An STC Community of Excellence

BLUE PENCIL

Pick of the Issue

A new year always brings changes and new challenges, from the mundane (writing the correct year on your checks) to the significant (Nicky is running for national office!). We hope you choose to be part of the STC as we all take on the personal and professional challenges this new year will send our way. Happy 2007!

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STC Pittsburgh's Own Nicky Bleiel Running for National Office

STC's Nominating Committee has selected Nicky Bleiel, STC Pittsburgh Immediate Past President, for the slate of candidates for national office. Nicky is running for the position of Director. An STC Director is a voting member of the Board, and represents the entire membership of the Society, in addition to promoting the overall objectives of the Society.

Following is a short Q&A that includes her experience, education, and her thoughts about technical communication. Please take advantage of the opportunity to vote in the March election.

Editor's Note: In general, the Blue Pencil will publish the submitted statements of any candidates running for a national office with the disclaimer that publication of such statements does not imply endorsement of the candidate. In this case, that just isn't true. This editor, along with chapter leadership, wholeheartedly endorses this candidate!

What assets—ideas, traits, experience—will you bring to the office of Director?

My professional experience, and the leadership role I have played in my local chapter, qualify me to represent the membership of the Society, and our profession. Much of what I have accomplished was through innovation, organizational skills, and focus. I can prioritize issues, work with others to find new ways to tackle problems, and drive initiatives.

Over the past few years, I have seen what a committed group of volunteers can accomplish at the chapter level. I would like to take the enthusiasm and dedication I have seen at the local level and bring it to the national level. I know and respect the business of technical communication and would like to work with the business community to promote the profession.

STC
SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

President's Column - *by Beverly Spagnolo*

The new year is finally here, and as such, it's the perfect time to reflect upon where we're going—not only in our own lives and our careers, but also the world in general. In this beginning of 2007, so many things are going around us in the world—conflicts in the Middle East, new leadership in Congress, Nancy Pelosi broke the marble ceiling, Bill Cowher resigned… So what's going to happen in your life this year?

Did you have a chance to attend our January meeting "Create Your Own Success?" At our annual career roundtable, we wanted to give you an opportunity to start off with some new ideas for your future and your career. No matter what your age or the state of your career, now is always the time to be sure that you're headed in the right direction.

This last year for me has been one of the most calamitous of my life—I continue my freelance writing, I keep trying to keep my husband's and my business afloat while he's spent most of the year working out of town, I got and started treatment for my recurrent cancer (treatments are fine except for the hair loss—how do bald guys keep their heads warm!?), and I became STC Pittsburgh chapter president. So this year I'm looking for a little more freelance work, and for the rest of everything else to just calm down. That might not be the most decisive plan to have, but sometimes you just want to make it through.

And to start the year, I just want to mention a few STC-related things.

Membership Renewal

I know, I've mentioned it before, but if you haven't already, it's time to renew your membership. You can do it easily on-line, or fill in the renewal form you should have received in the mail. When you renew, be sure to sign up for membership to the Pittsburgh chapter, so you can continue to attend our terrific meetings and network with the great people you have come to know over the years. At the price, STC membership is still a phenomenal deal compared to membership in so many other organizations (my husband pays $650 each year to belong to the American Institute of Architects—not a value, in my mind). Membership renewal was due January 1, but if you haven't renewed yet, take a minute and do so now.

STC Director Candidate

On the people side of things, Nicky Bleiel, Immediate Past President of the Pittsburgh chapter, is on the ballot for STC Director at the National level. Nicky has been an active member of the chapter for several years, and we want to wish her the very best in this big step up.

New Webmaster

I want to welcome Erin Giebler as our new webmaster. Erin brings a lot of good ideas and lots of enthusiasm for maintaining and improving our web site. If you have information that should be posted, or suggestions for the site, please contact Erin with the information.

I also want to thank Phil Miller for all the work that he's put into the site over the past couple years. I know we could really drive you crazy sometimes, but you did a wonderful job to keep our site alive and vibrant. Thanks, Phil!

Happy and Successful 2007

I want to close this column wishing each and every one of you a wonderful, prosperous, healthy and happy Year, and a quote from Edith Lovejoy Pierce,

"We will open the book. Its pages are blank. We are going to put words on them ourselves. The book is called Opportunity and its first chapter is New Year's Day."

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

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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. STC Members, Member Directory, Address/ Restriction Change Form link: (http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/ formAddressChange01.asp).

Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars

See http://www.stc.org/edu/ seminarsList01.asp for more information and to register.

January 17, 2007

The Xfactor-From HTML to XHTML

Instructor: Neil Perlin

HTML will be with us for years, but still, it's officially dead, replaced by XHTML. This presentation introduces XHTML at both the concept and code level. XHTML is based on XML, so the presentation first reviews XML's concepts and codes; it then moves on to the specifics of XHTML.

January 31, 2007

ANSI Z535.6- A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-Accompanying Literature

Instructor: Steven Hall and Elaine Wisniewski

A new national standard for how to present safety messages in owners' manuals, ANSI Z535.6, Product Safety Information in Product Manuals, Instructions, and Other Collateral Materials, has been completed and approved and was expected to be published by the end of 2006. The purpose of this presentation is to provide awareness of ANSI Z535.6 to those within STC that develop and/or oversee the development of manuals that contain safety information.

February 7, 2007

Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets

Instructor: Heather Hedden

February 21, 2007

Working in Global Teams

Instructor: Makarand Pandit

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STC Technical Communication Summit - 54th Annual Conference

May 12-16, 2007

Extensive information about the upcoming STC Annual Conference in Minneapolis is available online at http://www.stc.org/54thConf/. More information will continue to be posted in the coming days.

STC members tell us they compare the STC Annual Conference to conferences such as WritersUA and ASTD International Conference & Exposition. For 2007, STC has developed an even stronger education program with more in-depth sessions, certificate sessions and pre-conference workshops - all this for an Early Bird price ($645) that is still lower than WritersUA ($995) and ASTD ($950).

You may register online NOW at http://www.stc.org/54thConf/register/ index.asp

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STC Dues Are Deductible

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. In other words, dues paid in 2006 may be deducted only from 2006 tax returns. More information can be found in the November issue of Tieline (www.stc.org/stcmembers/ tielineArchive01.asp).

What important trend, change, or challenge have you seen evolve during the past two years in the field of technical communication?

Technical communicators offer a broad set of skills, as well as the ability to drive continuously evolving processes, tools, and deliverables to better serve the end user. We are a diverse group that not only writes documentation, proposals, specifications, white papers and more, but creates simulations, Web sites, wikis, podcasts, and other forms of assistance—all in an effort to make our users more successful.

This constant innovation and diversity bring two challenges: First, a challenge as professionals to learn and grow; and, second, a challenge to STC to be the leader in providing a variety of resources—training courses, seminars, conferences, even books—to make it possible.

Describe your STC service, honors, and awards

I am the immediate past president of the Pittsburgh chapter. During my presidency, Pittsburgh was recognized as a chapter of excellence; during my vice presidency, as a chapter of distinction. I was on the planning committee of the Region 4 Conference "Writers Without Borders: Trends in Technical Communication" held April 2004 in Pittsburgh. I also served as membership chair and have been involved with program planning for four years.

I have presented talks at several STC annual conferences, both during general sessions and on Leadership Day. I have contributed several cover articles to *Tieline*, the Society leaders' newsletter.

My Society honors include an Award of Merit for online communication from the Pittsburgh chapter.

> "I have seen what a committed group of volunteers can accomplish at the chapter level. I would like to take the enthusiasm and dedication I have seen at the local level and bring it to the national level."

Describe your education and other (non-STC) professional affiliations, honors, and awards

I earned a B.A. in journalism from the Pennsylvania State University, where I was a member of the University Scholars Program. I have continued my education, taking additional courses in VBA, *Excel*, XML, and HTML at the University of Pittsburgh Computer Learning Center.

I am a member of the American Society for Training and Development, the Pittsburgh Regional Knowledge Management Consortium, and the Pittsburgh eLearning Society.

What is your professional experience?

I have been a technical communicator for twelve years. Like many of us, I started my career writing books and producing them in hardcopy format, but have since embraced online help and user assistance, Web design, single-sourcing, usability, e-learning, and knowledge management. I have experience writing for products in a variety of industries; including media sales, industrial automation, simulation, and pharmacy.

I have given talks at the STC national, local, and regional levels, and I have been pleased to share my experience with other STC leaders on Leadership Day at the annual conference. I have presented at other national conferences and local meetings as well. Topics have included various tools and technologies, user assistance design, single sourcing, and wikis for knowledge management. I have been published in conference proceedings and on the Web, as well as in the online newsletters *Tieline* (published by STC) and STC Pittsburgh's *Blue Pencil.*

The Fun Factor: December Chapter Meeting Combines Good Food and Good Info
By Bryce Walat

The extremely fun December chapter meeting and holiday party, held December 18, combined hot hors d'oeuvres, tasty cookies, and an insightful presentation on E-Learning by Sheldon Murphy.

E-Learning is a $25-50 billion industry that is expected to grow by more than 30 percent in the next five years. In his talk, "The Fun Factor: Make E-Learning Interesting with Good Writing Techniques," Sheldon discussed how "content is king" when it comes to developing effective and interesting e-learning. Good content comes from subject matter expertise, creative writing, and solid instructional design.

Developing good content involves having the right people on your team, knowing your audience, and following the "Platinum Rule" of doing unto your audience as they would do unto themselves.

While general principles of good writing apply to e-learning, writing for e-learning is different from writing for traditional teaching materials or web sites because

success in writing for e-learning involves carrying out the objectives defined in the instructional design process and bringing about behavioral change beyond simple understanding of concepts – "learning to do" something rather than just understanding.

Sheldon then shared tips and techniques for writing content, doing voiceovers, and writing exercise and test questions, such as using a positive tone, using realistic scenarios, limiting on-screen text, and engaging learners, to name a few.

Sheldon ended the meeting when he showed the group examples of effective and not-so-effective learning materials. Some of the examples from the latter group were laugh-out-loud-until-your-sides-ached bad!

Bryce Walat is a technical writer/editor who can be reached at 412-779-1795 or walat_bryce@msn.com.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Winter Networking Social
Date: **Tuesday, January 16, 2007.**

Time: 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Location: Church Brew Works

Software Saturday #2: Introduction to MadCap Flare
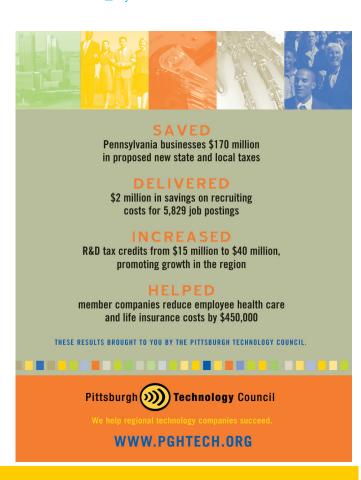Date: **Saturday, April 28, 2007.** See page 6 for a detailed description.

Chapter Awards Banquet
Date: **Monday, May 21, 2007**

Region 4 Conference
Date: **October 2007.** Hosted by the Northeast Ohio chapter.

Software Saturday #2: MadCap Flare Survival Guide

Speaker: Rob Houser

Date: April 28, 2007 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Location: Riverhead Training
425 Sixth Avenue (Regional Enterprise Towers)
www.riverheadtraining.com

Cost: $60 STC members/$75 non-members/$45 unemployed and students (includes continental breakfast)

RSVP: by Friday, April 20 to Nancy Carpenter at carpentn@genco.com or 412-820-2221 (work)

In this hands-on workshop, you will learn how to use Madcap Flare to create an effective online help system. "Hey, you can't teach me to use a tool like Flare in just one day!" you might say. Okay, maybe you won't be an expert in one day, but you can learn enough to get started on the right path.

You will learn how to:

 * Create and manage content that answers user questions

 * Link and layer content to support multiple levels of users

 * Make content easier for users to find

 * Control the look-and-feel of content

 * Deliver content where users need it

In the first 45 minutes, you will create a working help system with Flare. In the time that follows, you'll learn how you did it. And by the time you're finished, you should have the basic knowledge you need to start using Flare as well as some new ideas about how you can get results from Madcap Flare.

Rob Houser is a founding partner of User First Services, Inc. (www.userfirst. net), which specializes in the design and development of user assistance.
Over the past 16 years, he has worked as a technical writer, help author, instructional designer, trainer, adjunct professor, and usability specialist. Some of Rob's recent projects include creating the embedded help and on-screen text for Bank of America's online bill pay web site, writing help topics for Ceridian Employer Services self-service payroll application, creating the Getting Started Tour for Ipswitch's WS_FTP tool, developing web-based training for Johnson & Johnson pharmaceuticals' SAP system, developing the official Flare training guide for Madcap Software, and creating online help for Trimont Real Estate's asset management applications.

Rob has made over 50 conference presentations about user assistance and taught 15 of his own workshops. He holds a Master of Scientific and Technical Communication from Miami University of Ohio. Rob is a Certified Instructor for Adobe RoboHelp, Adobe Captivate, and Madcap Flare. He is also a Certified Performance Technologist through ISPI and an Associate Fellow of STC. In his free time, Rob is an Adjunct Professor at Southern Polytechnic State University, where he teaches online help, web design, and information design. Rob is an Associate Fellow of STC and a member of the Atlanta chapter.

February Chapter Meeting: Managing Translations 101

Speaker: Charlene Nagy

Date: Monday, February 12, 2007

Time: 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Learn what you can do to directly reduce the cost and turnaround time of translation projects. Simple steps to help you get organized and even make the process enjoyable will be presented. Get the scoop on the industry slang, find out what information you need to gather, what you should expect, and what is involved with the translation process. Also discover the best methods for managing updates and overseas reviews.

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

RSVP: by Feb. 7th to Nancy Carpenter - 412-820-2111 (w) or vicepresident@stcpgh.org

Location: Pittsburgh Technology Council Building (see http://www.pghtech.org/aboutus/directions.asp for directions)

Charlene Nagy is CEO of NCS Enterprises, LLC, a 2006 Tech 50 finalist, specializing in foreign language translation services, including software and Web site localization, desktop publishing, multimedia development, cross-cultural consulting, and simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. Charlene, who has been in the industry for over 19 years working with such clients as DuPont, Tyco and Pfizer, from medical, legal and high-tech material to heavy industrial fields, will keep an open format so that those who attend can get the most from the presentation by asking direct questions or concerns and getting straight answers and solutions.

Congratulations!

Fred Bugno won a free STC membership for 2007 at the December meeting's raffle. We hope to see you at many more meetings, Fred!

2006-2007
STC Pittsburgh Officers

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