go. Dozens of files can be converted in less than a minute.

If you need to include actual photos in your documents and have a need to touch them up a bit, you can do it with PSP. Several photo enhancement features are available:

- Automatic color balance
- Automatic contrast enhancement
- Automatic saturation enhancement

- Deinterlace
- Moiré pattern removal
- Scratch removal
- Clarify
- Fade correction
- Color correction
- Red-eye removal

I once used the Moiré pattern removal to alter some black and white scans I made of photos from an old high school yearbook. It worked great. I scanned the images directly into PSP using its ability to import from a TWAIN compliant scanner.

An outstanding feature of PSP is its extensive online help system. Every feature in

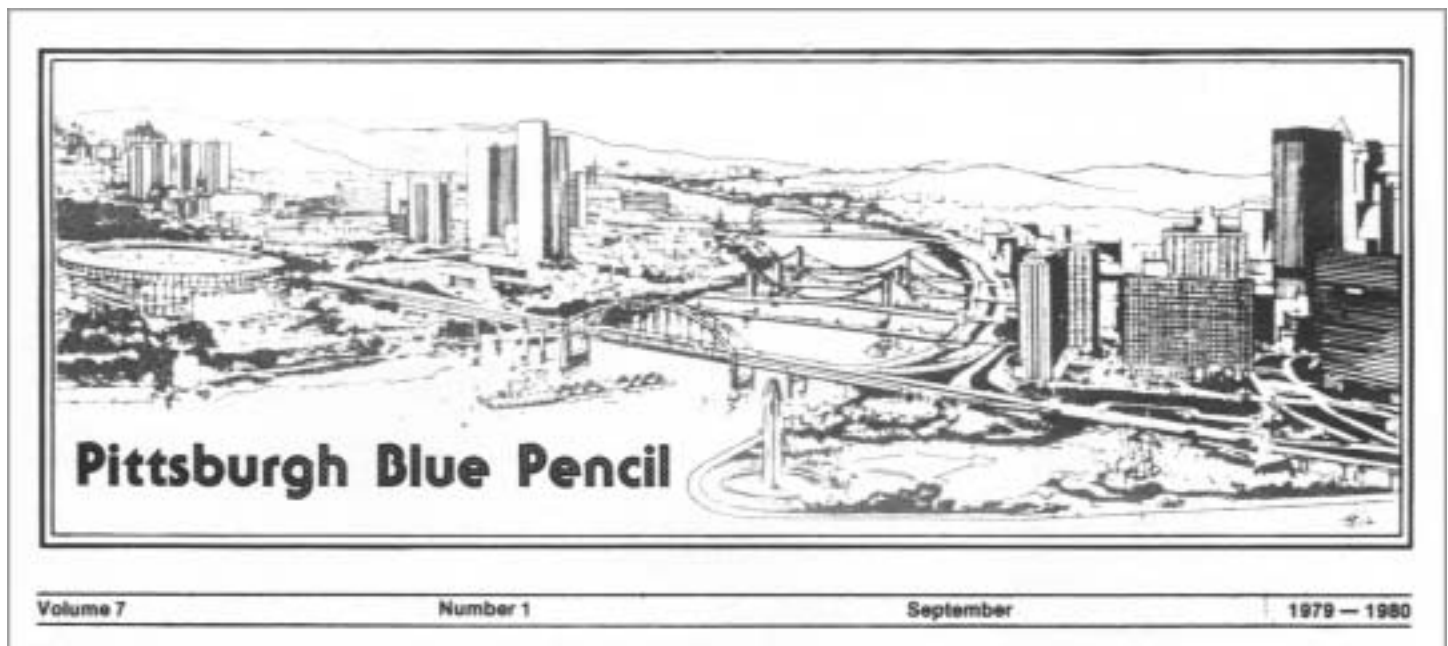
PSP is fully explained in the help with lots of pop-up windows and related topic links. It includes a huge index and full-text search capability.

Dollar-for-dollar, Paint Shop Pro offers the biggest bang for the buck. If you're in the market for a graphics tool, take a close look at Paint Shop Pro. I think you'll like what you see. An evaluation copy of PSP is available for download from [www.jasc.com](http://www.jasc.com). Links to program updates, picture tube files, buttons, and other freebies are also available at the site.

*Bob Mohr is a senior member of STC and a technical writer at BillingZone, LLC. He can be reached via email at [bob.mohr@billingzone.com](mailto:bob.mohr@billingzone.com).*

## Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

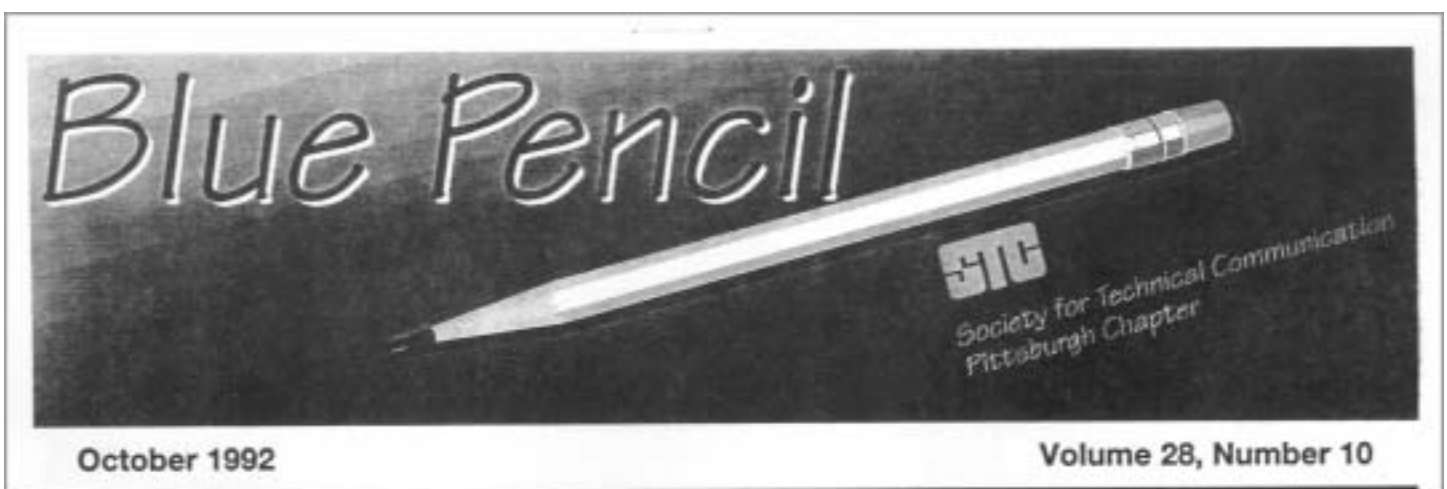
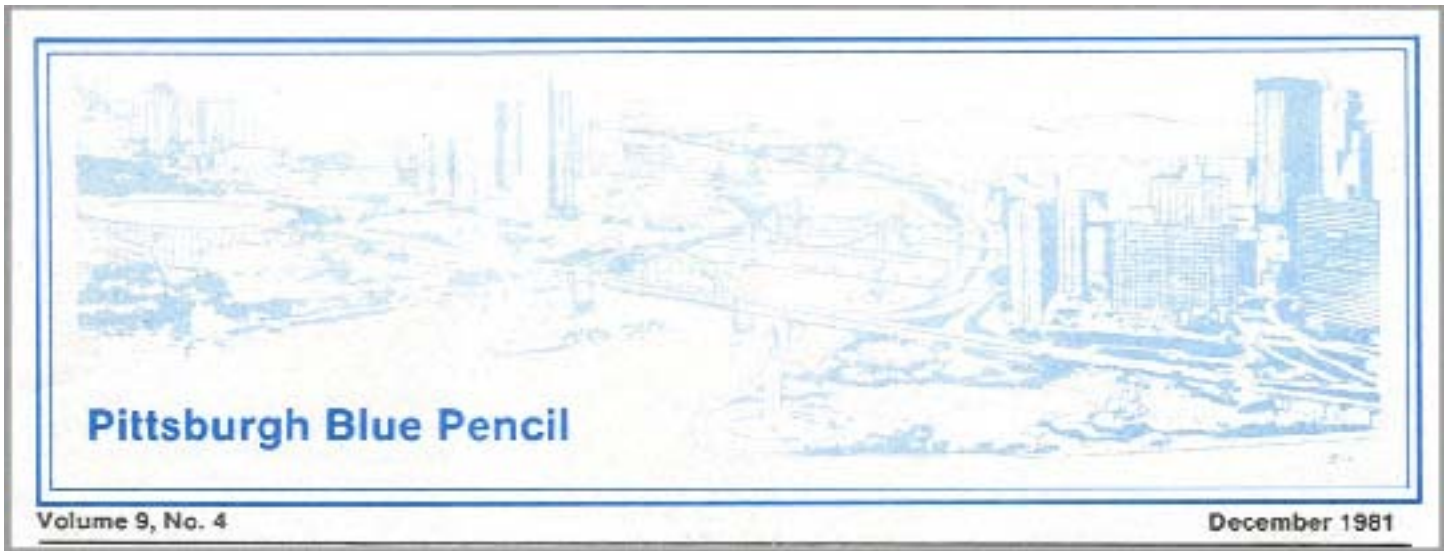
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# Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

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## Blue Pencil: Changing with the Times

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revolution. It was also interesting to see that coping with technical changes and struggling to help users have been constant concerns of tech writers throughout the decades.

Our biggest discovery was the dramatic change in the style and content of the newsletter overall, which occurred in the early-to-mid-80's. Until around this time, the newsletter consisted primarily of meeting notices and minutes, schedules, and announcements. It was an informational pointer to the meetings and other events that comprised the technical writing society in Pittsburgh. There was definitely a sense of community within its pages, but the *'Blue Pencil'* was not used in an interactive way. It did not in itself reflect that activity in its content; that's what the meetings were for.

The documentation was all hard copy output, and the work was primarily hard-core industrial production. The STC frequently held meetings that were sponsored by large corporations and had joint meetings with other technical and scientific organizations, such as the American Society of Chemists, the Pittsburgh Chemists Club, and Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, as well as other writing organizations, notably the International Association of Business Communicators. Pittsburgh was no longer at the peak of its post-war industrial output, but the companies mentioned in the newsletter were the 20th century giants: IBM, Westinghouse, Xerox, U.S. Steel, etc. There was a sense of the tremendous economic activity in Pittsburgh all through the 60's and 70's. There was very little of what we would today call "content" in the newsletter during all that time.

All of this changed as dramatically in the 1980's as pottery styles did thousands of years ago after the invention of the pottery wheel. By 1989, the names of the industrial giants largely disappeared from the *'Blue Pencil'*. There were still official announcements, meeting minutes, etc., but there also began to appear articles that imparted

knowledge and skills: tutorials, how-to's, examples, problem-solving scenarios, practical tips, and advice. This kind of information came to dominate the newsletter within a very short time. The newsletter became more interactive. Before, it had been an informational pointer to society, but the function of the newsletter altered; it became more and more that of the social gathering, containing the information people used to find elsewhere.

What caused the dramatic change?

I believe it's a reflection of the revolution that occurred in the industrial base of the United States in the early 1980's, which hit Pittsburgh so terribly hard. (It would be interesting to see if the same pattern of content change is evident in the newsletters of other chapters.) The old industrial giants died or changed beyond recognition, and the work culture they fostered and embodied died with them. Gone were the research and development labs; gone were the internal training and employee development programs; gone were the managed careers; gone were the accumulated stores of knowledge capital that companies once valued as their greatest asset. Technical writers were no longer receiving training at work, and "career paths" became a matter of the individual worker's concern, not the employer's.

At the same time, the digital revolution was getting under way, and the new tools and technologies began to emerge at an accelerated rate. The internet became more and more prominent, and the economic base of Pittsburgh switched from extractive industrial output to high-tech. Technical writers turned to one another for help and support as the world changed around them and they lost much of the corporate-sponsored support they once enjoyed. They began to use the *'Blue Pencil'* as a means of keeping up with new skills needed to survive.

As the new industry began to take off down the information super-highway, the technical writers began to network online as well,

and the first URLs and email addresses began to appear in the newsletter.

As the needs of the technical writing community in Pittsburgh have changed along with its economic base, the *'Blue Pencil'* has continued to evolve to meet those needs. It began as an informational pointer to society. Then, as the social space shrank, the newsletter took on more of its functions. Today, thanks to the networking that began in the 80's, we now have an electronic communal life that we participate in through email, list-serves, web pages, etc. Once more, the *'Blue Pencil'* is keeping up. It has just undergone another revolutionary change by switching to online delivery, and is now in the process of becoming a part of the virtual social space that more and more of us occupy daily.

I don't know what changes the next 40 years will bring, but I'm certain that the *'Blue Pencil'* will continue to evolve to support the Pittsburgh technical writing community through it all. I know that the STC writers who dig through old issues of the *'Blue Pencil'* on the occasion of its 80th anniversary will find themselves the heirs to a rich inheritance, as we do today.

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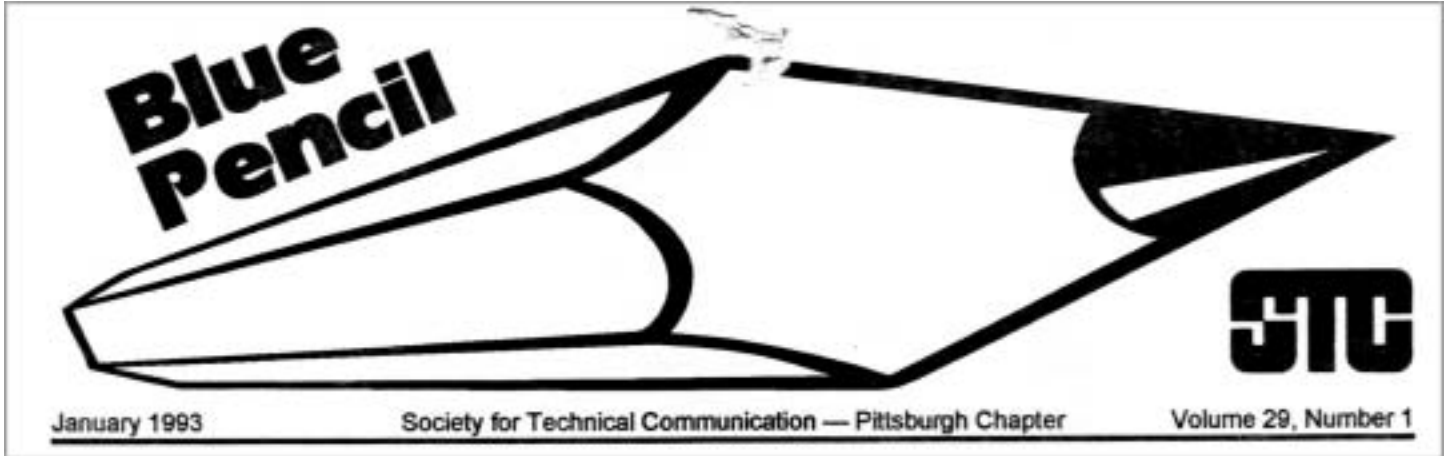
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# Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

(Continued from page 11)

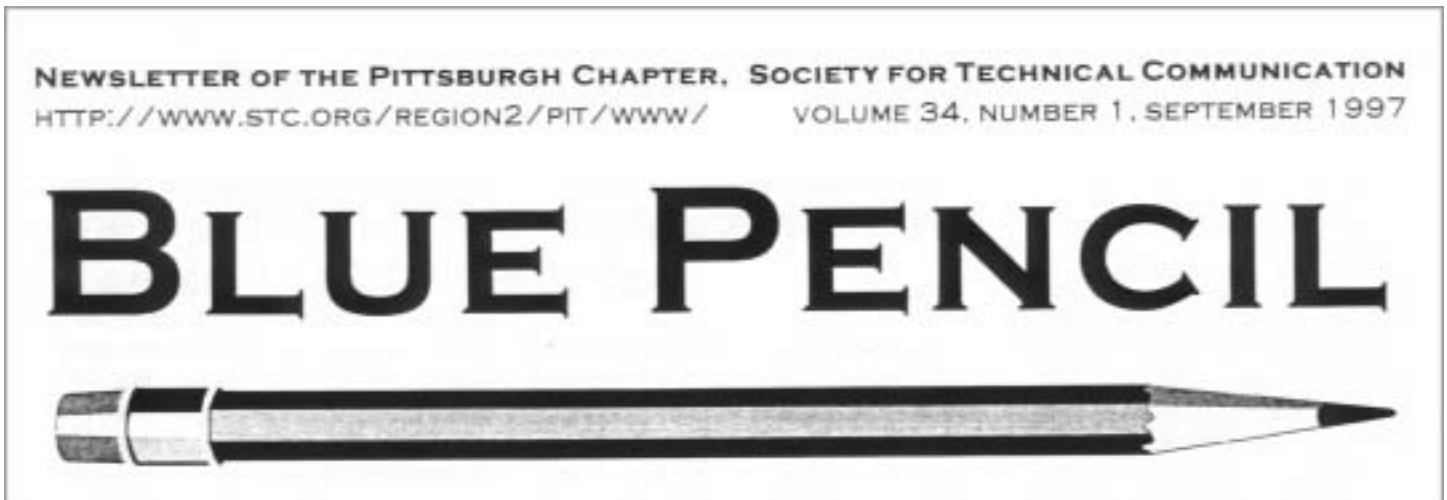


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## Venerable Logos: Blue Pencil from 1959 to 2002

*(Continued from page 13)*



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## Pittsburgh Blue Pencil Wins Award of Merit - 1997

*Reprinted from Blue Pencil??????*

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# January STC Chapter Meeting

Educational Opportunities for Technical Communicators

**WHEN:** Tuesday, November 27  
2001, 6:30-8:30P pm.

**WHERE:** Pittsburgh Technology  
Council Training Room

**COST:** There is no charge for  
this meeting. Light refreshments  
will be provided..

**RSVP:** Please reply by 3 pm on  
Friday, November 23, to Darlene  
Mullenix, Meeting Coordinator,  
by calling her at (412) 288-8676  
or by emailing her at  
dmullenix@federatedinv.com.



P.O. Box 133  
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JANUARY, 2002

VENERABLE BLUE PENCIL: PART 2 IN AN HISTORICAL SERIES