TECH Trends

Orlando Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

Getting Ready for Trends 97

By Alice Sennott, Conference Chairperson

For the last twelve years, the Orlando chapter either co-sponsored or hosted the Florida Technical Communication Conference. Typically attracting over 150 technical communicators, this annual, one-day event (usually held in March) offered a series of presentations, seminars, and workshops on a broad range of topics.
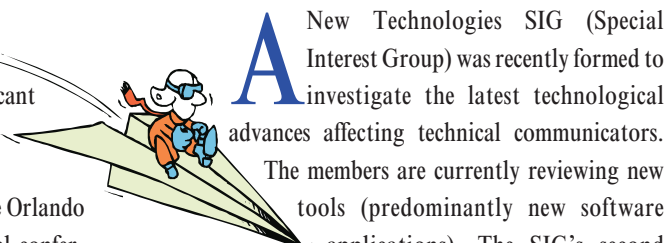
Over the last few years, however, chapter leaders and conference officials have been studying the increasing impact of technology on documentation methods and tools and the increasing need for technical communicators to keep abreast of these developments. To respond to this need, the Orlando chapter is preparing to make significant changes in the focus, format, and name of its annual conference.

And so, on October 3 and 4 of this year, the Orlando chapter will host Trends 97, a two-day regional conference focusing on the most current trends in technical communication and featuring presentations and workshops on the latest and greatest documentation methods and tools. Friday October 3 will feature concurrent presentations and workshops, and Saturday October 4 will offer a full-day, in-depth workshop on online documentation concepts, methods, and tools.

This year's keynote speaker and Saturday workshop presenter will be Dr. Jonathan R. Price, director of technical communication programs at the New Mexico Institute of Technology and noted author, lecturer, and expert at online help presentation systems.

Trends 97 will be held at the Expo Center in Downtown Orlando. Be on the lookout for the Trends 97 Call for Papers, which will be mailed soon. ✠

News Flash…

A New Technologies SIG (Special Interest Group) was recently formed to investigate the latest technological advances affecting technical communicators. The members are currently reviewing new tools (predominantly new software applications). The SIG's second meeting will be 4/21/97 at 6:30 at the Olive Garden restaurant on 17/92 in Winter Park. Please contact Laurie Benson at 667-3725 for further information. ✠

For the Latest Employment and Meeting Information, Call the Orlando Chapter Hotline at 407-262-2064

Attention!!

For the May issue of *Tech Trends*, Gwen Thomas has graciously agreed to manage the publication. Please submit all articles to Gwen Thomas at gthomas@ paysys.com or fax the article to her at 407/660-0483.

A Note from the President . . .

By Dick Hughes

Hello everyone. I hope the Easter Bunny was good to you. It was nice to see some of you at our March 27 chapter meeting at UCF, where we had a wonderful opportunity to see where central Florida's future technical writers are on the "cutting edge" of education. I hope you take the opportunity to really explore the department's Internet pages; they really are quite informative and thought provoking. Part of our tour included a demonstration of the English Department's upgraded technical writing lab, which would make any computer lover envious. Also, visiting professor Dr. Henrietta Shirk stimulated our communications consciousness with an excellent presentation on the future of our profession. It was an evening well worth the drive out east.

Well, if it's April, it must be chapter election time! That's right, our annual chapter election will be officially held at this month's meeting on April 30 at the Winter Park Civic Center. As I announced at the March 27 meeting, the candidates for 1997–98 elected positions include: Dick Hughes, President; Gwen Thomas, Vice President; W.C. Wiese, Treasurer; Laurie Benson, Secretary; and Mary Ellen Gomrad and Taylor Jordan as Nominating Committee members. There is also a bylaws language amendment on this year's ballot.

Here's how our election process works. According to our chapter bylaws, any chapter member may submit additional nominations up to 2 weeks prior to the actual election (that would be April 16). Any petition for nomination must include the nominee's written acceptance plus signatures of 10 percent of the chapter's members and must be sent to me. If you have any questions about this, please contact me. After the cut-off date for petitions, an official ballot form will be mailed to all paid chapter members. (That includes student members too, because, while student members are not allowed to hold elected office, they can vote.) Everyone should get their ballot form around April 19. Complete instructions for completing and returning the ballots are included on the form. At our chapter meeting on April 30, a Tellers Committee will collect all ballots brought in that evening, combine them with those returned by mail, and determine the results. So watch for your ballots in the mail and return them promptly—or better yet, bring them in person to our April 30 meeting !! ⌘

Net with an Expert!!

By W.C. Wiese

Get to know Dave King, President and owner of ParkAve.net, an Internet services company founded in 1996 that has quickly grown to seven full-time employees with offices in downtown Winter Park. At the April chapter meeting, Dave will talk with us on special uses of the Internet — including promotion and presentations — and the chance for communicators to get more involved.

ParkAve.net focuses on value-added Internet services based on a core set of technologies and key market segments. They provide web-integrated database design and development, as well as training and support for Internet access and commercial Internet services. Their website designs are currently provided to travel, entertainment, and residential real estate clients, in addition to corporate intranets. The company is growing rapidly, operating six servers, but will soon add a structured query logic (SQL) server for fast database searching, a firewall, and a separate news server.

Dave's 15 years of experience in the computer industry include a variety of roles from research and development to program management and sales. Among his credits are patent disclosures for advanced computing architectures. While at Lockheed Martin, he was responsible for the conceptual invention of the GAPP 4 array processor, which is, today, the centerpiece of an entire program area known as Programmable Array Logic (PAL). While with Datacube, Inc., he developed several major accounts including heart catheterization lab equipment and real-time non-contact animation equipment.

We're excited about being able to share Dave's Internet knowledge and resources with the Orlando Chapter, so be sure the attend this meeting! ⌘

Regional News and Views

Mark Hanigan, Director-Sponsor, Region 3

Greeting to all and Happy Spring! Here's what has been happening since I wrote you last . . .

Congratulations to the East Tennessee Chapter!!!

The winners have been announced in the recently completed STC Public Relations competition. The East Tennessee Chapter earned an Excellence in the category of Chapter Public Relations Program. Congratulations to chapter president Laurie Moulton and the entire chapter for a job well done!

Winter Board Meeting

The Winter Board meeting in Houston was a busy one. Some highlights:

❑ A $2000 seed money grant was approved for the Orlando Chapter to be used as an endowment fund for students.

❑ A $500 seed money grant was approved for the Orlando Chapter to be used to set up a high school technical writing competition.

❑ The following STC members were elected as Fellows of the Society:

Carol Barnum (Region 3, Atlanta Chapter); David Farkas; JoAnn Hackos; George Hayhoe (Region 3, South Carolina Chapter); Mac Katzin; Mary Fae McKay; Candace Soderston; and Jan Spyridakis.

❑ The following STC members were elected as Associate Fellows of the Society:

Gerald J Alred; A. Binion Amerson Jr.; Renee C. Anderson; Elizabeth Babcock; Paula Berger; Murrie W. Burgan; Alexa Campbell; Donna Lee Dowdney; Pattie J. Gillespie; Michelle I. Hutchinson; Ann Liggio; Brian McCaleb; Carl C. Miller; Barbara E. Mirel; Lynette R. Porter; Deborah F. Sauer; John O. Shipman (Region 3, South Carolina Chapter); Kristene S. Sutliff; Beth Tanner (Region 3, Middle Tennessee Chapter); Jan M. Ulijn; Carolyn Watt; Joy M. White; Thomas R. Williams.

Congratulations to all!

❑ I can't say much now, but more to come on the newly awarded Sigma Tau Chi and DCSA winners from Region 3.

Next month will be my final column flying solo; after that your new DS and I will post a joint column.

Yours in Friendship and Service,

Mark

APRIL SHOWER

Remembering Kirk Foster

By Kirstin Mercer, 1993 BGSU Graduate

Kirk E. Foster, an STC member since 1992, passed away on December 14, 1996. He was twenty-five.

Kirk graduated from Bowling Green State University (BGSU) in 1994 with a Bachelor's Degree in Scientific and Technical Communication. He then continued his education at Drexel University in the master's program in Technical and Science Communication. At the time of his death, Kirk was employed by the Electronic Publishing division of Litton PRC Inc. in West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. He was a Technical Writer/Editor.

Kirk was born with a rare illness that caused his body to produce an excess of scar tissue. He frequently traveled to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the Washington, DC area for treatments to help maintain his health. Though his condition rendered him unable to speak above a whisper, Kirk didn't allow it to keep him from doing what he loved: communicating.

Kirk became active in the technical communication field early in his career at Bowling Green. He served as second vice president of BGSU's student chapter, helped organize numerous fundraising book sales, and planned several chapter-sponsored meetings. He represented BGSU at the Dallas, Minneapolis, and Washington, DC annual STC conferences.

In his free time, Kirk enjoyed spending time with his long-time girlfriend, Christie; flying kites; and reading science fiction.

Friends remember Kirk as someone who loved and embraced life, who was generous with both his time and his friendship, and who never let his illness stand in the way of achieving his goals. Kirk is survived by his father Jon and two older brothers, John Jr. and Paul (PJ).

Kirk was not an STC fellow, an associate fellow, or even a senior member. But he was a contributing member of STC. More than that, he was a son, a brother, a significant other, and an employee. Most of all, he was a friend. He was a valuable asset to, and an advocate for, both the BGSU technical communication program and the field of technical communication as a whole. He strove to make a difference in others' lives and to leave his mark on the world. In these endeavors he succeeded. We miss you, Kirk.

Editor's Note: This article is reprinted with permission from the Bowling Green State University Student Chapter newsletter, Horizons, which dedicated the March 1997 issue to the memory of Kirk E. Foster. If you would like to contribute to the Kirk Foster Memorial Fund to support sending a student to the annual STC conference each year, you can send a donation to Bonnie Fink, STC Chapter Advisor, Department of English, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403. ⌗

Employment Opportunities

Here are the additions to our employment hotline. Remember to check the hotline (262-2064) for the latest employment opportunity information.

Position: Technical Writer (2 contract positions)
Location: Orlando
Contact: David McCorquodale, MDM Consultants, Inc., phone (407) 260-9050, FAX (407) 260-8150
Description: Position 1: Knowledge of HTML, highly technical, organized, strong interpersonal skills. 2-5 years experience.
Position 2: Windows online help with 3-5 years experience. $40-50K range.

Position: Technical Writer (2 permanent positions)
Location: Orlando
Contact: Documentation Manager, HTE Inc., Documentation Department, Barnett Bank Center, Suite 2000, 390 N. Orange Ave., Orlando, FL 32801, FAX (407) 648-0848
Description: Write online documentation and training materials. Degree required and software documentation experience. HTE develops software for city and county governments and employs 300.

Position: Contract Technical Writer (6 month contract positions)
Location: Clearwater
Contact: Carrie Tindell, Romac International, Tampa, FL, phone (800) 395-2493, FAX (813) 251-2493, e-mail ctindell@romac.com
Description: End-user doc., MS Word, Windows, RoboHelp or Doc to Help.

Position: Technical Writer (5 week contract position)
Location: Orlando
Contact: Ron Cool, Recruiter, Emerald Information Systems, Inc. 7457 Aloma Ave., Suite 305, Winter Park, FL 32792, phone (407) 677-1388, FAX (407) 677-8970, e-mail emerald@gdi.net
Description: 3-4 years experience, Windows 95 and MS Word, good analytical skills, overtime is required as needed. Tech writer will team with system designers helping pull together a system specification outline and will start the process of filling it in. Job reference # TW119D. Fax resume to Ron Cool.

Position: Technical Writer (1 permanent position)
Location: Orlando
Contact: Judi Alamia, (407) 240-3863. PO Box 628600, 5955 T.G. Lee Blvd., Suite 500, Orlando, FL 32862-8600 FAX (407) 240-1106
Description: Full time regular position. Bachelor's Degree in English or Technical Writing and 1-3 years experience; software/hardware documentation helpful. Experience with FrameMaker or other DTP software. Familiar with online authoring software. Able to work easily with technical and non-technical people. Send resume and salary history to Attn: Judi Alamia, Technical Publications, P.O. Box 628600, Orlando, FL 32862-8600.

Did You Know?

By Lori Corbett

Here are some interesting facts about the STC Web site. The STC World-Wide Web site is funded by a grant from the Society for Technical Communication and supported by the Technical Communications department at Clarkson University, which is located in Potsdam, NY. The site server (Heron) is a Pentium Gateway 2000 P5-90 running Linux 2.1.7.

You can access the following two addresses:

❑ If you want Society-level information, look at www.stc-va.org

❑ If you want Chapter-level information, look at www.stc.org.

Which Web sites do you use as information sources for your work? Please let me (or this month, Gwen Thomas) know so that we can share them with our membership in this new column. Be sure to include some background information. ✠

on Language

Where the Action Is

By Mary Kendig

I think everyone will agree that the written and spoken word can be a powerful instrument—that is, depending on the writer or speaker. Think of that person as the "on/off switch," the power source. Without that person's spark, without his or her style, energy, and creativity, words have no power. They can seem passive, weak, indecisive, or evasive.

We, the speakers and writers, are the key. No matter what kind of communicating we do—creative or technical—we mustn't let our words just lie there like boring lumps of mashed potatoes. We need to put some "gravy" on 'em: to inject some color, some action, some real power into them. How? We can begin by increasing our use of the active voice.

As we know, the active voice places the actor in front of the action, as in:

My **company manufactures** millions of precision **tools**.

When the structure of the sentence places the receiver in front of the action, the sentence is in the passive voice, as in:

Millions of precision **tools are manufactured** by my **company**.

Passive sentences may be useful in some instances (if we don't know or don't want to mention the actor, or if we want to place the emphasis on the receiver). Many times, however, technical and scientific writers overuse passive sentences, often more from habit than choice. Converting unneeded passive sentences to active sentences can strengthen the style of the document, making it seem more dynamic and more confident. Here are two ways to do so:

➤ Turn the passive clause or sentence around:
Passive: These methods **are described** in detail in Section 6.
Active: Section 6 **describes** these methods in detail.

➤ Change the *to be* verb to an action verb:
Passive: The solutions **were achieved** because of our extensive effort.
Active: The solutions **resulted** from our extensive effort.
Passive: Our study **was conducted** on the Sales Manager position.
Active: Our study **focused** on the Sales Manager position.

As you can see, the sentences in the active voice are stronger, more direct, and more concise. No doubt, they'll have a more positive impact on the reader! ❊

44th Annual STC Conference

The Society office has posted information about the technical sessions on its Web site at http://www.stc-va.org. Select "Conference Details" from the menu, and then select "Sessions." Other options include:

❑ Overview
❑ Committees
❑ Pricing
❑ Transportation
❑ Tours
❑ Post-Conference
❑ Forms
❑ Lodging
❑ Host Chapter.

The following STC Annual Conference program tours have been canceled:
❑ Toronto Star Press Centre
❑ IBM Canada Workshop on User-Centered Design Approaches.

The Royal Ontario Museum program tour has been changed to the morning of Thursday, May 15. Its exact time has yet to be announced. It's not too late to register for the conference; the advanced registration deadline is May 2. ❊

Chapter Notes

By Paul Lockwood

March Meeting

Online classes, state-of-the-art equipment, and predictions of the future of technical communication were all subjects of discussion at the March chapter meeting at UCF. Attendees were first treated to an overview of improvements to the lab, courtesy of professor David Gillette. With over 20 Dell or Mac workstations, the latest desktop publishing and online design software, direct Internet connections, and an overhead display system for both computer and video projection, students clearly have a large number of tools to help them. Gillette also discussed an online course he's teaching in Digital Rhetorics and the Modern Dialectic. If you missed his presentation, check out the site at http://reach.ucf.edu/~enc4932/asstoc.htm.

Next, UCF visiting associate professor Dr. Henrietta Nickels Shirk presented "Vision 2000: The Future of Technical Communication." Among Dr. Shirk's predictions for our industry: there will be more of a focus on legal and ethical issues, and as we encounter more changes in our professional roles, we may become "designers" more than "writers."

Door prizes went to Chuck Weirauch, Dan Voss, Flora Werfel, and Rick Lineback.

Admin. Council

Things are moving along nicely for the fall Trends conference. At the March Administrative Council meeting, Dick Hughes reported for conference committee chair Alice Sennott that a draft of the call for papers and presenters should be ready for the Council's review at its April meeting. Dick also provided a copy of a proposed amendment to the bylaws; it requires that the annual election of chapter officers be conducted at or before the chapter's general meeting in April. ❊

Coming Up . . .

APRIL SHOWERS

DATE	TOPIC	LOCATION
APR. 21	**Second Meeting of the New Technologies SIG.** 6:30 p.m. — Please call Laurie Benson at 667-3725 for more information.	Olive Garden Restaurant Route 17-92 Winter Park, FL
APR. 30	**Chapter Meeting and Elections:** Web Page Design and Business Opportunities for Communicators, presented by Dave King, owner of ParkAve.net 6:30 p.m.—Members: $5.00/Nonmembers: $7.00 R.S.V.P. to Charlotte Salveson at csalveson@paysys.com or 407-660-0343. *(See "Net with an Expert" on page 2 for more information.)*	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, FL
MAY 2	**Deadline for submitting articles for the May issue of Tech Trends.** For this month only, please submit all articles to Gwen Thomas at gthomas@paysys.com or fax to her at 407-660-0483.	
MAY 11-14	**44th Annual STC Conference.** For more information, check out their web site at www.stc-va.org.	Toronto, Canada
MAY 28	**Chapter Meeting:** Topic to be announced. 6:30 p.m.—Members: $5.00/Nonmembers: $7.00 R.S.V.P. to Charlotte Salveson at csalveson@paysys.com or 407-660-0343.	Winter Park Civic Center 1050 W. Morse Blvd. Winter Park, FL