

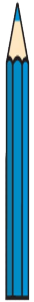
# BLUE PENCIL

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, STC

[HTTP://WWW.STCPGH.ORG](http://www.stcpg.org)

VOL. 44, No. 5 - FEB/MAR 2008

## Pick of the Issue



*Elections are all around us! Most people are probably aware that the country is in the process of electing party candidates for President of the United States. But now is also the time to think about the future leadership of your chapter (see Nancy's column on page 2) and the STC nationally (read one candidate's position on page 6). As citizens of the United States, it is our right, privilege, and responsibility to cast an informed vote. The same may be said of our status as STC members.*

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## STC Annual Awards Banquet Speaker Chosen

Dr. Barbara Johnstone has been selected to be the keynote speaker for our chapter's annual awards banquet this May. She will talk about a research project she is conducting on the history of local speech. It includes a projection of what is likely to happen to local speech, both generally and in Pittsburgh.

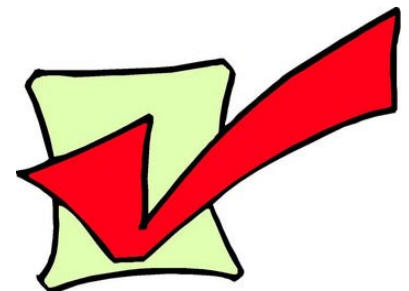


Dr. Johnstone is a professor of Rhetoric and Linguistics at Carnegie Mellon University, as well as the Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of English. She is also the editor of Language in Society.

The annual banquet will be held on Monday, May 19, 2008 from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Radisson Hotel in Monroeville. More details will be forthcoming.

## STC National Elections - Coming Soon!

The election for STC officers at the national level is coming in March and April, but now is a great time to become more familiar with the candidates for office. While one candidate for Second Vice President did submit a statement to the Blue Pencil (see page 6), there is another candidate for that office as well as several candidates for Director, Secretary, and Nominating Committee. You can see the candidates' bios, ask them questions, and see their responses at [www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp](http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp).



President's Column - by Nancy Carpenter

The Primaries

The nation is in the midst of primaries, and so is the Pittsburgh Chapter of STC. We are forming a committee to take nominations for Vice President. This officer then succeeds to the presidency in the following



year, giving the candidate a year to work in the chapter and learn the president's job. To provide continuity, guidance and training, this person remains on the board as Immediate Past President for one more year.

Our chapter is small, and we've rarely been able to hold elections for any board position, but it's

important to bring new people and ideas to direct our activities. If we get more than one candidate, we'll hold elections in March. Our hope is to have the new Vice President selected in time to send that person to the STC international conference in May. (The chapter pays the registration fee, if necessary.)

So I appeal to you to help nominate candidates for Vice President. We'll publish the names of the nominating committee members soon, so just contact anyone on committee or the Pittsburgh Chapter's board if you know of a good candidate.

Thank you and see you at a meeting.



**Thought for the Month:  
Make Your Own Luck o' The Irish**

This coming St. Patrick's Day, many people will be looking for that pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, or even a four-leaf clover for good luck. It seems that good luck is harder to find than ever. That's the bad news. The good news is that you don't need a four-leaf clover or pot of gold, or even to be Irish, to have good luck...you can make your own good luck. How do you do that? Luck is really a matter of the right preparation meeting the right opportunity. Folks who appear to be "lucky" are proactive about preparing for and looking for the right opportunities. STC Pittsburgh can help you make your own good luck with preparation, such as events, classes, and articles, and opportunities, such as job openings, proposals, and speaking engagements.

-Bryce Walat

Society for Technical Communication

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**STC Pittsburgh's Mission Statement**

STC Pittsburgh's mission is to provide professional support for technical communicators in the region. The chapter strives to:

- \* Provide opportunities for professional enrichment
- \* Help members achieve their career goals
- \* Support the local business community
- \* Promote technical communication as a career.

**Keep Your Information Current**

Receive your STC emails and publications on time! Update your STC contact information at [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org). STC Members, Member Directory, Address/Restriction Change Form link: (<http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/formAddressChange01.asp>).

**Notes from the National Office**

**Tell Us About Your Professional Accomplishments!**

Have you helped your company win new business? Improve productivity? Decrease accidents? Have your manuals, help systems, or other technical communication efforts increased customer satisfaction? Boosted sales? STC wants to know about **your** professional accomplishments and contributions to your company or clients. We're looking for specifics about the work done by you as an individual. Write it up in 100 words or less and send it to [intercom@stc.org](mailto:intercom@stc.org) with "professional accomplishments" as the subject line.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Early Bird Rates For Annual Summit Expire March 17**

Register by March 17, 2008, to receive the early bird rates for the 2008 Technical Communication Summit (June 1-4 in Philadelphia). Registration is available online at [www.stc.org/55thConf](http://www.stc.org/55thConf), as well as by fax and mail. The Early Bird rates offer significant savings:

- Member early bird rate: \$695—a savings of \$300 off the on-site rate
- Nonmember early bird rate: \$995—a savings of \$200 off the on-site rate
- Student early bird rate: \$175—a savings of \$75 off the on-site rate
- Student nonmember and retired member or retired nonmember early bird rate: \$225—a savings of \$30 off the on-site rate

For the best conference value, act fast: register by March 17!

\*\*\*\*\*

**STC Election Closes April 14**

The 2008 STC election closes April 14. Only members who have paid their dues by February 28, 2008, will be eligible to vote. All eligible members will receive voting instructions in March.

\*\*\*\*\*

**U.S. Members: Deduct Your Dues**

If 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. Therefore, if you paid your 2008 dues on or before December 31, 2007, these dues can be deducted only from your 2007 return. You can claim dues as a deduction in one of several ways: as a charitable expense, a business expense, or a miscellaneous deduction.



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## 'Twas the Season for Budget Software - by Kathleen Kuvinka

Right before the holidays, STC Director and Pittsburgh Chapter member Nicky Bleiel presented “Cool Tools for Tech Writers for <\$100” at the December monthly meeting, demonstrating how we could fill our e-stockings with inexpensive—but mostly free—software tools that can help us be more productive and organized.

(Macintosh users will have to wait, because most of these items work only on Windows-based systems, including Vista.)

Nicky provided a link to all of these tools, in addition to demonstrating several of them. Highlights of the free software included:

- The GIMP, an Open Source image editing tool similar to Adobe PhotoShop ([www.gimp.org](http://www.gimp.org)).
- A character editing tool, Private Character Editor, available from [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com).
- The Mantis Open Source bug tracker, available for Windows, Linux, and Mac ([www.mantisbt.org](http://www.mantisbt.org)).
- The Subversion Open Source version control software, which replaces CVS, and is also available for most operating systems ([www.subversion.tigris.org](http://www.subversion.tigris.org)).
- A collection of Wiki tools. See [www.wikimatrix.org](http://www.wikimatrix.org) for comparison information on over fifty Wiki tools.

Nicky also discussed several low-cost options, many of which include free trial downloads:

- Icon Forge for icon creation and editing, \$37.95 from [www.cursorarts.com](http://www.cursorarts.com).
- SnagIt for screen captures, \$39.95 from [www.techsmth.com](http://www.techsmth.com).
- Text-to-speech software like TextAloud (\$29.95 from [www.nextup.com](http://www.nextup.com)) and RecordPad, \$28.20 at [www.nch.com.au/recordpad](http://www.nch.com.au/recordpad).
- The knowledge management tool SharePoint—well, okay, the server costs more than \$100 but a client license is less. A trial version of SharePoint Server 2007 is available from Microsoft.

Nicky wrapped up her talk by presenting a list of other “cool stuff”—helpful reference information like where to find color charts, a “Greeked text” generator,

and the newsletter software our STC chapter uses to enlighten you each month.

The audience contributed some more ideas for free cool tools including: Reference Links on the Council of Science Editors web site ([councilofscienceeditors.org](http://councilofscienceeditors.org)); OpenOffice (a complete Open Source office suite including word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, and drawing software); and free software you can download from Google.

For more information and links to all of the tools Nicky discussed, see ([nickyb@componentone.com](mailto:nickyb@componentone.com)).

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## Jumpstarting My Job Search: The 2008 Annual Hire-Ability Round Table - by Barbara Glynn

In the process of graduating with a B.S. in civil engineering, presenting my meager one-page résumé to the recruiters visiting campus every week, and finally finding work, I never dreamt (and why do we not nightmare?) that a job search could ever be so complex and rich in interfacing. I am now immersed in studying the intricacies of a résumé: the placement of a bullet point, to serif or not to serif, the nuance of a noun -- the sum of my being in two pages or less. I have acquired of a stack of business cards as thick as the Chicago white pages.

Thank you to the wonderful folks at the Pittsburgh STC chapter and WorkQuest who did a stellar job at organizing this year's annual Hire-Ability Round Table. The January 7 event was a great way to for me jump-start my 2008 job search. Five presenters addressed areas that are always in need of some polishing.

Here are three points from each speaker that I found to be very helpful.

Dr. Yuki Lu addressed *Cultural Diversity in the Light of Globalization*.

- Do not judge one people's belief system (culture) as being better than another
- In the workplace, the point is to achieve your goal while respecting one another, even if you don't necessarily agree.
- Americans rush to get things done. In Russia, South Korea, India, and China they develop a relationship first.

Matt Tomsho spoke on *Sharpening Your Technical Skills*.

- Being productive is not necessarily being effective.
- To be effective, know what your company needs, know how to apply this assistance (especially in the technical arena), and know where to look for help to find the answers.
- Identify trends. If you're considering an upgrade, engage effected employees in the decision-making process.

Deanna Tucci Schmitt showed us *Networking: The FORM Method*.

- Go in to a networking meeting with the attitude of "How can I help you?" not "How can you help me?"
- Network at church, parties, where you volunteer and with almost all the people you know.
- Do not monopolize people at a networking meeting though they may seem like a safety net. Get used to moving around.

Robert Bruns' topic, *A Complete Step-by-Step Guide to Winning Interviews*, came from the Westinghouse point of view.

**"I never dreamt that a job search could ever be so complex and rich..."**

- Begin the résumé with a Skills Summary
- If you get the interview, ask your contact as many questions as possible about the interview format: testing? who will attend? how long?, etc.
- Westinghouse uses Monster, CareerBuilder and HotJobs.

Jay Speyerer's talked about, but primarily demonstrated, how to *Be Confident at Interviews: Show It with Your Body Language*.

- Keep your hands away from your head. You'll tend to lean on your chin or rest your head on your hand if you are tired.
- Avoid what is called "autocontact" (arms crossed at chest, hands in pockets). This can signal uneasiness.
- Match and Mirror, when one takes up the body language of the other, is good when it happens naturally.

One last point that I took with me from that night's event: it is reassuring to know that there are a lot of people who will freely give their time and talent to help people in their job search. Thank you all.

## Providing Value: STC Takes the Lead - by Larry Kunz, Candidate for STC Second Vice-President

*PLEASE NOTE: Publication of a candidate's statement does not imply endorsement of that candidate by either the STC Pittsburgh Board or the Blue Pencil Editor. To keep our chapter members informed, we will publish submitted statements of any candidates running for national office.*

Are you getting value for your investment in STC? Many members, as they renew their memberships for 2008, are asking what value they receive in return for the dues they pay.

I'm pretty well sold on the value of STC. Just last year I got a new job after spotting the opening on my chapter's employment page. During the interview process, I benefited from the experience I've gained through STC and the contacts I've made in STC.

But that's just one person's experience. STC must offer real value, consistently and across the board, to members and prospective members. STC will need to offer even more value to remain competitive in the next few years.

(Yes, I said "STC" and "remain competitive" in the same sentence. STC is a business, and it confronts significant issues and stiff competition in today's marketplace. It's nice to think that STC is more than just a business and that it'll always be here. But the reality is that, to remain viable in the short term, STC must do better at proving its value.)

Taking a longer view, however, STC has an opportunity to provide value in ways that go far beyond what's possible today. STC is uniquely positioned to take the lead in defining the profession of technical communication. When we do that, we'll provide significant and enduring value for our members, for practitioners who haven't yet become members, for the people who employ us, and even for society in general.

### Defining the Profession

Ever since I joined STC 25 years ago, we've been saying that technical communication is a profession. But we're an immature profession, and as a result our work often isn't taken seriously by the people who employ us and the people who buy our products.

To grow into a mature profession, we need at least two things:

- An agreed-on code of ethics. STC has its own ethical code, but it doesn't represent the consensus of the entire profession, and it's not enforceable.
- A unique body of knowledge, and the expectation that each practitioner has mastered that body of knowledge.

The technical communication profession is desperate for leadership – desperate for a set of ethical values, an agreed-on body of knowledge, and perhaps a credentialing system.

Today, all of the pieces are in place for us to develop technical communication into a mature profession. We have the will, we have the know-how, and we have an organization – STC – with the stature, the broad reach, and the resources to lead the way. STC can assemble the building blocks for our profession, it can forge consensus, and it can gain buy-in among the significant stakeholders in the worldwide community of technical communicators.

### What Is STC Doing?

As a member of the STC board of directors I'm leading the effort to formulate a strategic plan, or roadmap that positions STC as the leader in defining the profession – especially by establishing a body of knowledge and promoting ethical standards. (We've already begun working on the body of knowledge.)

You might have heard the phrase *telling our powerful story*. The strategic plan focuses on raising the profile of all technical communicators – and emphasizing the value we provide to our employers and to the world in general – by marketing our people and the work we do.

The strategic plan also emphasizes establishing and expanding partnerships. By teaming with other organizations, STC will strengthen its leadership role in the profession and position itself to provide even more value to its members.

STC doesn't need to be fixed. It needs to be modernized. The board of directors, along with the executive director and her staff, understand this. We know that STC must keep providing value over the short term while setting the stage for long-term value by defining the profession. We're implementing plans to keep the business of STC strong by retaining and attracting members and by constantly

*Larry Kunz, cont. on 7*

Larry Kunz, cont. from 6

reviewing its suite of programs and services to ensure that they still make sense.

I believe that we can find a way to develop technical communication as a profession and continue delivering real value to our members – all without losing the social and interpersonal aspects that have made STC so special to so many people over our history.

### What It Means to You

Defining the profession will benefit every technical communicator because it'll make us more valuable to the people who sign our paychecks. Instead of simply saying "I need some manuals and online helps" (which reduces technical communication to a commodity, not a profession), our employers will realize that they need professional people who contribute value to the organization by increasing customer satisfaction and making products easier to use – thus easier to sell.

We'll prove our value on a much wider stage as well. By providing information that makes technology work for the people who use it, we contribute real value to society as a whole.

I'm running for second vice-president because nobody is better acquainted with the issues that STC will have to confront as leads the profession to where we want it to go. I can foster a climate of creativity and cooperation in which we'll plot a course for the Society and the profession. STC needs leaders who can build consensus and explain decisions to the membership at large. I hope you'll entrust me with your vote.

The next few years will be exciting. Along with my membership dues, I've chosen to invest my time and energy in being a part of this effort. I hope you'll agree that STC's future, and the value it'll bring to you, is worth investing in as well.

*Lawrence D. "Larry" Kunz, a candidate for STC second vice-president, is a member of the Society's board of directors and immediate past president of the Carolina chapter. He is employed as a Senior Technical Writer at Systems Documentation, Inc., in Durham, NC, where he manages a large software documentation project. To learn more about Larry, check out <http://lk81924.googlepages.com/home>.*

## March Meeting: Setting Up an Editing Process

**Date:** Monday, March 3, 2008

**Time:** 6 - 8:30 p.m.

**Speaker:** Lisa Adair

When she first came to Rockwell Automation, Lisa Adair discovered that there was no formal editing process in place, resulting in inefficiencies and errors. Lisa created a task force to evaluate the state of technical editing at Rockwell International and offer recommendations for improvement. Based on these recommendations, Lisa Adair and the task force set up an editing process and created tools to support this process.

In this session, Lisa will show you how to:

- Develop an editing process from scratch.
- Improve an existing editing process.
- Create a task force to help you edit and write with one voice.
- Develop editing checklists, levels of edit, and estimates for turnaround times.
- Create an editing workflow to track the progress of deliverables through the editing process.

**Location:** Pittsburgh Technology Council

**Cost:** \$10 for students/unemployed, \$12 for STC members, \$15 for non members; includes meal

**RSVP:** By February 27 to Bryce Walat at 412-779-1795 or [vicepresident@stcpg.org](mailto:vicepresident@stcpg.org). Please include your name, phone number, and email address.

## April Meeting: If You're So Smart, Why Does Your Writing Suck?

**Date:** Monday, April 14, 2008

**Time:** 6 - 8:30 p.m.

**Speaker:** Karen Schriver

**Location:** Pittsburgh Technology Council

**Cost:** \$10 for students/unemployed, \$12 for STC members, \$15 for non members; includes meal

**RSVP:** By April 9 to Bryce Walat at 412-779-1795 or [vicepresident@stcpg.org](mailto:vicepresident@stcpg.org). Please include your name, phone number, and email address.



## Promoting Your Business or Nonprofit By Using a Press Release

Every business can use free publicity. One way to distinguish your business, products and/or services is to get free publicity through newspapers and other media sources. This workshop, led by Andrea Carrero (member of the STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter and a past presenter at the STC international conference), can show you how.

**Date:** April 30, 2008

**Place:** Pittsburgh Renaissance Hotel, Pgh, 15222

You can find more information here: [www.stcpgh.org/events/AndreaCarreroSeminar.pdf](http://www.stcpgh.org/events/AndreaCarreroSeminar.pdf).




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