

# BLUE PENCIL

PITTSBURGH CHAPTER, STC

HTTP://WWW.STCPGH.ORG

VOL. 45, No. 3 - Nov 2008

## Patent Careers For Technical Writers, pt. 1 of 2 - by Steven C. Oppenheimer, Licensed U.S. Patent Agent

After working more than fifteen years as a freelance technical writer, I discovered another career option that draws heavily on my technical writing background and potentially offers significantly better money: a patent agent. The purpose of this article is to help other technical writers decide if they want to explore this interesting option.

### What Is a Patent Agent?

Let's start by defining both patents and patent agents.

A patent is a legal document which describes a new invention, and in particular characterizes those aspects of the invention which are really "new" or "inventive." A patent has several parts, but the crucial parts are the detailed discussion of the invention (sometimes referred to informally as "the disclosure") and the claims.

The disclosure gives an overall description of the invention, in sufficient detail that someone who is well-versed in the overall field of technology at hand could build the invention based on the disclosure. The claims are a section of the patent which—by means of very specific, structured legal language and conventions—indicate precisely the aspects of the technology that the inventor asserts are original, and which should therefore be protected by law as a unique invention.

In the United States, inventors are legally permitted to draft patent applications for their own inventions. Most inventors, however, recognize that drafting an effective patent requires specialized training. As such, they turn to patent attorneys or patent agents to draft their patents for them. Patent attorneys and patent agents are licensed

to draft, file, and prosecute patents on behalf of inventors.

"Drafting" a patent application entails gathering necessary information from the inventors and writing up the patent application. Patent "prosecution" entails a kind of legal dance between the patent applicant and the United States Patent and Trademark Office, or USPTO. It is common for the USPTO to initially reject all or most of the claims in a patent application. For a patent application you are working with (which will likely be someone else's invention, but we'll call it "your invention"), the USPTO will either: (i) argue that a single other, earlier patent or patent application has all the features of your invention (rendering your invention "anticipated"); or (ii) that a reasonable combination of two or more other patents or patent applications would have all the features of your

*Patent Agent, cont. on page 4*

## Table of Contents

<i>President's Column</i> .....	2
<i>STC National and Regional Notes</i> .....	3
<i>December Chapter Meeting</i> .....	5
<i>Important Changes in Word 2007</i> .....	6
<i>Letter from the Editor: Pet Peeves</i> .....	8

## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

### Annual Employment Roundtable

**Date:** Tuesday, January 13, 2009

**Location:** Duranti's Restaurant

More information will be forthcoming in the Blue Pencil and the monthly email update.

## President's Column - by Bryce Walat

As Thanksgiving approaches, it's time to think about thankfulness. We're thankful for many different things: our health, our families, our careers, our freedom, and other things too numerous to mention here.

As far as what I'm thankful for, I'd have to say this: meaningful work and meaningful relationships. Only in the last few years have I realized that meaningful work and relationships are the keys to a life well led—not money, status, good looks, or power. STC Pittsburgh is one avenue for meaningful work and meaningful relationships.

Obviously, STC Pittsburgh has the things you need for meaningful work, like WorkQuest, our job boards, monthly meetings, newsletter, and other “goodies.” As far as meaningful relationships, STC Pittsburgh is where you can meet fellow technical communication professionals to talk shop with, turn to for help and advice, and just enjoy spending time with. I don't know offhand if anyone out there met a romantic partner through STC Pittsburgh, but if that's so, let me know.

In my previous column, I mentioned that joining or renewing STC membership in November and December lets you get 14 months of membership for the price of 12. Now is the time to visit [stc.org](http://stc.org) to join or renew.

That having been said, I have both bad news and good news. First for the bad news: If I haven't done so already, I regret to inform you that Lisa Over will not be running for President for the 2009-2010 event year because of health concerns that suddenly came about, as well as a desire to spend more time with her family. She'll be helping out with VP duties, but will be transitioning to a less “hands-on” role in STC Pittsburgh. As VP, Lisa has served with competence and cheerfulness, and on behalf of STC Pittsburgh, I commend her for her service. I admit that I'm disappointed that Lisa will not be running for President, but her health and family are Job One, and I admire Lisa for making the tough decision to focus on these issues, which are what really matter. Thank you, Lisa, for everything!

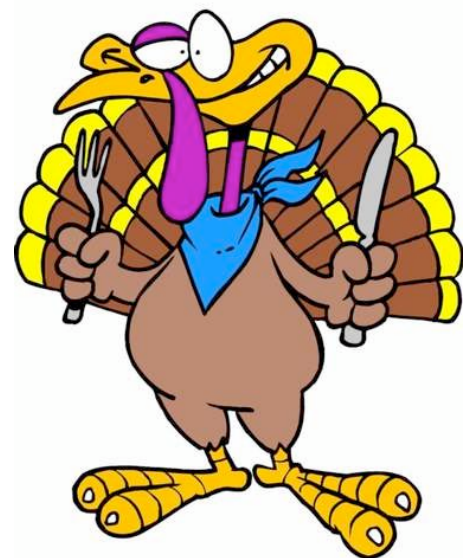
While I would not object to serving another term, I would prefer new candidates for President, and we need candidates for Vice President for the 2009-2010 event year. We are actively recruiting candidates for not only these offices, but other offices. If you're interested, contact me and I'll provide you with a “job description” of each position. We're having our election in April, so we need to have our slate of candidates by March 15, 2009.

Now for the good news: On October 25, I proposed to my college sweetheart, Anastasia Louise “Stacy” Matejka. Her answer



was an emphatic “YES!” We met as undergraduates in Duquesne University's McAnulty College of Liberal Arts. We dated for five years, drifted apart, and fate brought us back together. We're planning our wedding for October 17, 2009 at Duquesne University's chapel.

Happy Thanksgiving!



Society for Technical Communication

**Pittsburgh Chapter**

P.O. Box 133  
Pittsburgh, PA 15230  
[www.stcpgh.org](http://www.stcpgh.org)

**National Office**

901 North Stuart Street  
Suite 904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1822  
Phone: 703-522-4114  
Fax: 703-522-2075  
[www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

**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.

**STC's Mission Statement**

The STC's mission is "creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication."

**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>).

**STC National and Regional Notes**

**Upcoming Web Seminars**

**Time:** 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. ET

**Cost:** Members - \$79; Non-members \$149

**Wednesday, November 19**

How to Avoid Common Graphical Mistakes that Technical Communicators Make (Presented by Naomi Robbins)

**Wednesday, December 3**

Printed Books and Online Help Using a Wiki (Presented by Rahul Mehrotra)

**Distinguished Awards**

To recognize members who demonstrate exemplary dedication and service to their STC communities, the Society runs three special award programs: the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA), the Distinguished SIG Service Award (DSSA), and the Distinguished Service Award for Students (DSAS). The deadline for submitting recommendations is November 30, 2008. If you have an idea for someone who deserves to be recognized for one of these awards, please contact Bryce Walat ([walat\\_bryce@msn.com](mailto:walat_bryce@msn.com)) as soon as possible.

**2009 Slate of Candidates**

NOTE: All STC members must have paid their dues by 28 February 2009 to vote in the election.

**For President:** Cindy Currie will automatically succeed from first vice president.

**For First Vice President:** Mike Hughes will automatically succeed from second vice president.

Candidates on the slate for the 2009 STC election:

**For Second Vice President:** Hillary Hart and WC Wiese

**For Treasurer:** Brian Lindgren and Aiessa Moyna

**For Director** (two positions to be elected): Joaquim Baptista, Karen Baranich, Lori Corbett, and Makarand Pandit

**For Nominating Committee** (two positions to be elected): Suzanne Guess, Sandra Harner, and Garret Romaine

The 2009 Society election is scheduled to run from March 10 through April 9, 2009. Please watch the STC website for detailed information about the candidates and to access a Q&A area where you can ask questions of the candidates. The election website will go live after the first of the year.

**Carnegie Mellon**

**M.A. Professional Writing**

- Technical Writing
- Professional Writing
- Document Design
- Online Information Design

15 month program  
Financial aid available

For more information, or to attend a free, one-day information design workshop, contact

Dr. Karen Schnakenberg  
Director, MAPW Program  
[krs@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:krs@andrew.cmu.edu)  
412.268.2859

*Patent Agent, cont. from page 1*

invention (rendering your invention “obvious”). In other words, Patent Examiners at the USPTO will argue that someone else got there first.

The patent applicant or applicants—typically represented by their attorney or agent—may then either amend the patent claims, or present factual arguments that the claims are not actually anticipated by prior inventions. Sometimes the attorney/agent will do a combination of both, amending some claims while trying to argue around other rejections. Both patent agents and patent attorneys are licensed to fully represent inventors in all respects before the USPTO. In other words, from the standpoint of patent prosecution with the USPTO, there is no practical difference between a patent agent and a patent attorney.

A patent agent, under the supervision of a licensed patent attorney, may also engage in “opinion” work. This means, typically, giving legal advice to a client about whether one of their inventions violates a patent claim of another patent (usually from another company or inventor), or whether a competing product violates one of their patents.

**How to Become a Patent Agent**

Drafting and prosecuting patent applications are not exactly the same as technical writing, but there is significant overlap in the skills involved. Certainly, it is crucial to be able to work with subject matter experts (like engineers or biologists) to gather technical information, and further to be able to write up the information in clear language. Drafting the patent claims involves additional legal skills that

would be new to technical writers, but these skills certainly can be learned.

In the U.S., however, there are strict limits on who can become a patent agent. On the one hand, a law degree is not required. On the other hand, there is a licensing exam which is administered by the USPTO. In order to qualify for the exam, you must have significant technical training in a field such as electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, chemistry, biology, physics, or medicine.

As such, the patent agent field is wide open both to technical writers with the necessary academic training, and also to engineers, scientists and medical professionals who want to make a switch, and who enjoy working with the written word.

Typically, you must have at least an undergraduate degree in one of the appropriate fields, or the equivalent. The exact requirements for being able

to take the test can be found at: <http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/dcom/olia/oed/examregist.htm> (Click on the link for “General Requirements Bulletin” for a .pdf file that lists the exact requirements.)

Once you apply and qualify for the test, you must take the test, which consists of 100 multiple choice questions! The licensing test is not a technical test—if you qualified to take the test, it’s assumed you know something about technology or science already—instead, it’s a test on law and administrative issues related to patents. It’s a very detailed test, and the pass rate is not all that high. In other words, you really need to study for it.

Everything you need to know about patent law and regulations can be found in a book called the MPEP, or Manual

*Patent Agent, cont. on page 5*

**RAMEY**  
TECHNICAL  
WRITING

Complete technical writing service from planning to publication

- Manuals
- Users Guides
- Reports
- Articles
- Brochures
- Technical Sales Support
- Catalogs
- Proposals
- Training Materials
- Newsletters
- Periodicals
- Procedures
- Presentations
- Courses & Seminars
- Publications Planning
- Online Documentation

412.833.5548

ramey@technical-writing.net (e-mail)  
http://www.technical-writing.net (website)

**GW**  
GROUP WELLESLEY™

**Documentation services for technology industries™**

**Authoring:** User manuals, online help, setup/administration guides, marketing collateral

**Technical:** Electronic document delivery, desktop publishing, source format conversion, single-source publishing, SGML/XML support, usability testing, documentation process consulting

**Trainings:** FrameMaker+SGML, XML

933 Wellesley Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
Tel: 412.363.3481  
Fax: 412.363.3482  
www.groupwellesley.com  
info@groupwellesley.com

*Patent Agent, cont. from page 4*

Of Patent Examining Procedure, which can be downloaded from the USPTO web site. Unfortunately, it's about 3000 pages long (really), and it's hard to know exactly what to study from that book! Here is a link to a site where you can get more advice on studying for the patent agent/attorney licensing exam. (Agents and attorneys both take the exact same exam.) <http://www.intelproplaw.com/> (Go to the "forums", and find the discussions on patent careers.) There are also discussion groups on Usenet related to patent law, where you can get advice. (See the newsgroup misc.int-prop.)

Here is one site (among dozens that you will find, if you search the web) for course materials you can find for the patent practice certification test: <http://www.patentpublishing.com/index.html>.

**To be continued next month: What types of opportunities might you find as a patent agent?**

=====

*Steven Oppenheimer is a patent agent at a boutique law firm specializing in intellectual property. Mr. Oppenheimer specializes in electronics, software, mechanical, and business method patents. He may be reached at [steveqdr@yahoo.com](mailto:steveqdr@yahoo.com).*

*Notice is served that while Mr. Oppenheimer is employed as a patent agent at a law firm, and while he maintains a Web site for his (currently dormant) technical writing services, doing business as "Oppenheimer Communications", there is no association between Oppenheimer Communications and the law firm. Further, the law firm is not responsible for the content of this article, and does not endorse any of the contents of this article.*

*This article is Copyright © 2008 Steven C. Oppenheimer. All rights reserved. This article may not be reproduced or redistributed without the express written permission of the author. A more extended version of this same article may be found at: <http://www.OppenheimerCommunications.com>*



**SAVED**

Pennsylvania businesses \$170 million in proposed new state and local taxes

**DELIVERED**

\$2 million in savings on recruiting costs for 5,829 job postings

**INCREASED**

R&D tax credits from \$15 million to \$40 million, promoting growth in the region

**HELPED**

member companies reduce employee health care and life insurance costs by \$450,000

THESE RESULTS BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE PITTSBURGH TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL.

Pittsburgh  Technology Council

We help regional technology companies succeed.

[WWW.PGHTECH.ORG](http://WWW.PGHTECH.ORG)

## December Chapter Meeting: Designing and Implementing Embedded, Dynamic Help

**Date:** Tuesday, December 9

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

**Speaker:** Nicky Bleiel

**Place:** Pittsburgh Technology Center, 2000 Technology Drive, Pittsburgh PA 15219

**Cost** (includes dinner): Members: \$12, non-members: \$15, students/unemployed: \$10

**RSVP:** by Friday, December 5, to Lisa Over at [lisa.writer@yahoo.com](mailto:lisa.writer@yahoo.com) or 412-571-2244.



Writing  
Editing & proofing  
Design & formatting  
Web content development

**Meg A. Papa**

2020 Greensburg Pike  
Pittsburgh, PA 15221

Phone/Fax: 412-243-3026  
Cell: 412-298-0606  
[meg@alumni.cmu.edu](mailto:meg@alumni.cmu.edu)

## Important Changes in Word 2007 - by Robert P. Mohr

You already know about Word's new ribbon, but you may be wondering if there are other major changes in the interface and if so, what are they? Well, there are many, but this article will touch on a few of the more significant changes.

### Mini Toolbar

Overall, the interface was changed to enhance productivity. One such enhancement is the Mini Toolbar. This little toolbar sort of “ghosts” into view whenever you select text then hover the mouse pointer over the selection. As the toolbar comes into view, move the mouse pointer onto it to fully display it. Having 14 text/paragraph formatting icons immediately available by moving the mouse just a fraction of an inch is an immense time-saver. The icons on the mini toolbar represent the following functions:

- Font
- Point size
- Increase font size
- Decrease font size
- Style selector
- Phonetic guide (displays phonetic characters to clarify the pronunciation)
- Bold
- Italic
- Justification (toggles between center & left)
- Highlighter
- Font color
- Decrease indent
- Increase indent
- Bulleted list selector

### Galleries

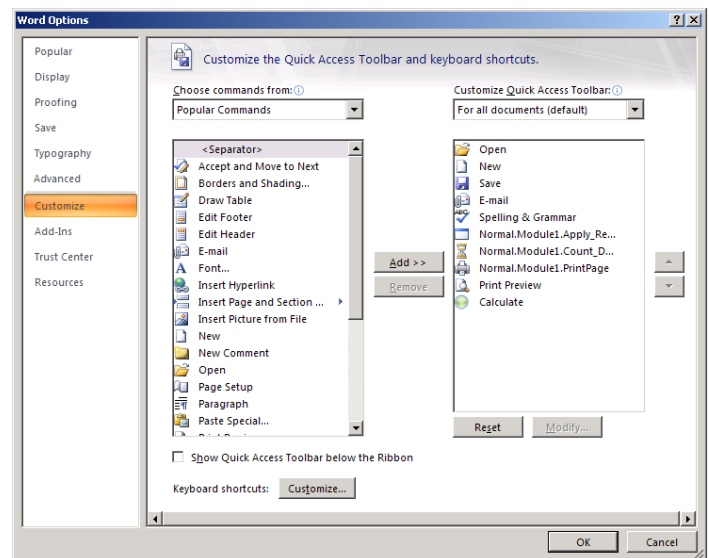
Another device designed to save time is the gallery—and there are several of them. Each gallery is a collection of predefined formats that you can apply by clicking on them from a displayed list. Galleries exist for the most

common document-level components: headers, footers, page numbers, watermarks, margins, shapes, table of contents, and tables. You can also add your own gallery entries thereby further enhancing their usefulness.

### Quick Access Toolbar

Unfortunately, little can be done to customize Word's ribbon unless you know something about XML. However, you can customize the Quick Access Toolbar (QAT) which is located either immediately above or below the ribbon, depending on where you chose to place it. You can add any command available in Word and your own custom macros to the QAT by clicking on it the QAT's drop-down arrow and selecting **MORE COMMANDS**.

The **WORD OPTIONS** window is displayed.

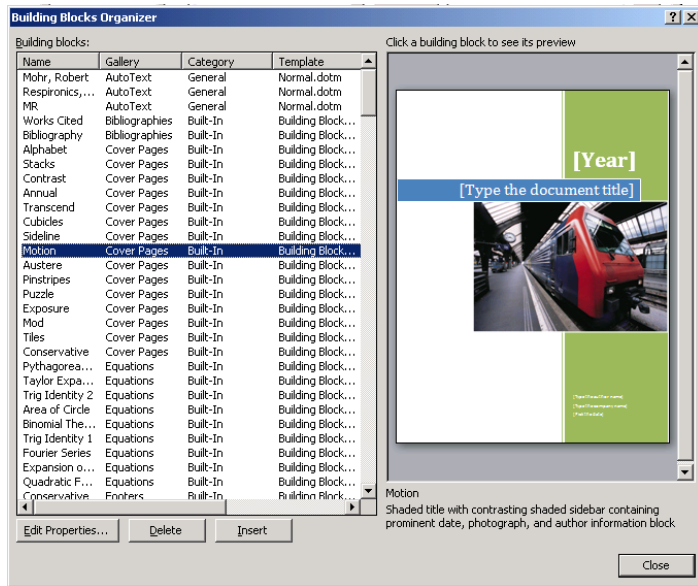


In the figure above, several standard Word commands have been added to the right-side panel as well as three custom items, each prefixed with “Normal.Module1.” These are macros that I frequently use to repeat the heading rows of tables, determine the number of days between dates, and to print the currently displayed page without having to open the Print window. By placing the commands (and macros) you use the most onto the QAT, you will minimize the time spent navigating the ribbon and increase your overall productivity.

*Word Changes, cont. on page 7*

### Building Blocks

Another improvement in Word 2007 is the Building Blocks feature. This feature lets you insert reusable pieces of content including fields and any preformatted snippets of content you create. It's a lot like Word's old AutoText feature only much more powerful. Click the arrow on the **QUICK PARTS** icon under the **INSERT** tab on the ribbon to access the Building Blocks Organizer window.



The figure above shows an entire cover page saved as a building block. From this window you can change or delete a selected block, or you can add a new building block.

### File Formats

One of the single-most important changes in Word 2007 is the addition of several new file formats. All of Office 2007 now has its roots in XML. Microsoft's intention is to make the files smaller and less prone

to corruption. So, by default, Word 2007 saves files in its new .docx format. This is actually a compressed collection of XML files into a single file. In addition to the .docx format, there are several other formats. Here is a breakdown of the formats and a description of each:

Extension	Description
.docx	The default format; supports all of the latest features of Word 2007.
.docm	Supports macro usage; the .docx format does not for added security.
.dotx	Format for full-featured document templates.
.dotm	Same as .dotx, but macros can be stored in it. The standard template (.dotx) does not store macros for security reasons.
.mhtml, .mht	Web pages in which all the graphics and helper files are embedded. This is handy when creating HTML-based e-mails.

Out of the box, Word's default file format is .docx, but you can change the default setting to the Word 2003-compatible .doc format by clicking on the Office button (top left) and selecting **WORD OPTIONS > SAVE >** and choose **WORD 97-2003** from the **SAVE FILES IN THIS FORMAT** drop-down list.

### Summary

There are many changes in Word 2007—too many to discuss in this article. Consult the **WHAT'S NEW** topic in Word's online help system for details about all of Word's features.

*Robert Mohr is a senior member of STC and can be reached at [rpmohr@writemohr.com](mailto:rpmohr@writemohr.com).*

## Letter from the Editor: Pet Peeves

If you happen to be sitting next to me while I am watching T.V. or reading the newspaper, you may hear me let out a shout, a groan, or a heavy sigh once in a while. These verbal expressions are not usually due to bad news, or bad acting, but to an egregious (in my mind) violence committed against the English language and its associated grammar rules. I'm talking about Pet Peeves: those errors/differences in usage which we cannot forgive, no matter what. They raise our blood pressure way more than the occasion merits, and in the Grand Scheme of Life they really don't matter, but still, we rail against them.

Some of my usage Pet Peeves include the following:

- Using singular nouns followed by the abused *their*. "Each teacher had to submit their pupils' grades by noon." If you don't want to use his or her, change the subject to be plural (*all teachers*).
- Using *less* to quantify countable nouns instead of *fewer*. "This line for 10 items or less." Even some of the grocery stores are correcting this error; why can't the journalists and script writers?
- Omitting the serial comma before the conjunction in a list of items: "We needed bread, milk, fruit and meat at the store." I know it is optional, and even frowned upon in the newspaper business, but I like the clarity it provides.
- Having lists that do not use parallel construction (each item of this list of my Pet Peeves starts with an -ing

form of a verb, although the initial draft did not. The glory of proofreading.)

There are more, but I only had so much space for this column. On the other hand, there are grammar/style issues which don't bother me a bit, but must surely lead others to grind their teeth down to the root. For example, split infinitives ("to boldly go") don't raise my hackles – in fact, at times I think they sound better -- but many editors and writers are still appalled to see them cross their desks. The historic subtleties of the usage of *that* vs. *which* also don't stir me. In fact, Word is telling me I've used *which* incorrectly twice in this article. Sorry, Word, you are sticking to outdated conventions. Move on.

Of course, we must be judicious in how often and loudly we express our displeasure at the perceived sins of other writers. It has been said that we must be careful not to become the thing we hate most. As writers, we must be careful not to *commit* the thing we hate most (like using weak nouns). Someone, perhaps an earlier victim of our outrage, will surely point it out to us.

What are your Pet Peeves? (Perhaps unnecessary capitalization is one.) Or am I the only one? Send them to me at [megapap@verizon.net](mailto:megapap@verizon.net).

### 2008-2009

#### STC Pittsburgh Officers

President	Bryce Walat	412-779-1795	<a href="mailto:president@stcpgb.org">president@stcpgb.org</a>
Vice President	Lisa Over	412-571-2244	<a href="mailto:vicepresident@stcpgb.org">vicepresident@stcpgb.org</a>
Secretary	Kathleen Kivinka	412-365-1063	<a href="mailto:secretary@stcpgb.org">secretary@stcpgb.org</a>
Treasurer/Historian	Beverly Spagnolo	412-766-7200 (W)	<a href="mailto:treasurer@stcpgb.org">treasurer@stcpgb.org</a>
Immediate Past President	Nancy Carpenter	412-820-2221 (W)	<a href="mailto:pastpresident@stcpgb.org">pastpresident@stcpgb.org</a>

#### Committees

Publicity	Martin Houser		<a href="mailto:publicity@stcpgb.org">publicity@stcpgb.org</a>
Web Site Coordinator	Erin Hill		<a href="mailto:webmaster@stcpgb.org">webmaster@stcpgb.org</a>
Publications Competition	Heather Lum	412-823-0151 (H)	<a href="mailto:pizzercat@pobox.com">pizzercat@pobox.com</a>
Employment Liaison	open		<a href="mailto:employment@stcpgb.org">employment@stcpgb.org</a>
Student Liaison	open		<a href="mailto:studentliaison@stcpgb.org">studentliaison@stcpgb.org</a>
Special Projects Coordinator	open		<a href="mailto:specialprojects@stcpgb.org">specialprojects@stcpgb.org</a>
WorkQuest™ Chairman	Chuck Lanigan	412-473-3119 (W)	<a href="mailto:workquestchairman@stcpgb.org">workquestchairman@stcpgb.org</a>
WorkQuest™ Executive Director	Janis Ramey	412-833-5548 (W/H)	<a href="mailto:workquestdirector@stcpgb.org">workquestdirector@stcpgb.org</a>
Blue Pencil Managing Editor	Meg Papa	412-243-3026 (W/H)	<a href="mailto:newsletter@stcpgb.org">newsletter@stcpgb.org</a>

*Blue Pencil is the official newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Pittsburgh chapter. It is published monthly from September through June by the Pittsburgh chapter to inform and promote communication within the chapter and the Society. Material contained in this publication may be reprinted by other STC chapters, provided credit is given. Please send a copy of the reprint to the editor. Copyright 2008.*