BLUE PENCIL

Pick of the Issue

The old adage says that nothing is permanent except change. It may be trite, but it is true. As STC Pittsburgh begins another year, we welcome in a new president (read Nicky's first column on page 2), and a new BP feature, Pittsburgh Points. This feature will highlight the news about our chapter members as well as local, non-STC events that may interest members. Check out the first installment on page 5.

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STC Pittsburgh Recognized as a Chapter of Distinction

STC Pittsburgh was recognized as a Chapter of Distinction at the 2005 STC Conference in Seattle. This is STC's highest honor in the chapter achievement awards program, and STC Pittsburgh was awarded Distinction for:

"Sponsoring local and regional activities that promote the technical communication profession while continuing to expand membership services."

The chapter achievement awards program recognizes chapters for exceptional accomplishments in meeting STC goals. The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning chapter have been met, but that the winning chapters have performed well beyond expectations. The awards program recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, chapters that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society.

Achievement must be shown in specific areas, including: Chapter Communication, Expanding Community, Leadership, Administration, Membership, Member Services, Membership Growth, Programs, Recognition, Society and Regional Participation, and Transformation Efforts.

The contributions of many STC Pittsburgh members lead to this award, including the redesigned website and newsletter (the *Blue Pencil*), the technical awards competition, the programming, our e-mail publicity campaign, WorkQuest™, the membership campaign, and our successful Region 4 conference last April.

Thanks to all the STC Pittsburgh members who contributed to help win this award!

See http://www.stc.org/awards_chptAchievement_winners.asp for the Pittsburgh Chapter listing on the STC National website.

A Thank You
by Barb Stanton

This year has been a great year for the Pittsburgh chapter. The officers and the board worked very hard to improve the resources and benefits we offered our members and accomplished goals we defined last June that made our chapter stronger and more energized.

I am very blessed and fortunate to have worked with really great people. Everyone contributed so much of their time, professional talent and energy to the chapter and its leadership. I truly believe these individual contributions are what gave us such a great year.
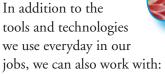
This year Pittsburgh was recognized as Chapter of Distinction, STC's highest honor in the chapter awards program (see page 1) and also won Chapter of Excellence for Region 4. Janis Ramey also received the honor of Associate Fellow by the Society for her lifetime of outstanding achievement in the field of Technical Communication. These honors are a result of the hard work everyone on the board put into STC this year to make it a value asset to members.

Not only was this year full of honors for our chapter, but we also presented members with programming that was different and provided a broad appeal to wide range of audiences. We unveiled a new website and newsletter as well as other methods of publicity - all of this to reach out to our members and welcome them back to all the benefits membership has to offer.

As I wrap up my tenure as President and turn the reigns of President over to Nicky Bleiel I want to say thank you for making this an awesome experience for me. All the honors and successes of this year could not have been accomplished if it wasn't for a hardworking and talented team.

President's Column
by Nicky Bleiel

As all of you know, technical writers walk the line between being right-brained and left-brained—we're creative and we're technical (OK, I'll say it—we're geeks).

In addition to the tools and technologies we use everyday in our jobs, we can also work with:

- A wide variety of subject matter experts
- Development teams on UI design and usability testing
- Training departments on instructional design projects
- Support teams on knowledge bases
- Plus, we are part-time webmasters, graphic artists, and printing experts

And we write too…

Filling all of these different roles makes our jobs extremely challenging, but that's also what keeps it interesting.

With that in mind, this year's programming will focus on the many roles of technical writers, the tools we use, and the politics we deal with.

We are planning joint meetings with Pittsburgh ASTD, the Pittsburgh Regional Knowledge Management Consortium (PRKMC), and the Northeast Ohio chapter of STC. We are also putting together a series of "Software Saturdays" where we will focus on tools of our trade. Please see the listing of upcoming meetings in this issue (Meg please Xref) to see what we already have planned. And bookmark stcpgh.org and check it every week for new events.

I'm looking forward to being chapter President this year and hope to see you all at our monthly meetings—and please bring a friend!

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

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Membership at a Glance

(as of June 30, 2005)

National

Total Members: 15,773

Total chapters: 140

Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars

Cost: $99 (STC Members), $149 (non-members). See stc.webex.com for more information and to register.

September 14 & 21, 2005

Dreamweaver MX 2004, Parts 1 & 2

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Macromedia Dreamweaver MX 2004 is the most popular Web development tool in the world. Yet most users have only scratched the surface of its functions. Through live demonstrations and examples, this two-part seminar helps bring Dreamweaver users to the next level of Web authoring. (Regular seminar prices apply to each session.)

October 19 & 26, 2005

Project Planning and Quality Checks: Parts 1 & 2

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Why is technical documentation an "afterthought" in the minds of some of your co-workers? Solid, well-considered project and documentation plans can help you alter counterproductive viewpoints and get co-workers on the same page—literally—by showing them how technical documentation is one of many product components. In Part 1 of this two-part seminar, John will present general project planning and user analysis techniques before delving into detailed documentation planning practices. He will wrap up these planning strategies in Part 2 before discussing quality criteria and techniques for faultless quality checks. (Regular seminar prices apply to each session.)

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Upcoming Society Events

September 8, 2005

Northeast Ohio Chapter, Society for Technical Communication (NEO STC) will discuss "Emerging Trends in Technology: From Blogs to Wikis and More"

Neil Perlin will address the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (NEO STC) meeting at the AmeriSuites Hotel in Independence on September 8, 2005. Neil Perlin's presentation, entitled "What's Up, eDoc?", will discuss emerging trends in technology such as blogs, wikis and content management systems which enable users to create and disseminate information interactively. In addition to their value as internal communication methods, these technologies also make it easier for organizations to communicate externally with their customers, vendors, and the general public.

Pre-registration is required. To learn more about the NEO STC and to register for the meeting, please visit: www.neostc.org.

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First STC Training Program to be held October 20-21, 2005

Imagine a two-day course covering the things you need to advance your career in technical communication--an in-depth, focused course taught by some of the most respected names in the field.

Now imagine that you have a choice of five such courses, each covering a different subject within technical communication. That's the STC Training Program--a new learning venue designed for today's professionals and scheduled for October 20-21.

The five two-day courses, described in detail at www.stc.org/training, cover the following subjects:

- The Architecture of Content. Instructor: Jonathan Price, STC Fellow

- Creating and Using Personas to Improve Usability. Instructor: Whitney Quesenbery, STC Associate Fellow

- Focusing on Content: Making Web Sites Work for Users. Instructors: Janice (Ginny) Redish, STC Fellow, and Caroline Jarrett

- Leadership in Information Management: Developing the Business Framework and Implementation Roadmap for Single Sourcing, Content Management, and Knowledge Management. Instructor: Benhong Rosaline (Roz) Tsai, STC Associate Fellow
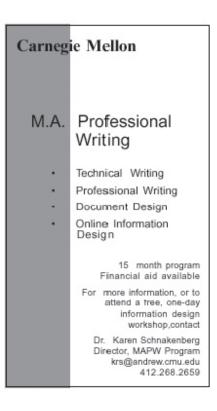
- XML: From Hand-Coding to WYSIWYG Authoring. Instructor: Neil Perlin, STC Associate Fellow

The STC Training Program will take place at the Hyatt Regency Crystal City, Crystal City, Virginia (near Washington, DC). Register by September 21, 2005, and the cost for STC members is $1,095 (with hotel, $1,295) and $1,255 for non-members (with hotel, $1,455). After September 21, costs increase $150.

Don't miss out on this unique opportunity. For information or to register, please visit www.stc.org/training.

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STC Executive Director Peter Herbst Resigns

STC Executive Director Peter Herbst has resigned his position, effective October 7, 2005. Pete has been a member of the STC professional staff for over 21 years, and Executive Director since 2003. STC President Suzanna Laurent says, "He has been a dedicated and trusted representative of STC during his career, and we will miss him very much. At the same time, we wish him the best in his future endeavors."

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Pittsburgh Points

Welcome to Pittsburgh Points, a new feature that news about Pittsburgh chapter members and local items of interest. If you have an item for Pittsburgh Points, please email it to Meg at meg@alumni.cmu.edu.

In the July/August *Intercom*, Pittsburgh is well-represented:

Page 32: Pittsburgh's Chapter of Distinction/Chapter of Excellence announcement

Page 38: Janis Ramey's Associate Fellow Announcement

Page 41: The PA Notaries Award of "Excellence" in the International Technical Publications Competition Announcement

Page 20: An article by Lisa Earl, Pittsburgh Chapter member

News on Local Technology Events

American Medical Writers Association (September 29 - October 1, 2005) Pittsburgh, PA http://www.amwa.org/default.asp?Mode=DirectoryDisplay&id=1&DirectoryUseAbsoluteOnSearch=True

TechyVent: http://newsletter.techyvent.com/

Pittsburgh Business Calendar: http://www.businesscalendar.org/

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette: http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/03001/276969.stm

Pittsburgh Technology Council Events (Members Only): https://members.pghtech.org/source/Meetings/cMeetingProcessSearch.cfm

2004/2005 STC Publications Competition Results
by Heather Lum, Competition Manager

During the 2004/2005 program year, STC, Pittsburgh held chapter-level Technical Publications and Online Communications competitions. One entry went on to receive recognition at the international level after local judging was complete in December 2004: the *Practical Guide for Notaries Public in Pennsylvania, Twenty-Fifth Edition,* received an Excellence award at STC's International Technical Publications Competition.

For the first time, competition judging was done online without any physical meetings or telephone conversations. After receiving their entries in the mail, judges were able to discuss them with each other and vote for awards in a customized environment supported by Invision's Power Board software. Judges downloaded evaluation forms and judging guidelines via the Judging Board, and they could take advantage of other features like subscribing to discussions about specific entries.

While some judges missed the opportunity to meet face-to-face, the Judging Board eliminated scheduling difficulties and made it possible to extend judging over a week-long period. This, in turn, led to lengthy, often spirited debates about the merits of some entries. It was a very interesting process that we hope to enhance for next year's competition.

STC — SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Special thanks go the STC members and other professionals who volunteered to judge the chapter's competition. The judges were a highly competent group spanning many professions, including technical communication, training, engineering, and information development.

The judges were Nancy Carpenter (GENCO), Heather Como (Eaton Electrical), Alan Houser (Group Wellesley), Ray Janicko and Marlene Miller (Pa. Association of Notaries), Chris Keefer (DDI, Inc.), Roselyn Kline (freelance), John Lum (consultant), and Nancy Ott (consultant).

STC Pittsburgh Competition Winners

Distinguished		
Competition	*Entry Title*	*Submitter*
Technical Publications	Practical Guide for Notaries Public in Pennsylvania, Twenty-Fifth Edition	Pennsylvania Association of Notaries
Excellence		
Competition	*Entry Title*	*Submitter*
Online Communication	Fischione Website www.fischione.com	Ramey Technical Writing
Technical Publications	Advanced FrameMaker	Bright Path Solutions
Technical Publications	Doc-to-Help 7	Component One LLC
Technical Publications	FastGate® Metrology System SSM Model SSM Model 6200 Operation Manual	Ramey Technical Writing
Merit		
Competition	*Entry Title*	*Submitter*
Online Communication	Doc-to-Help 7	Component One LLC
Technical Publications	Helping Local People Save Local Land	Ramey Technical Writing
Technical Publications	Model 200 Dimpling Grinder	E.A. Fischione Instruments, Inc.

STC 2005/2006 Technical Publications Competition

STC Pittsburgh is holding the following competitions in October 2005:

- Online Communications Competition

- Technical Art Competition

- Technical Publications Competition

The entry submission deadline is Saturday, October 22, 2005. Entry fees are $80 for STC members, $95 for non-members, and $60 for students.

Entries that receive a Distinguished award at the chapter level are automatically submitted to the International competition. More information and entry forms will be available shortly at STC Pittsburgh's website, www.stcpgh.org/compete/index.htm.

Contact Heather Lum at hlum@pobox.com with any questions.

Surviving Outsourcing and Remote Work (pt. 2) - *By Nancy Ott*

Part one of this article (published in the April '05 BP) focussed on the problem of communication. Here, Nancy addresses the problems of coordination and culture.

Problem 2: Coordination

Working remotely can make it more difficult to coordinate with other members of your team. This impacts your ability to manage projects and offsite workers.

Have a process in place

Explicitly incorporate outsourced/ offsite work in your company's product development processes. (It never "just works"!) If you don't have a formal process, start one before you outsource.

Don't assume anything

Check your assumptions at the door! Don't assume that the remote group "just knows" what is going on. Make sure that everyone on your team and management knows what is expected of them and give frequent updates on project status. Confirm things in writing after conference calls and meetings, save instant messages, etc.

Write detailed plans, specifications and design documents

Be very explicit when writing project plans, specifications and design documents. Scheduling extra time for this can pay off in the long run. Make sure any updates are done according to process and are communicated widely.

Schedule extra turn-around time

Communication usually takes longer if multiple time zones are involved.

Build extra turn-around time into project plans and schedules, especially for reviews and other collaborative efforts.

Use collaboration tools

This helps to spread the latest project developments and "tribal knowledge" throughout your group. Many commercial and open source groupware/collaboration products are available. Use both formal and informal collaboration methods. For example: TWiki (www.twiki. com), Lotus Notes, Yahoo Groups (check with management before using external collaboration tools), message boards, shared network drives.

Use source control

Software developers have been using this for years. Source control is most important if you are working with a large, spread-out group. It makes it easier to manage the different versions of your project, track changes, keep people from overwriting each other's files, and build online documentation and help sets. Many commercial and open source products are available. If you're working with a software development team, you may be able to use their system.

Never "throw work over the transom"

One myth about outsourcing and offshoring is that you can treat it like a black box — you send a project specification out; the project

is completed and sent back without any further effort on your part. This doesn't work in real life. You'll need to constantly stay in touch to make sure that work is done correctly and on schedule, especially for offshored projects.

- Stay connected!

- Schedule regular meetings/ conference calls.

- Keep meetings short, sweet, and to the point.

- Frequent, brief updates are better than infrequent, long ones.

Scaling up

Another popular myth is that you can keep adding inexpensive offshored people to a project to get it done on time and under budget. This also doesn't work in real life. You can't just throw bodies at a project and expect it to scale up to a larger size.

- While adding more personnel is often appropriate, each additional person adds to the project's complexity and requires additional resources and management overhead. It eventually reaches a point of diminishing returns.

- Use both remote and local project managers to handle day-to-day issues. Delegate as necessary.

- Lots of local project management time will be needed, probably more than upper management expects.

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

- Use communication and management techniques that scale well. For example, a former manager who shall remain nameless kept up to date on her project's status by holding a mandatory three hour conference call every Monday morning. Her entire team had to listen in and give their individual status when prompted. While this would have been fine for a small group, it was unwieldy and inefficient for a large team that was scattered over several locations. Holding shorter calls with the project managers and emailing status updates to the team would have been more effective.

Problem 3: Culture

You may be working with people whose culture is different from yours, whether it be their corporate culture, social culture, or both. Be flexible and try to understand the other person's position. In extremely broad generalities:

- American technical workers question instructions more often than those in some other countries, especially if they find problems with designs and specifications.

- Productivity can suffer on offshored projects due to language barriers, differences in work culture, etc. Extra effort is needed to make sure things go smoothly.

- The culture of the remote workplace may be unfriendlier than you are used to. Or more secretive. Or more open. You'll need to figure out what's going on at the remote site and adjust your work style accordingly.

- Take holidays into consideration when scheduling offshored or inshored work.

Fishing (for a Job) in Pittsburgh
by Joe Brennan, Member of STC WorkQuest

The 2005 Bassmaster Classic held for three days in July attracted forty-seven of the best bass anglers in America to Pittsburgh with hopes of locating and capturing the Three Rivers indigenous fish. Yet these seasoned, skillful anglers anticipated a competitive and challenging contest for the top, three-day-total prize. Quite a few fishermen did not catch a single tournament fish in an entire day. It appears that Three Rivers Bass were scare or elusive even for experienced anglers. However, at the final weigh-in, one of the top six contestants offered this advice: "We all have the same skill, the only difference is mental."

Perhaps it all came down to who was best able to adapt to the nature of these finicky fish. Just as angling for a bass trophy is not merely a game of chance, neither is 'fishing' for a job. Whether competing in a fishing tournament or competing in the marketplace for a job, we should keep in mind that our mental approach (including perseverance, preparedness and patience) as well as our diligence will ultimately determine our success.

Finding a job is a lot like fishing. You must have all the necessary lures; the proper equipment (lines of communication); and have honed your skills (e.g., communication, marketing, salesmanship, etc.). So that when the time is right and you get those nibbles, you can reel 'em in.

Good luck in landing your job.

Kevin VanDam shows his trophy to the Mellon Arena crowd after winning the 2005 Citgo Bassmaster Classic.

Photo by Martha Rial, Post-Gazette, Monday, August 1, 2005

2005-2006 STC Pittsburgh Programming

A new programming year is upon us, and we begin with the traditional happy hour, but with a twist! Check out the event description below...and then come check out the happy hour!

Our first meeting of the year will be in September, and you will find a detailed description on page 10.

Also, see below to get a taste of the rest of the year's programming.

We look forward to seeing our members and guests at an STC Pittsburgh event this year!

Pittsburgh STC /PRKMC /SLA Joint Social

Date/Time: Thursday, August 25 from 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Join the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, the Pittsburgh Regional Knowledge Management Consortium, and the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Special Librarians Association for the kickoff of their 2005-2006 programming years. This joint Happy Hour on scenic Mt. Washington will be an evening of networking and knowledge.

- Learn about the benefits of joining STC, PRKMC, and SLA

- Hear about the events all three have scheduled for the upcoming year

- Meet the members and Boards of similar societies

A free membership to each organization will be given away as raffle prizes! (Up to a $150 value)

Place: Grandview Saloon, 1212 Grandview Ave, Pittsburgh (Mt. Washington) (Directions at: http://www.grandviewsaloon.com)

Cost (Members/Non-Members): $12 includes an assortment of appetizers (Cash bar)

RSVP: by Friday, August 19 to JoAnn Matthews at joann.matthews@highmark.com or (412) 544-2397. Please indicate that you are a member of STC.

Directions and other programming information at:

- www.stcpgh.org

- www.pittsburghkm.org

- www.sla.org/chapter/cpit/index.htm

Additional Planned Programming

Sept. 21 6:30 - 8 pm -- "Making Message Visible" (Agnew Moyer Smith, South Side) Speaker: Don Moyer

Oct. 17 6:30 - 8 pm -- "Transitioning to E-Learning" Joint Meeting with the Pittsburgh Chapter of American Society for Training and Development (ASTD)

Nov. 14 6:30 - 8 pm -- "Essential Consulting Skills for Career Success"

Speakers: Beth Williams and Lori Klepfer (Tech Council Building)

Dec. 12 6:30 - 8 pm -- "Adobe Acrobat: The Technical Communicator's Swiss Army Knife" (Also the Holiday Party) Speaker: Alan Houser (Tech Council Building)

Jan. 9 -- Career Roundtable (Chris Keefer and WorkQuest) location TBA

Feb. 13 6:30 - 8 pm — Panel Discussion:" Enhancing Your Career and Skills Through STC - Making STC Work for You." Moderator: Nicky Bleiel. Panel: Janis Ramey, Barb Stanton, Lisa Earl (Tech Council Building)

September Chapter Meeting - "Making Messages Visible"

Speaker: Don Moyer, Agnew Moyer Smith

Date: Wednesday, September 21, 2005

Time: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

"Oh, I see what you mean…" We've all had the experience of suddenly understanding a topic when we could see it. A clear diagram, a map, even someone waving their arms in just the right way can sometimes make a message click.

In this presentation, Don Moyer of Agnew Moyer Smith will talk about how he and his team approach the problem of making messages visible. He'll discuss how they organize a topic, construct a visual model that can support storytelling, and steer a project through testing and approvals to the finish line. He'll also talk about some of the things that can go wrong along the way.

Cost: $12 STC members; $15 non-members; $10 students and unemployed (includes dinner and beverages)

RSVP: by September 16 to Beverly Spagnolo - 412-766-7200 or bspagnolo@klauscherarchitects.com

Location: Agnew Moyer Smith, 3700 South Water Street, Suite 300, South Side. Directions @ http://www.amsite.com/exchange/exchange.html

Agnew Moyer Smith helps businesses untangle complex problems and explain important ideas by making these ideas visible, understandable, and accessible. AMS's Design Solutions include Information Models, Brands & Identities, Web Sites, Presentations, Kiosks, Print Communications, Exhibits, Environments, Packaging, and synchronized Content Management across these solutions. Learn more at www.amsite.com *and* http://foglifters.amsite.com/enter.html

Don Moyer *is a writer and designer who helps businesses make important ideas clear and easier to understand by making messages visible. That's what he and his teammates do every day for businesses like BearingPoint, Caterpillar, ACNielsen, McDonald's, Otis, Ovations, and Steelcase.*

Don often speaks at conferences about the power of making messages visible and the opportunities that visual information offers to businesses. Also, he teaches a Writing Backwards Workshop to help writers and editors discover ways to better integrate visual storytelling into their projects.