BLUE PENCIL

Pick of the Issue

Being a member of the STC is about more than paying your dues, skimming your Intercom issues, and occasionally attending a meeting. Members accomplish great things (see our cover story on Alan Houser and the article about award winners on page 7); they also learn new tools (check out the handy tips from the latest Career Roundtable on page 5). And in next month's Blue Pencil, look for an article on how the chapter can help you - - and vice versa.
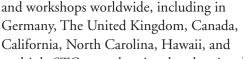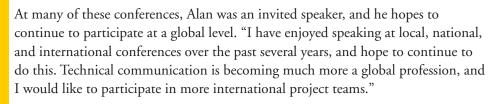
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Alan Houser Named STC Associate Fellow

It gives us great pleasure to congratulate Alan Houser, longtime member and past president of the Pittsburgh chapter, on being named an Associate Fellow of the STC.

Alan has been a technical writer for 17 years, and in that time he has authored over three dozen papers and presentations in publications such as TEQ Magazine, Intercom, and a variety of print and on-line technical newsletters. He is also the co-author of the book XML Weekend Crash Course. He has presented at conferences and workshops worldwide, including in Germany, The United Kingdom, Canada, California, North Carolina, Hawaii, and multiple STC annual national and regional conferences.

At many of these conferences, Alan was an invited speaker, and he hopes to continue to participate at a global level. "I have enjoyed speaking at local, national, and international conferences over the past several years, and hope to continue to do this. Technical communication is becoming much more a global profession, and I would like to participate in more international project teams."

His presentation topics and training classes cover a wide range of technical tools, including XML, XSLT, XSL, XSL-FO, DITA, single-sourcing, FrameMaker, FrameScript, Acrobat, and WebWorks Publisher. His breadth and depth of knowledge led the Programming Committee to ask him to be the Tools and Technologies Stem Manager for the 2007 STC National Conference in Minneapolis.

Currently, Alan is the Principal partner/President of Group Wellesley, a firm that provides technical writing, publishing, and documentation-process consulting services to technology-based companies. Group Wellesley provides support to help their clients maintain their information efficiently and effectively using XML publishing, database publishing, and application integration and automation. The company also provides a wide-range of training courses in state-of-the-art publishing and information management solutions.

STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

President's Column - *by Nicky Bleiel*

The STC Pittsburgh website (stcpgh.org) now has a Discussion Board, and I wanted to let all of you know why -- and how you can set up your system so you don't miss a thing.

The chapter officers began talking about switching to Invision web hosting over one year ago because it would enable us to provide more options and opportunities for our members, namely discussion boards and blogs. It would also make it possible for our competition judges to do their judging online, greatly streamlining their process.

Invision was implemented late last year and provides many benefits, with only one casualty -- the STC Pittsburgh listserv. But with the new Discussion Board replacing it, we can continue to communicate with the following upgrades:

- Posts are stored by topic, so it is easy to quickly scan information of interest

- You don't have to store/organize/delete emails

- There is search functionality

- Since there is an e-mail notification feature (see sidebar) -- you can choose immediate alerts, delayed alerts, or a daily or weekly digest -- you will be updated as often as <u>you</u> wish. If you prefer no e-mail, you won't receive any. If you love to receive e-mail, you still can.

Please bookmark or create a shortcut to the Discussion Board webpage (http://www.stcpgh.org/forums/) and register. Feel free to join in an existing discussion, or add a new Topic and get everyone talking.

Our Webmaster, Phil Miller, has spent a great deal of time researching and setting up the new system. Please see the sidebar for his explanation of how to set up e-mail alerts.

I'm sure that once you've all checked out the new Discussion Board and its features you will find that it efficiently helps you get the answers you need from your colleagues in a timely manner -- which is why the chapter provides it.

Invision has an email notification feature that will alert you when new postings are made to the STC Pittsburgh Discussion Board. Simply subscribe to the topics or forums of interest to you.

There are three ways to subscribe to a topic:

- Click the "Track This Topic" link at the top of the topic that you wish to track.

- On the posting screen when replying to or creating a topic, select the "Enable email notification of replies?" check box

- From the E-Mail settings section of your User CP (My Controls) select the "Enable Email Notification by default?" option; this will automatically subscribe you to any topic that you have replied to.

Please note that to you will only get one e-mail for each topic you are subscribed to until the next time you visit the board.

You can also subscribe to an entire forum. To do so, click the "Subscribe to this forum" link at the bottom of that forum. You will then be notified when a new topic is created in that forum.

To unsubscribe from any forums or topics go to the "Subscriptions" section of "My Controls."

If you have any questions or you wish to be a moderator of a topic, please email Webmaster Phil Miller (writer_miller@hotmail.com).

-- Phil Miller

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

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Membership at a Glance

(as of February 28, 2006)
National
　　Total members: 17,895
　　Total chapters: 137
Pittsburgh
Total members: 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.

April 12, 2006

Software Simulations: Tips, Tricks, and Best Practices

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: William Horton

Would you rather learn to use a computer program by reading about it or from a personal coach who shows you how and then guides you through your first steps? Software simulations provide that coach and make learning more like playing a game than reading a manual. Today, easy-to-use tools like Captivate, Camtasia, and even PowerPoint can create highly interactive, instructionally valid learning simulations. But what makes for an effective simulation?

May 24, 2006

Life After RoboHelp-How We Got Here and Where To Next

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: Neil Perlin

The apparent sunsetting of RoboHelp and the spread of XML into online documentation have added turmoil and uncertainty to what had been a stable profession. But while turmoil and uncertainty are unsettling, they aren't entirely bad. They offer the opportunity to add new and better ways to work, to correct bad practices, and to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. The goal of this presentation is to add structure and context to a very messy situation.

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Upcoming STC Events

May 7–10, 2006

STC's 53rd Annual Conference will be held at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel and Paris Las Vegas Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. On-line registration is now open. Also, hotel reservations must be made by April 10 in order to take advantage of reduced room rates. For more information, please visit www.stc.org/53rdConf/.

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Reminder: Vote in STC Elections by March 31

Information about candidates for Society level office was posted to www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp. As in past elections, the information includes candidates' responses to questions posed by the STC nominating committee and summaries of the candidates' STC service and professional experience.

In addition to electing officers, voters in STC's 2006 election will be asked to approve a proposed amendment to the STC Bylaws. The amendment specifies a process for filling vacancies on the board of directors. An explanation of the reasoning behind the proposed amendment, including arguments both for and against the amendment, has been posted to www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/bylawsChange01.asp.

The election closes at noon Eastern Time on March 31. Please note that the closing date has been moved up from previous years.

Only members who have paid their dues by February 28, 2006, will be eligible to vote.

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STC Dues are Tax Deductible

I f you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. Please note, however, that dues must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 2005 may be deducted only from 2005 tax returns. Therefore, if you pay your 2006 dues on or before December 31, 2005, these dues can be deducted only from your 2005 return. Members who have questions should contact their local IRS office or their accountant.

You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways: as a charitable expense, a business expense, or a miscellaneous deduction.

See the November 2005 *Tieline* ([www. stc.org/tieline.asp/2005_11.pdf](www.stc.org/tieline.asp/2005_11.pdf)) for more detailed information about eligibility and deduction levels.

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Selling STC to Your Boss

Having trouble selling the idea of STC membership to your boss? Get it paid through your corporate training budget.

Dictionary.com defines "training" as follows: "to make proficient with specialized instruction and practice."

"Training" happens when a community workshop on XML helps you develop superior company documents—faster and more efficiently.

"Training" happens when an STC Web-telephone seminar teaches you and your colleagues the basics of single sourcing—and thereby streamlines your company's production processes.

"Training" happens when a technical session at an STC annual conference shows you how to develop a usability plan that returns valuable feedback on your company's product—resulting in a better product and more satisfied customers.

"Training" happens when an article in Intercom or Technical Communication shows you how to translate a company Web site to reach an international audience.

If an STC- or community-sponsored event or activity shows you how to improve your company's products or processes, that's "training." Nonmembers often pay significantly more for STC programs, conferences, and workshops than do members.

Hot Topics in Career and Professional Development
by Chris Keefer, Marlene Miller, Meg Papa, and Barb Stanton

The annual STC Career Roundtable meeting, held this past January, once again provided the attendees with tools, information, and inspiration to invigorate our professional lives. Here is a sampling of the information that was presented.

Using the Pittsburgh Business Times in Your Job Search – Robin Dugas

The *Pittsburgh Business Times* is a well-known local newspaper that covers the regional business climate. Robin discussed how you can take 30 minutes to go through an issue and find the information relevant to your career.

Skim - Go through the issue with a highlighter and skim all the article titles cover to cover. Highlight those that are in areas of interest to you.

Read - If an article concerns job opportunities, read the entire article. If an article is about your business community, reading the first ten paragraphs should suffice.

Act - Act on what you have found. Send hand-addressed, stamped letters offering congratulations (where appropriate), information, and your business card.

Clip - Clip and save articles on strategy.

Also, take note of events from the calendar section. Use the newspaper to stay informed about the business climate in Pittsburgh and the hot topics and trends in business in general.

Getting Organized – Deirdra Gross

"What would you do with an extra 333 hours a year?"

This question sparked off Deirdra Gross's presentation on Productivity Through Organization & Time

> ### Spending 5 to 15 minutes a day looking for things adds up to 333 hours per year!

Management. Deirdra's business, MAKK Strategies (www.makkstrategies.com), is dedicated to helping people organize their homes, workplaces and lives to maximize their free time. Once she told us that the average person spends 5 to 15 minutes a day looking for things and that a few simple steps could gain each of us an extra 333 hours a year, we were eager to learn how to get organized. Deirdra taught us the SPECS system—remember SPECS and you're on your way to gaining that extra time to spend as you wish.

Sort - Sort a small section of an area into 4 or 5 categories, such as Urgent, To Do, To Read, To File, To Toss. Don't tackle a whole room or the whole garage at once or you'll get discouraged.

Prioritize - Decide as you sort whether it's worth the time, money and effort to keep an item. Don't forget to include storage costs as well as the time you

spend thinking about what to do with a particular item.

Eliminate - Trash what no sane person could ever use and give away or sell the rest.

Contain - Find a home for everything you own and keep it there. But don't over-containerize your things—too many containers defeats the purpose. Keep similar things in one container.

Schedule - Schedule time to organize. Maybe monthly when the bills come in or every Saturday as part of general housekeeping chores, but schedule the time on a calendar. And—do we really need to say this?—don't procrastinate or you'll end up right back where you were!

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If you need help in getting your life in order, contact Deirdra Gross at 412-414-2242 or dem@makkstrategies.com.

Polishing Your Professional Image – Jonna Martin

Jonna Martin from AdvanceMe Associates gave several excellent tips to help us improve our first impressions and networking skills. She discussed the ABCs of image: **appearance**, **behavior**, and **communication**.

Appearance - Red, black, grey, navy, royal blue, and pinstripes are power colors for clothes. Wearing those colors will give you a more authoritative appearance, especially women. For men who need to soften their image in order to be more approachable, a pink tie will do wonders. Also, watch your body language: use good posture (shows confidence), don't cross your arms (sends closed signal), and smile.

Behavior - Use a firm handshake, and learn how to gracefully enter and exit a conversation. One way to exit a conversation is by saying something polite and extending your hand. Be aware of and follow social etiquette. Also, request a business card from someone before offering your own.

Communication - Jonna began the session with a fun exercise that taught us how to better remember names. When each person in the group introduced him or herself, the rest of us had to think of a celebrity or a personal association that would help us remember the name. For example, for the name "Meg," ideas included Meg Ryan and Meg from the book Little Women.

Contracting Opportunities – Gary Naranjo

Gary Naranjo from A.C. Coy, a local contracting firm, discussed the current contracting environment. More and more companies use contracting firms not only to meet temporary staffing needs, but also to act as a pipeline for contract-to-hire positions. Many of the jobs that A.C. Coy fills end up being permanent hires down the line.

Gary also said that most of the jobs his company fills are full-time positions (40 hrs/wk), and most are located downtown and west of the city of Pittsburgh.

Electronic Portfolios – Nancy Ott

If you're tired of lugging along a portable file of resumes and work samples to interviews, it's time to consider an electronic portfolio. Whether created in PDF or HTML formats or a combination of both, an electronic portfolio allows you to package your resume and work samples together into one neat, professional package, explained Nancy Ott, STC-Pittsburgh senior member and long-time user of electronic portfolios. Digital portfolios also lend themselves to various delivery methods, such as burning a CD you can leave behind after an interview or uploading to a website.

In creating an electronic portfolio, Nancy suggested making it easy to navigate and including samples appropriate to the specific audience (potential employers or clients). For example, consider building your electronic portfolio around your résumé, adding links to various work samples related to your job responsibilities.

She also recommended testing the electronic files and all related file links before presenting the portfolio to a potential client or employer. These steps help ensure that your electronic portfolio best represents your skills and capabilities as a technical professional.

Job Burnout – Geri Puleo

Geri Puleo of G.A. Puleo and Associates, presented a session to help you determine whether you have job burnout. She presented some signs and causes of burnout, ways of handling burnout at your job and then offered a few questions to ask yourself before you decide to leave your current situation.

Geri presents this session at other meetings and workshops, for more information, visit her website at http://www.gapuleo.com.

Chapter Competitions Attract More Entries
By Marlene Miller

Technical communicators in five states and Japan took advantage of the opportunities offered by the STC Pittsburgh's 2005/2006 Technical Art, Technical Publications, and Online Communications competitions. Fifty-nine entries arrived from Pittsburgh, Ohio, Tennessee, Florida, California and Tokyo, Japan's chapter of STC. While fewer than 20 percent of the entries were from organizations in and around Pittsburgh, all entries were welcomed and appreciated for the wide-range of interest, talent, and enthusiasm for the profession that they represented. Twenty judges from STC Pittsburgh evaluated the entries and provided valuable feedback in the form of praise for excellence and suggestions for improvement.

By comparison, it was a banner year for the chapter's competitions. In the 2004/2005 competitions, STC Pittsburgh received 13 entries, and nine of them (69 percent) were from Pittsburgh area organizations. In 2003/2004, the chapter judged 35 entries, and 10 of those (29 percent) were from submitters in the Pittsburgh area.

One Technical Art and four Technical Publications entries won Distinguished awards in this year's competitions and were automatically entered in the international competition. Those results are announced in March.

This was the chapter's second year using Invision's Power Board (professional bulletin board software, www. invisionpower.com) to conduct online judging discussions and voting. After receiving their entries in the mail, judges were able to discuss them with each other and vote for awards in a customized judging environment. Judges downloaded evaluation forms and judging guidelines via the judging board, and then took advantage of other features like subscribing to discussions about specific entries and voting for awards in preparation for the final consensus vote for each entry. Invision allowed judges to participate in a judging forum from the comfort of their homes and offices instead of spending a Saturday or two gathered in a cold conference room somewhere as was done in years past. Although some of us miss the donuts, coffee, and camaraderie of those Saturdays, working in the electronic age also has its benefits.

Thanks to Volunteers

The chapter wishes to thank the volunteer judges who gave the entries the benefit of their valuable time and expertise: Technical Art judges Greg Harrison, Todd Pinkham, and Sue Vilushis; Technical Publications and Online Communications judges Sulbha Bahl, Susan Gatt, Martin Houser, Ray Janicko, Chris Keefer, Mary Kate Kelley, Roselyn Kline, Chuck Lanigan, John Lum, Marlene Miller, John Morley, Lori Morris, Nancy Ott, Mary Ann Pike, Tara Rotuna, and Beverly Spagnolo.

Heather Lum, Competitions Manager, once again handled the innumerable important details of the competitions: publicity, securing volunteers, receiving, coordinating, and returning entries, monitoring the online judging, encouraging consensus, and notifying award winners. Please contact Heather at hlum@pobox.com if you would consider helping with next year's competitions, which have grown too large for one person to manage. Experience not required!

Award Winners

Competitions award winners will be recognized at the annual STC Pittsburgh Awards Banquet on Monday, May 22. The scheduled speaker is William Sabin, editor of the Gregg Reference Manual, a thorough and well indexed reference that covers just about every aspect of writing, including grammar and spelling rules, standard forms, word processing terms, and techniques for editing and proofreading. Please check the chapter website and future issues of the Blue Pencil for place, time and other details.

STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Below are the Chapter Distinguished Awards and the Awards of Excellence. The winners of the Award of Merit may be viewed at the chapter website.

Award	Entry Title	Competition	Submitter
Distinguished	Energy and Engineering Sciences	Technical Art	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Distinguished	"Professional Paradigms," Enhancing Professionalism and Nursing Excellence	Technical Publications	The Western Pennsylvania Hospital
Distinguished	Realizing the Promise of Performance Management	Technical Publications	Development Dimensions International (DDI)
Distinguished	DIGITAL 600 / Stylus 600 Quick Start Guide	Technical Publications	Olympus Imaging Corp. (Japan)
Distinguished	The Y-12 Report	Technical Publications	BWXT Y-12
Excellence	Composite, Ordered Material Having Sharp Surface Features	Technical Art	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Excellence	Oak Ridge National Laboratory REVIEW (Vols. 37-3-04; 38-1-05; and 38-2-05)	Technical Art	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Excellence	Stack Configurations for Tubular Solid Oxide Fuel Cells	Technical Art	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Excellence	Building Winning Partnerships	Technical Publications	Development Dimensions International (DDI)
Excellence	Digital Mixing Console M7CL Owner's Manual	Technical Publications	Yamaha Corporation (Japan)
Excellence	KM-1820 FS-1118 MFP Operations Guide	Technical Publications	Kyoceramita Corporation (Japan)
Excellence	Leadership Forecast 2005-2006: Best Practices for Tomorrow's Global Leaders	Technical Publications	Development Dimensions International (DDI)
Excellence	Notary Notes	Technical Publications	Pennsylvania Association of Notaries
Excellence	Notary Review	Technical Publications	United States Notary Association
Excellence	Oak Ridge Reservation Annual Site Environmental Report for 2004	Technical Publications	Oak Ridge National Laboratory
Excellence	Pittsburgh Research Laboratory - Visitor Information	Technical Publications	CDC-NIOSH
Excellence	"Pushing the Envelope," Oak Ridge National Laboratory REVIEW	Technical Publications	Oak Ridge National Laboratory

Mark Your Calendars for May 22nd!

The May Chapter Awards Banquet will be held on Monday, May 22, 2006. This year our speaker will be William Sabin, Editor of the Gregg Reference Manual. We will also be recognizing the Competition award winners at the banquet.

April Joint Conference of the STC Northeast Ohio and Pittsburgh Chapters – Online Help: Trends, Technologies, and Help Authoring Tools (HATs)

Speaker: Char James-Tanny

Date: Saturday, April 1, 2006

Time: 9 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Schedule:

Registration 9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. (Breakfast includes muffins, tea, coffee)

Opening Comments 9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m. Welcome by chapter presidents Nicky Bleiel and Bob Young

Trends in Online Help (Past, Present, and Future) 9:45 a.m. – 10:45 a.m.

Windows Vista (formerly Longhorn) Help 11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Lunch 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Online Help Tools Workshop —"Picking a HAT" 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

HAT Vendor Session 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.

Tables open to discuss questions, view demonstrations, or obtain literature for most of the following tools:

- AuthorIT
- DocToHelp
- Flare
- RoboHelp
- WebWorks Publisher

Cost: $60 member/ $70 non-member/$50 student and unemployed. **Register and pay by March 15, and save $10!** — Only $50 member/$60 non-member/$40 student and unemployed.

RSVP: by Monday, March 27 to Beverly Spagnolo at bspagnolo@klauscherarchitects.com. Include your name, email address and phone number, and your member status (STC member, non-member, or student/unemployed). (Payment information will be sent to you upon receipt of your RSVP.)

Location: Holiday Inn
7410 South Avenue
Boardman, OH

Directions: www.hiboardman.com

April Chapter Meeting – Life After RoboHelp – How We Got Here and Where To Next

Speaker: Neil Perlin

Date: Thursday, April 20, 2006 **(Note Day)**

Time: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

The apparent sunsetting of RoboHelp and the spread of XML into online documentation have added turmoil and uncertainty to what had been a stable profession. But while turmoil and uncertainty are unsettling, they aren't entirely bad. They offer the opportunity to add new and better ways to work, to correct bad practices, and to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. This goal of this very full presentation is to help by adding structure and context to what's currently a very messy situation.

- The presentation first summarizes the history of help authoring tools, beginning with Doc-To-Help in 1991, to explain how our world got to be the way it is today.

- The presentation then turns to the major RoboHelp replacement tools. It focuses on Flare, ePublisher Pro, and AuthorIT, comparing their workflows to that of RoboHelp and how this affects the difficulty of migrating from RoboHelp to one of these tools.

- Finally, the presentation discusses how a move to XML-based authoring tools affects documentation development - letting us clean up bad projects and workflows but requiring us to understand what the tools are doing and to establish and enforce development discipline and standards.

At the end of this presentation, you still may not know which new tool to use. You might even decide to stay with RoboHelp for the time being. But you'll have a better basis for making that decision.

Cost:

RSVP: April 14th to Beverly Spagnolo; 412-766-7200 bspagnolo@klauscherarchitects.com

Location: Pittsburgh Technology Council Building

STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Alan's involvement with STC is an important resource for him. "Since I support many different companies and organizations as a trainer and consultant, it is particularly important for me to keep up-to-date with current trends, problems, and developments in the field of technical communication. The publications, chapter meetings, and conferences at the regional and international levels have been a wonderful resource for fully participating in the technical communication community."

Alan's service to the Pittsburgh STC chapter has been extensive. He has served as the chapter president, vice-president, and CIC SIG chair. He was also on the 2003-2004 Region 4 Conference committee and has judged the Technical Communications competition in multiple years. Alan invests much of his time in the Pittsburgh community, giving pro-bono technical talks and workshops, and speaking with college student groups at the local universities about technical writing.

Alan holds a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and an M.A. in

Professional Writing from Carnegie Mellon. He started out with the intention of being "the engineer who wrote the specs, plans, and other engineering documents, so I took technical writing courses for all of my open electives." He decided instead to become a technical writer. One of the professors in the M.A. program was Karen Schriver, another member of the Pittsburgh STC chapter who is also an Associate Fellow.

He also has a number of professional certifications, including CTT+ technical training certification, IBM Certified Developer in XML and Related Technologies, and Adobe Certified Expert and Certified Instructor in FrameMaker and Acrobat.

> "The Pittsburgh chapter is an exceptional organization. We have better programs and higher meeting attendance than many chapters that are double, triple, or quadruple our size. It was a privilege to serve as Pittsburgh chapter president during 2002 - 2003." -Alan Houser

Of the AF designation, Alan says, "I see it as a validation of my career in technical communication. I am eternally grateful to the STC Pittsburgh chapter board of directors for initiating the nomination." We hope every member of the chapter will join the Officers and Board in congratulating Alan on this significant accomplishment!