

blue pencil



2002 Region 4 Conference

Mark your calendars to attend the upcoming Region 4 Conference.

The Pittsburgh chapter was recently moved into Region 4, which also includes Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. The Central Ohio Chapter of the STC is hosting the 2002 Region 4 Conference on November 8 and November 9, 2002.

The Leadership Conference will be held on Friday afternoon, November 8, 2002 at Chase Manhattan Mortgage Corporation in Easton, OH. Tina Rich will present a hands-on session on Tongue Fu!, followed by a presentation on the state of the Society from Ed See, STC President, and Mike Bates, Region 4 director/sponsor.

The Region 4 Conference will be held on Saturday, November 9, 2002, at Columbus State Community College. This year's conference will feature several nationally known speakers and topics from the 49th Annual STC Conference that was held in Nashville, TN, in May. Topics from the national conference included: cascading style sheets, XML/single-sourcing, information architecture, web usability, and help authoring

trends. Many of these same vital topics will be addressed at the Regional Conference. Further, the same industry leaders who presented these topics in Nashville will be coming to Columbus to deliver their expertise to you.

There is a full day planned with over 20 topics presented by a variety of speakers. Neil Perlin will present two sessions: one on XML and the other on small steps to single sourcing. Joel Sklar will deliver the keynote address and present a session on cascading style sheets. We will also have hands-on sessions; Michael Starr will share his expertise on Dreamweaver and Course Builder.

Learn how to conquer MS Word, hear the confessions of a professional service consultant (or how to redefine your work in this tight job market), learn about preemptive project management, writing for the web, help authoring trends, web usability, industry gurus, and dealing with change. Other sessions include a job hunting panel, online editing, special needs, and information architecture.

The half-day Leadership Conference is \$50 for non-members, \$40 for members, \$35 with corporate discount (3 or more from the same company), \$20 for students. The Region 4 Conference is \$95 for non-members, \$85 for members, \$75 with corporate discount, and \$25 for students. To attend both the Leadership and Region 4 Conference, the costs will be: \$135 for non-members, \$115 for members, \$100 with corporate discount, and \$30 for students.

So, plan now to attend this information-packed conference! Don't forget to mark November 8 and 9, 2002 on your calendar. For more information, contact Brenda McGuire at mcguireb@battelle.org or Sue Wolford at sue.wolford@chase.com, or visit our conference Web site at: www.centralohiostc.org/region4conf.

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Call for Entries for Pittsburgh Chapter Publications Competition!

Why compete? Whether you win, place, or show, you will receive professional evaluation of your work that is worth far more than the entry fee. If you win, you will receive an excellent line for your resume.

Entries are due on October 14. They must have been produced or substantially revised since September 1, 2000. Fees are \$70 for

STC members, \$80 for non-STC members, and \$60 for students.

See <http://www.stcpg.org/calendar/comp.htm>. You may also contact our competition managers: Chris Keefer (keefercj@adelphia.net) for technical publications and technical art; Marlene Miller (mgmiller@telerama.com) for online communication.

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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

I would like to address — chapter competitions, and chapter meetings.

Chapter competition

If you have completed a project in technical publications, online communication, or technical art within the past two years, your work is eligible for the chapter competition.

Everybody who enters the competition receives benefits equal to or greater than the value of the entry fee. Winners receive professional recognition for themselves and their company (or client). Winners of a distinguished award, the highest category, are sent to the STC international competition. Winning an STC award at any level is an excellent professional credential.

All entries receive a written critique of the entry by a competition judge. This independent review is itself worth the entry fee.

If you have never entered the chapter competition, I strongly encourage you to do so. Even if your entry does not win, you may benefit from the judges' review. If your entry wins, you will have a great accomplishment to add to your résumé.

Chapter meetings

One measure of the strength of an STC chapter is the value of service that the chapter provides to its members. Thanks to the efforts of several volunteers, I believe our chapter is currently doing a very good job by this measure.

I was very pleased with our opening meeting of the chapter year in September. Heather McQuaid of Pittsburgh-based MAYA Design provided an excellent presentation about human factors-based methods for evaluating products. The number of attendees (approximately 35) was impressive for a chapter of our size. More importantly, however, was the mix of the attendees. There was a mix of old faces and new; regular and occasional attendees. It is always wonderful to see new faces at our meetings, and it's encouraging to see renewed interest in chapter meetings by more senior members.

Our regular monthly chapter meetings provide a diverse line-up of speakers and topics, as well as an opportunity to network with other writers. The Pittsburgh Chapter also sponsors two special interest groups. The independent writers SIG is enthusiastically run by Barb Stanton (Bstanton@SEEC.com), and meets every two months. WorkQuest, a weekly support and networking group for writers seeking work, was conceived and is run by Janis Ramey (ramey@technical-writing.net).

If you have ideas about how the Pittsburgh chapter can better support its members, I would love to hear them. You can reach me via email to arh@groupwellesley.com, or by telephone at 412-363-3481.

New WorkQuest Group Provides Practical Help for Job-Seekers

By Mary Ann Pike

The unemployment rate is at its highest level in years, and the technology field is particularly hard-hit. Technical writers are victims of this economic downturn, along with the engineers and programmers who find themselves out of work. Spending months looking for a job, struggling to have your résumé stand out from the hundreds that are submitted for each job that opens,

can become a disheartening experience. Janis Ramey, a long-time member of STC, decided to start a support group for unemployed writers (and friends) in the Pittsburgh area.

Janis thought that it would be good to have a place that people could go to get themselves out of the house and thinking about

(continued on page 3)

Independents and SIG Meeting

The September Independents and SIG Meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 25 at 6 p.m. at the Pittsburgh High Tech Council building on Second Avenue. The topic of the month's meeting is "Small Business 101."

Walt Becker, from the Pittsburgh chapter of SCORE (Service Corp of Retired Executives - <http://www.scorepittsburgh.com/index.htm>), will address issues relevant to those of you just starting out, as well as those of you who already have an established business and would like to learn more about various business issues. Some of the information he will be discussing includes starting a home-based business, developing and writing a business plan, marketing and networking, accounting and invoicing, paying taxes, and continuing growth. The evening is designed to provide information that can help everyone in various stages of business.

SCORE is a nonprofit association comprised of 10,500 volunteer business counselors throughout the U.S. and its territories. SCORE members are trained to serve as counselors, advisors and mentors to aspiring entrepreneurs and business owners. The organization provides other types of resources including email counseling, books, workbooks and articles along with low cost workshops and seminars. These services are offered at no fee, as a community service.

There is no fee for the meeting and light refreshments will be served. Come prepared with any questions to help in the continued growth of your business. Please RSVP to Barbara Stanton by 5 p.m. Monday, September 23 either by phone (412) 893-0383 or email bstanton@seec.com.

The Technology Council is located in the Voicestream Building, 2000 Technology Drive, in the Pittsburgh Technology Center (on Second Avenue in the Hazelwood section of Pittsburgh, just off the Bates Street Exit of the Parkway East). Parking is free.

New WorkQuest Group Provides Practical Help for Job-Seekers

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new and positive ways to approach their job search. She started the WorkQuest group in mid-August to enable people to exchange ideas and job-hunting experiences. The WorkQuest group meets weekly at different places in the Pittsburgh area. At each meeting, the people who attend talk about what they did in the previous week to find employment. In addition, each meeting has a theme, with one or two members volunteering to do a presentation or lead a discussion on that theme.

Janis hosted the first meeting at the Panera in Mt. Lebanon. About 12 people attended, including freelance writers (like myself!) who haven't had a contract in six months or more, as well as people who were laid off and are looking for full-time employment. At this first meeting, everyone brought copies of their résumés. Janis informed us that the average amount of time HR people spend on the initial review of a résumé is 20 seconds. So the attendees did an exercise where we looked each person's résumé for 20 seconds, then tried to determine what features were good and drew attention to the individual's talents. Then the members each picked one résumé from the pile and spent about 10 minutes critiquing that résumé, which they returned to the owner with comments.

The second meeting was hosted by Rick Lohmeyer at the Racquet Club Apartments in Monroeville. The topic of this meeting was networking. Rick brought a sample list of the meetings that he often attends. Some of them are meetings of technical societies whose members would potentially employ technical writers; others are social meetings of local technology people. Many of the meetings are free, even to non-members of the groups, and others can be attended for a small fee.

Rick also told us that the best way to make contacts is to call people. John Clark added that you should call a company and ask for the name of the documentation or engineer-

ing managers, and then try to talk with them. He also suggested talking with the purchasing department, since they talk with vendors all the time and may be able to give you the name of an internal manager you can speak with. Also, don't neglect to ask friends who are employed to find out the names of appropriate managers in their companies. Rick suggested keeping a database of the people you've talked with so that you can call them in the future and see if any potential projects have developed. Rick likens job hunting to doing sales work on commission, with the commission being your income.

Many other good ideas were brought up in this meeting. People suggested that while you are unemployed, you should use the time to update your résumé, your portfolio and your website, take training courses in unfamiliar tools, and compare tools so that you can discuss their merits with potential employers. John says not to forget to keep in touch with potential employers even when you are fully employed, and keep networking to make new contacts. John McCarty said that he's had some good contacts from cold calling companies, and from stopping by and dropping off unsolicited résumés in person.

The third meeting was held at Panera in Cranberry. The meeting was hosted by John Clark and Leslie Johnson, and the topic was interviewing. They told us that the bulk of interviewing questions fall into one of the following categories, and all are really saying "Tell Me About Yourself."

- Why should we consider you?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What can you do for us?
- Will you fit in?
- Can we afford you?

John and Leslie stressed that you should
(continued on page 4)



People News

Chapter 186

Total 20318

Welcome to New Members

- Jill A. Mortell**
- Joe O'Keeffe**
- Meg A. Papa**

Society for Technical Communication

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Memberandums

Mary Ecsedy, past president of our chapter, will present a paper at the Region 6 conference in St. Louis, Missouri. The conference is being held from October 13 to 15. She will speak on how to learn from your mistakes as a freelancer.

Alan Houser, president of our chapter, has published an excellent article called "Creating XML Content" in this month's Intercom.

New WorkQuest Group Provides Practical Help for Job-Seekers

(Continued from page 3)

be prepared to answer those questions before you go into the interview. John gave a summary of some interviewing tips he's gathered from a number of different sources:

- DO use short answers (20-90 seconds) to questions
- DO research the company's background and its products
- DO tell people how you will save them time and money
- DO adjust your responses to your interviewer: low-key with HR, more aggressive with managers
- DON'T use tentative terminology (I might, I could, I like, I think)
- DON'T give generalized answers, give real world examples
- DO remember that the best prepared person gets the job, not necessarily the most qualified person

Several sets of people did some interviewing role-playing, with the interviewer asking randomly selected preset questions, then doing some improvising. The entire group then critiqued the interviewee's answers and suggested alternative ways to respond to the questions.

Although the meetings are geared toward writers, Janis would like to invite anyone looking for work. Spouses of group members who are unemployed have been attending the meetings. Unfortunately, in this economy there are numerous sets of unemployed couples. Everyone is welcome to attend the meetings, and notices of the meetings can be found on the calendar page of the Pittsburgh STC web site. The goal is to have different volunteers host each meeting, and hopefully, to have the membership changing constantly as some members get jobs and new members join.

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Human Factors Methods

The first STC meeting of the chapter for this year, held September 10, was a joint meeting with Pittmark and drew 35 people. Heather McQuaid, from MAYA Design, discussed some of the methods MAYA uses to evaluate human factors in order to help a project reach its system design goals.

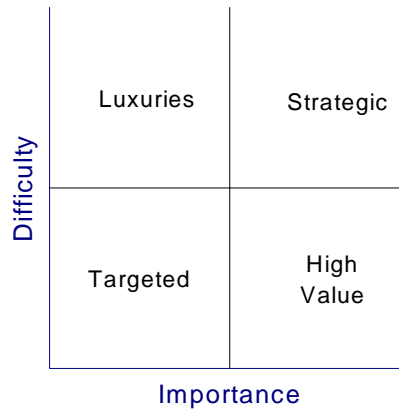
The company's procedures involve gathering domain knowledge, organizing that knowledge so that interrelationships and patterns are revealed, evaluating the results empirically and non-empirically, and conducting usability testing. Projects are worked in teams consisting of at least one person from the three disciplines of engineering, human sciences, and visual design. The project does not have to be fully developed or even to the functioning model stage, although the team does need something concrete to analyze.

Domain knowledge comprises the project's business goals, observation of the target audience, and survey of competitors. This information is organized into three types and displayed in several different formats. Information about users is given in personas, narratives and goals. Information about the system environment is given in pictures and diagrams. Information about system tasks is given in lists and flows.

A persona is a snapshot of a hypothetical user that is created by distilling the characteristics of real people. It includes their interests and goals, but is independent of the system that is being designed. Real people could be surveyed or observed in action to find out what they do and how they do it. For one project, MAYA researchers observed baseball scouts in the stands during games and training camps as they gathered and recorded information about potential recruits. Perhaps 5 to 7 personas are developed, depending on the complexity of the system that is being designed. The use of personas gets the client to talk concretely about users and to provide input to clarify user characteristics. Using the personas, descriptions are then written of how each person would use the system.

Heuristic evaluation involves comparing the system with the design rules, noting problems, and describing why they are problems. If the system is complex, the project team focuses on parts. Problems are categorized using affinity diagramming. In this way, patterns are revealed.

The categories then are prioritized in two ways — how important they are to correct, from the user's view, and how difficult and costly they are to correct. To establish importance, the team considers how critical the problem is to proper operation and ultimate success of the system. These categories of problems are plotted on a four-quadrant diagram as shown below.



When usability testing is conducted, the actual system use sessions are videotaped. Finally, the results of the analysis are documented and delivered to the client.

For references to the research techniques used, see:

http://www.maya.com/web/what/papers/maya_evaluating_interfaces.pdf

Maya Design is a well-respected consultant in high tech design and usability testing. It was formed by three professors (in engineering, human sciences, and visual design) from Carnegie Mellon University. Its products include software, internet applications, handheld devices, and consumer electronics. Projects include robots at the Carnegie Museum that give tours, on-screen menus for Samsung televisions, the Pittsburgh Green Map website (greenpittsburgh.net), and the Merrill Lynch website for institutional investors.

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Employment Issues Column:

Decisions ... Decisions! What style should you use for your résumé?

By Pam Schmidbauer, Area Manager, Aquent

We've all heard it over and over - you should always have a résumé ready just in case you need it. This rings true because you usually need it when you least expect it. What style of résumé should you go with? There are four main styles.

Chronological

The chronological style presents your education, extracurricular activities, and work experience with skills and achievements described in reverse chronological order under each category. One advantage to this style is that employers are comfortable with this style since it's the most widely used of all the styles, plus, it's easy to write.

Functional

The functional style organizes your skills and accomplishments into functional (job task) groupings that support your job objective, which should always be stated. Some advantages to this style is that it draws attention to what you've done rather than when or where you did it. It allows you greater flexibility in presenting skills gained through personal experience or through low-paying or unpaid jobs. It's

useful for entry-level or reentry employees whose employment history is brief or scattered.

Targeted

The targeted style focuses on a specific position or job target, presenting your capabilities and accomplishments supporting this position eliminating all unrelated data. A job target or objective is required with this style. Some advantages to using the targeted style is that it's very powerful because it's focused. You look like a natural for the position if you have done the necessary background research. It also allows you to project your abilities to do the job even if you don't have directly related experience. It's also easy to prepare a different version for each different position to which you apply.

Combination

The combination résumé style utilizes some of the aspects of the chronological and functional formats. It allows the writer more flexibility in organizing a résumé.

The résumé style that will work best for you ultimately depends on your work experience, skills, and the target of your résumé. Trying out multiple approaches will help you to develop the most effective résumé possible.

Pam Schmidbauer is Area Manager of Aquent's Pittsburgh office and can be reached at pams@aquent.com or 412-322-4940. Aquent (aquent.com) is a global professional service firm delivering Creative and IT solutions. Through a network of nearly seventy offices in twelve countries, Aquent provides staffing, consulting, and outsourcing services in the areas of print and Web design and production; application and database development; and project management. In its fifteen-year history Aquent has made over 200,000 matches of independent professionals with client companies worldwide. Aquent is a privately held firm headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts.

Handy Handhelds

By Robert P. Mohr

Over the years, I've settled on several tools to help me do my job as a technical writer. Perhaps the most useful and flexible of those tools is a handheld computer. Also referred to as a PDA (Personal Data Assistant), I have found mine to be more partner than assistant.

There are many types of handhelds on the market today. They can vary widely in capability and price range. At the low end of the scale are models with PDA basics:

- To-do lists
- Appointment calendars
- Memo pad
- Time/date functions
- Search
- Phone lists
- Graffiti language
- Calculator

High-end handhelds have most of those functions plus color screens, MP3 capability, more memory, wireless Internet/e-mail, and built-in cell phones. I'm still using the same low-end unit I bought two years ago.

(continued on page 7)



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Handy Handhelds

(Continued from page 6)

I use it everyday for one thing or another. (I wrote this article on it.)

In my opinion, the handheld really sets itself apart from traditional day planner tools in at least four key areas:

- Categorization of information
- Downloadable applications
- Add-on modules
- Electronic transfer from handheld to PC/laptop

Categorization of Information

Not only can you create phone lists, to-do lists, and memos, you can create multiples of these and assign them to customized categories. For example, I have a memo category called BP in which I store Blue Pencil articles. Other memo categories include the names of projects I'm working on. It is here that I write project-specific notes and meeting minutes. My phone lists are organized into categories such as Personal, Quick List, Cycles, and Fishing. Categories make information easy to organize, thus easy to find.

Downloadable Applications

There are literally thousands of applications available for handhelds. You can find anything from games to drug-to-drug interaction databases. Most applications are shareware ranging in price from \$5 to \$50. Many applications are free. In either case, simply download the application and install it the next time you synchronize handheld to PC.

Add-on Modules

Some handhelds make use of plug-in modules. Handspring's devices are most notable. Available modules range from game packs to GPS units to cameras. (I have a 100,000-word Webster's Dictionary plugged into my Handspring Visor.)

Electronic Transfer

Here is where the handheld really shines. As a long-time bus rider, with two hours of riding time per day, I often used that time to write in composition books. Later on I would transfer the longhand writing to the laptop by typing it. I didn't mind writing in long-

hand, but I hated the extra typing time. It was too much like writing everything twice.

The handheld solved the problem. Now I can write in the Visor, drop it in its cradle (which is connected via USB to the laptop), press a button, and in seconds the memo is transferred. Using the desktop software supplied with the Visor, it's a snap to transfer the memo to Microsoft. See the figure at the end of this article.

Word then creates a new document for every memo transferred. It even uses the first line of the memo to create header text; a footer with page numbering is also automatically created.

Some handhelds incorporate keyboards for text entry, but mine has a stylus that I use to hand-write characters. My PDA uses Graffiti language, a character set of symbols that represent conventional letters, numbers, and standard symbols (punctuation, @, \$, (), etc.). After a little practice, I could write as fast with it as I could with pen and paper.

All of my writing is done with the standard memo application, but many more applications are available for this purpose. Some of them will let you read and write native Word files.

You can also transfer information from one handheld to another using the built-in infra-red port. It's easy to do and works quite well. One morning, (on another long bus ride), I suddenly remembered that I forgot to write a status report for my boss. I

switched on my handy companion and started to write. By the time I arrived at my stop, the report was finished. I took my Visor to my boss' office where I then beamed the report from my Visor to hers. She then dragged the memo to her Word icon and saved the text as a Word file. She was impressed and I was relieved.

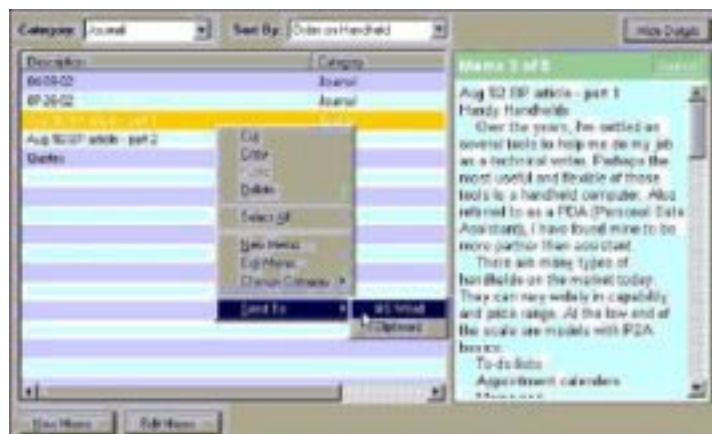
I've only touched the surface here of what you can do with a handheld. The possibilities are truly endless. If you've been contemplating the idea of getting a handheld, contemplate no longer — buy one. You'll be glad you did.

Additional Information

Before you decide to purchase a handheld, you should know that the technology is constantly changing and there are dozens of models to choose from. Analyze your needs and do a little research before making a purchase. The following sites contain links to handheld makers, downloadable applications, and magazines dedicated to handhelds that you may find useful:

- www.handspring.com
- www.palm.com
- www.pocketpcmag.com
- www.planetpdamag.com
- www.pdabuzz.com/About/
- www.palmgear.com
- www.handango.com
- www.freewarepalm.com
- www.bluenomad.com
- www.handmark.com/products/wordsmithpro/

Bob Mohr can be reached at rpmohr@writemohr.com.



Employment Roundtable, October 8

Learn more about becoming employed from STC and outside experts. The following speakers are booked. Others will be announced at the meeting.

- Interviewing — John Clark
- Resumes — Mary Ann Pike
- Medical writing — Diana Mathis
- Things to consider before becoming a freelancer — Alan Houser
- The chance to fail: How to get started in freelancing — Mary Ecsedy
- Portfolios — Nancy Ott, Marlene Miller
- Chapter SIGS — Barb Stanton (Independent Contracting), Janis Ramey (WorkQuest)
- Miscellaneous topics like job market, education, etc. — Bob Reitman

STC Meeting Schedule for 2002-2003

Mark your calendars! Here are topics and tentative dates for the remainder of the 2002-2003 meeting calendar. More details on each meeting will be published as the dates draw closer.

2002:

October 8 (Tuesday) — Employment Roundtable

November 6 (Wednesday) — Quadralay demonstration (Andy VanConas)

December 7 (Saturday) — Usability lab (Mike Bates); Joint chapter meeting with Cleveland in Youngstown OH

2003:

January — Winter Party (date to be determined)

February 11 (Tuesday) — Frame 7 (Kay Ethier)

March 11 (Tuesday) — Chapter 50th Anniversary Party and Awards Banquet (Janis Ramey)

April 8 (Tuesday) — Robohelp (Leslie Johnson)

May — Spring Fling Party (date to be determined)

WHEN: Tuesday, October 8, 2002, buffet dinner 5:30. Meeting 6:30-8:30 pm. You **MUST** attend the dinner; there is no meeting-only option.

WHERE: Duranti's Restaurant at 128 North Craig Street, Oakland (Off-street parking is available.)

COST: Members: \$15.00. Non-Members: \$17.00. Students/Unemployed: \$6.00. Make checks payable to STC-Pittsburgh and mail to STC Pittsburgh Chapter, PO Box 133, Pittsburgh, PA 15230. Cancellations received after October 4th and no-shows are expected to pay for dinner.

RSVP: Please reply by Thursday, October 3, 2002 to Darlene Mullenix at:

dmullenix@federatedinv.com

or 412 288-8676. Include your telephone number.

We Need your Help:

Corporate Sponsors Needed

Corporate sponsors are needed to provide occasional meeting space and use of a projector. Please ask your company if STC could hold a monthly meeting in your conference room. If you can offer this space, contact Darlene Mullenix at 412-288-8676 or dmullenix@federatedinv.com.

Share your Expertise with WorkQuest

WorkQuest, our newest SIG, needs your help. Please consider sharing your expertise to help other writers who are out of work. Contact Janis Ramey at 412-833-5548 or ramey@technical-writing.net.

STC's 50th Anniversary

In May of 2003, STC will be celebrating our 50th anniversary as a national professional organization. Please see the web site to find out where you can send your memories and to find out how the Pittsburgh Chapter plans to mark this occasion.

Article Deadline

The deadline for the next issue of the Blue Pencil is Monday, October 7. Please send your submissions to Meg Papa at mv0t@andrew.cmu.edu.