STC
SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

MEMO TO MEMBERS

"Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication."

STC Orlando Chapter: A Four-Year Chapter of Distinction · April 2007 · Volume 5, Issue 7

Goin' Shopping

BY ERIKA HIGGINS

As many of you may know, Minneapolis, Minnesota is the home of the largest mall in the country-The Mall of America. This year, Minneapolis is also the home of STC's 54th Annual Conference. While I plan to spend part of my time (ok, maybe every waking moment that I am not at the conference) in Minnesota shopping for bargains at the Mall of America, I also plan to get in on a good deal at the conference.

For example, for just $600 ($300 each) I can score two, full-day pre-conference workshops . Or, for less than $800 (member rate), I gain access to three days of over 200 education sessions on topics ranging from Designing and Assessing User Experiences to Producing and Publishing Information .

But wait, there's more! It is nearly a buy-one-get-one-free sale, because for that same low conference admission fee I can meet and greet with hundreds of software, translation, and writing company reps, all of whom have some of the neatest giveaway items. Act now and you also get the Keynote Presentation delivered by author, journalist, and television producer Simon Singh and a closing session hosted by high-tech humorist Ze Frank. And, just between you and me, the networking opportunities at the conference are phenomenal and there is no extra charge! You can meet with other members and exchange great ideas, absolutely free.

After the conference, I can show off my snazzy new duds from the mall at the next chapter meeting while I flaunt my newly acquired knowledge and skills from the conference. I plan to stretch the savings even further by sharing these skills with my colleagues at the office. How's that for getting mileage out of my conference admission fee?

But, like every good bargain, the offers only last for so long. To take advantage of the pre-registration rate, you must register for the conference by May 4th. For even bigger savings, sign up for STC membership and your conference pre-registration fee is just $795. And, if you are attending the conference, you'll want to take advantage of the great hotel room rates that STC has negotiated for conference attendees.

So, while I will be walking the Mall of America in search of great sales on the season's latest styles, I will also be getting in style with the latest trends and topics in the world of technical communication at the conference. It will be a bargain hunter's paradise. Hope to see you all there!—**MtM**

ERIKA HIGGINS IS STC ORLANDO CHAPTER PRESIDENT, A SENIOR MEMBER, AND MEMBER OF THE A-SIG AND IDL SIG. ERIKA WORKS AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES INDUSTRY.

Don't miss our next meeting...

Dan Beall, from *Doc-To-Help*, will be our guest speaker.
Dan's topic will be:
"Past, Present, and Future of Help Authoring"

Tuesday, May 27, 2007 at 7:00 pm
PBS&J Building
482 S. Keller Dr.
Maitland, Fl 32810

From Writer to Communicator: University of Central Florida Changes Its Program Name

BY MIKE MURRAY
STC BOARD OF DIRECTORS

By now, I hope you're all aware of the changes taking place in our profession. We're moving from being "technical writers" to "technical communicators," and it's more than just a change in job titles. (Read "Technical Communicator," Your Time has Come and From Writer to Communicator to learn more.)

This movement is taking place both in the workplace and, now, in academe. On March 19, STC Treasurer W.C. Wiese and I attended a meeting of the faculty of the University of Central Florida's technical writing program. I'm pleased to report that we had significant success in making the case for a switch to "technical communication."

W.C. and I explained the importance and value of changing the UCF program from "technical writing" to "technical communication." For data, we drew on a document that STC recently presented to the United States Department of Labor that argues for official recognition of "technical communicator" in the Standard Occupational Classification system, a Bureau of Labor Statistics document that influences hiring decisions, funding, grants, and statistic gathering. (See The Case for Technical Communication).

We also got support from UCF Professor and STC Fellow Dan Jones, who summarized the view of Dan Voss, who could not attend the meeting. (Voss spent eleven years as manager of STC's Education Committee and is the co-founder of the Orlando Chapter's mentoring program at UCF.) Jones pointed out that several of the English Department's new course titles already included the words "technical communication" (such as "The Visual in Technical

> **" Personally, I think 'Mike Murray, technical communicator' has a nice ring to it. "**

Communication" and "International Technical Communication").

As a result of the meeting, the faculty unanimously agreed on changing the title of both the BA and MA programs to "technical communication."

Jones said he would look into what is officially required at the department, college, and university levels to make the name change. Jones also encouraged the faculty to use "technical communication" in place of "technical writing" in all program-related correspondence with other faculty, staff, administrators, and students. He plans to make the necessary changes to the 2008-2009 undergraduate catalogs when the next deadline comes in late fall.

The Board is, of course, pleased with this development, and we encourage other educational institutions to consider changing their program names to "technical communication." And for those of us in the workforce—maybe it's time we talk to our bosses about a title change.

Personally, I think "Mike Murray, technical communicator" has a nice ring to it.

MIKE MURRAY IS ONE OF THE FIRST TWO DIRECTORS-AT-LARGE ELECTED BY THE ENTIRE STC MEMBERSHIP RATHER THAN MEMBERS OF A SPECIFIC REGION. HE IS A SENIOR MEMBER OF THE SOCIETY, HAVING JOINED THE ORLANDO CHAPTER IN 1984. MURRAY IS BEST KNOWN IN THE ORLANDO AREA FOR LEADING THE ORLANDO CHAPTER TO THREE STRAIGHT CHAPTER OF DISTINCTION HONORS.

Note: The preceding article first appeared in the March/April 2007 edition of STC News & Notes and is reprinted here by permission of the author.

—MtM

Six Reasons You Don't Need a Technical Writer (and Why They're Dead Wrong!)

By ANN ZUCCARDY

I know, I know. Times are tough. You have to make due with the staff you have. It's a common and valid lament in today's workplace. You've got to do more with less, so an obvious place to cut costs is in your documentation efforts. After all, writers and editors are a luxury in lean times. You're a small company and you can produce your documentation in-house, right? Think again. Hiring the right freelancer to do the job correctly the first time around could save you hundreds or thousands in help desk calls, service calls, document revision, and distribution. Here's why.

1. You want someone with your industry or product knowledge.

Knowledge of your industry or product is helpful, but your writer's ability to communicate well both in writing and in the spoken word is crucial to your documentation project's success. A good technical writer:

- designs easy-to-use and easy-to-find documents.

- writes clear and easy-to-follow instructions.

- demonstrates a broad range of technical knowledge which enables him to acquire new technical knowledge quickly. Most tech writers thrive on learning obscure technical facts just as much as they love discussing the merits of the semicolon. The best tech writers are amazingly quick studies.

- creates document templates with a clean, professional appearance that your company can re-use.

- asks intelligent questions of your SMEs (subject matter experts) that you might not think to ask, ensuring thorough coverage of the product's features.

2. The programmers or engineers can write the documentation.

Oh, really? They're not busy enough already? Most programmers and engineers with whom I've worked loathe writing. Let them do what they do best and let a writer do what she does best.

Good technical writers are power users of most word processing programs and HATs (help authoring tools). They are also privy to the latest documentation techniques that will enhance your company's professional reputation. A good technical writer is savvy about design trends and best practices. Can you say this for your engineers and programmers?

3. You need a writer on site.

Why? This is 2007. Most freelance tech writers have high-speed internet connections, fax machines, and cell phones. I've worked with clients I've never even met or who I've met just a couple of times for documentation review meetings. It's good for the writer and it's good for you when you don't have an extra body taking up your valuable space. I have developed some of my best professional relationships in cyberspace.

4. Only you understand your users' needs best.

> " A good technical writer is savvy about design trends and best practices. Can you say this for your engineers and programmers? "

Yes, you do. You know what they want and what they need; that's why your business is so successful.

Consider the following questions:

- Does your documentation need to be geared to the newbie user or the experienced techno-geek?

- Do you know how to analyze your audience and write to that audience?

- Do you understand your audience's basic learning style?

- Will graphics work better than words to convey your message?

- Will a CD or HTML-based online help work better than print documentation?

If You Missed Our Last Meeting...

BY CINDY SKAWINSKI

...you missed spending the evening with some of the most talented students in Florida! April's meeting was the eleventh annual Florida H.S. Technical Writing Competition Awards and Pellegrin Scholarship dinner, held at Buttermilks County Restaurant in Maitland.

There were many students honored this evening, led by Rachel Eichen's triumph for the Distinguished Service Award for Students. Gail Lippincott secretly nominated Rachel for this STC award, and Rachel was definitely pleased to receive this unexpected honor. Thank you for everything you've done for the Orlando Chapter, Rachel!

There were two undergraduate winners of the Pellegrin Scholarship this year – Daniel Beck and Ashley Carney, both students at UCF. Each student was awarded a $500 scholarship for their exemplary work. We were fortunate enough to have Melissa Pellegrin's family in attendance to help present the awards to these distinguished students.

Many local H.S. students were also honored this year for their technical writing skills at April's meeting. The winners represented Apopka H.S., Hagerty H.S., Lake Brantley H.S., and Winter Springs H.S.. See page 8 for the complete list of winners. More information on the Florida H.S. Technical Writing Competition can be found at http://www.stc-orlando.org/education/highsch/highsch.asp.

Adrienne Kuxhausen from Hagerty H.S. won the Excellence award in the Florida H.S. Technical Writing Competition. Adrienne's entry, titled *Inside Hair: A Closer Look at Color and Shape*, impressed our local judges so much that it was submitted to the International Student Technical Communication Competition. It went on to win the top honor – the Distinguished Award – along with $1,000. Since Adrienne was not informed of her international award, her peers, along with teachers, family members, and members of the Orlando chapter, happily shared in the surprise.

Finally, April's meeting also marked the annual election of chapter officers. The elected chapter officers for the 2007-08 year are:

- President: Erika Higgins
- Vice President: Kelli Pharo
- Secretary (vacant)
- Treasurer: Mark Wray

Jon Kessler presents the 2007 High School Technical Writing Competition Excellence Award to Adrienne Kuxhausen

Chapter president Erika Higgins surprises Rachel Eichen with the Distinguished Service Award for Students

At Our Next Meeting…

BY KELLI PHARO

This Month: Come Hear About Help Authoring

We are pleased to announce that Dan Beall of ComponentOne will be our May chapter meeting guest speaker. Dan is a product manager for ComponentOne, and will be speaking to us about his company's Help authoring tool, Doc-To-Help.

Dan will be discussing the past, present, and future of Help formats, along with the pros/cons of each. He'll wrap up his presentation with a discussion and demo of ComponentOne's Doc-To-Help – what it does, where it is going, and how to convert projects to it.

Doc-To-Help has been empowering authors to generate online Help and print-ready documentation since 1991. The editor-independent authoring experience allows writers to create content in Microsoft Word or any HTML editor without the need for importing or converting the content into a proprietary format. Authors are choosing Doc-To-Help for its innovative browser-based Help

(NetHelp), powerful conditional content and single-sourcing, Windows Vista compatibility, Office 2007 support, and integrations to Microsoft Word, FrontPage, and Adobe Macromedia Dreamweaver. Doc-To-Help also helps to preserve legacy content by providing powerful HTML Help, WinHelp, and RoboHelp project converters.

Join us Tuesday, May 22, at 6:30 p.m. for this interesting topic, some great networking time, and some yummy food. See our website for more info – www.stc-orlando.org. This is our last regular chapter meeting of the chapter year. We hope you'll also join us for our end-of-year banquet in June. More on that coming soon!

Getting Yourself Hired
Lesson 3: What Questions Do You Have For Me?

BY DALTON HOOPER

At some point during the job interview (usually near the end), the interviewer will ask, "Do you have any questions for me?". It is a precious gift. Never throw it away. Leveraged to their fullest, the questions you ask can carry more weight than the answers you have given up to that point.

Be prepared

Before you show up for your next interview, you will no doubt have spent some time preparing your answers to the questions you think will most likely be asked. That is a wise strategy. If the interviewer has also prepared wisely, the questions asked of you will have been purposely selected to reveal your suitability to the position for which you are being interviewed.

Like many interviewers, I long ago developed a standard set of questions to suit my purposes. I generally ask the same questions of each candidate, judging each answer in relation to their competition's answer to the same question.

Is there one question in my repertoire that I consider to be the most revealing?

Why, yes. There is. The question? "Do you have any questions for me?"

A defining moment

In a future lesson within this series, I will talk about the presence of "defining moments" in job interviews and how to manage and create them. For now, let's concentrate on the opportunity you are handed near the end of your interview which will allow you to create a defining moment.

I am frequently amazed at job candidates who have persevered through my interview session with them, only to turn down the precious gift I offer them – to ask questions of me! Have you ever been asked by your interviewer if you had any questions for them, only to reply, "No. I think you've answered everything I wanted to know." If you take nothing else away from this article, learn this: **Never, ever pass up the opportunity to ask your interviewer some questions!**

Cracking the code

I am going to let you in on a fact so little-known that even most interviewers don't realize its existence: When you ask the interviewer a question, your primary purpose is <u>not</u> in learning his or her answer, but in having the interviewer hear the question(s) you have chosen to ask! As a hiring manager myself, I can tell you that regardless of how you have performed in the interview to this point, you can drastically improve or decrease your chances of being the successful candidate based on the questions you ask. If you choose to pass up this opportunity, you had better hope all of the competing candidates did also. Of course, even if you do ask your interviewer some questions, you can "blow it".

Here are some examples of poor questions choices:

- "Would I be working in a cubicle or an office?"

- "Do you have casual Fridays here?"

- "Is there a cafeteria in the building?"

- "What day is payday here?"

Consider instead, these examples:

- "What would be the greatest challenge for someone filling this position?"

- "Can you walk me through what a typical day would be like in this role?"

- "How does this position support your company's objectives?"

- "After spending this time with me, what would you consider to be my weak points and how would you recommend I improve on them?"

I especially like the last example. It not only instantly makes your interviewer become your mentor and advisor (and logically, your ally), but also gives you a read on how you fared in the interview – no more wondering. How useful is that!!

Can you see the obvious difference in the types of questions in the first list versus the second list? In the first list, the questions reveal your interest in what the potential job could do for *you*. In the second list, the questions indicate a desire on your part to be what the *interviewer* wants you to be. If you were the interviewer (i.e., the decision-maker), which set of questions would be most endearing to you? Exactly.

Your own repertoire

I mentioned earlier that I have a standard set of questions I use in nearly every interview. You should also develop a standard set of questions that *you* will use whenever an interviewer asks, *"Do you have any questions for me?"* Give your repertoire of questions a lot of thought. Rehearse them so you can ask them without pulling out a piece of paper to read them. You need to ask them as if they were a natural result of your keen interest in the position being discussed. Good luck!

DALTON HOOPER WORKS FOR *WALT DISNEY PARKS AND RESORTS INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY*. UNTIL RECENTLY, DALTON WAS THE DOCUMENTATION PROJECT MANAGER, DIRECTING A TEAM OF TECHNICAL WRITERS. HE CAN BE REACHED AT

Six Reasons You Don't Need a Technical Writer
(Continued from page 3)

How will you deliver and distribute the final documentation product?

A good technical writer will perform a user needs analysis and provide a documentation plan that drives your information architecture design. He will create a documentation plan that will evolve over the course of the project and will allow the documentation to grow as your product changes. With a great foundation, you won't have to reinvent the wheel with every new iteration of your product.

5. You already know how to use MS Word.

That's great and it's important.

- Are you thoroughly comfortable with Word's advanced features?

- Do you dream in macros?

- Are you familiar with FrameMaker (a highly un-user-friendly but powerful favorite tool of tech writers that handles large, complex documents that make MS Word quiver and crash)?

- Have you ever designed online help using RoboHelp?

- How are your Photoshop, Illustrator, Paint Shop Pro, Quark, Visio, InDesign, and basic HTML coding skills?

- Are you aware of the latest trends in writing and grammar style so your company's message will be consistent and grammatically correct?

Good tech writers bring an extensive working knowledge of a plethora of word processing and graphics programs as well as standard business writing practices.

6. You can keep up with document updates.

- What is your plan for documentation version control?

- Who will write the updates?

- How will you ensure your users have the latest and greatest version?

If you don't have a version and source control system in place, multiple versions of your document in several folders create an organizational nightmare when it's time to revise or update.

There's a trend toward single sourcing technical documentation these days. Simply put, this means one source for all of your documentation needs. This single source may contain material for your print manuals, online help, and training materials all in one place. In single sourcing, a writer tags specific material for a specific use. When you deliver documentation, you simply designate the type of documentation you want (e.g., print, online help, user guide, training material, technical reference information) to create and the software does the rest. The point is, everything is in one place, making version and source control simple.

Setting up a single sourcing system now will save you time and future headaches later. A good technical writer is familiar with industry trends for single sourcing and may be able to help you set up a single sourced system within your organization.

If you're skeptical about hiring a technical writer, consider this: good written communication skills will always be in demand in the business world. However, in today's complex business world, just being a good writer isn't enough. A good technical writer needs technical savvy, a sound knowledge of dozens of software programs, and impeccable research and writing skills.

Would you hire an accountant to develop software? Would you want an engineer to answer phones? Would you expect a copywriter to do your taxes? Probably not. So, give your business and your wonderful products the professional attention they deserve and consider a technical writer for your next documentation project.

ANN ZUCCARDY, CREATIVE ENTREPRENEUR, FOOD LOVER AND OWNER OF THE VERMONT SHORTBREAD COMPANY, INVITES YOU TO SAMPLE A TASTE OF HER BUTTERY-RICH, AUTHENTIC VERMONT SHORTBREAD. PLACE YOUR ONLINE ORDER FOR SHORTBREAD BOXED FRESH FROM THE OVEN AND SHIPPED RIGHT TO YOUR DOORSTEP AT HTTP://VERMONTSHORTBREAD.COM

ARTICLE SOURCE: HTTP://EZINEARTICLES.COM/?EXPERT=ANN_ZUCCARDY

Congratulations 2006-2007 High School Technical Writing Competition Winners!

Level	Award	Essay Title	Recipient	School
Excellence	$150	Inside Hair: A Closer Look at Color and Shape	Adrienne Kuxhausen[1]	Hagerty H.S.
Merit	$75	Scratch and Sniff	Yesenia Ezell	Hagerty H.S.
Merit	$75	No More Ironing?	Jenna Nikles	Winter Springs H.S.
Merit	$75	An Insight into the Future: Research on the Development of Superconductors	Maurice Uchegbu	Apopka H.S.
Achievement	$25	Nanomedicine: The Miracle Elixir	Andrew Boik	Winter Springs H.S.
Achievement	$25	Biodetectors - What They Are and Why We Need Them	Mansfield Burlingame	Lake Brantley H.S.
Achievement	$25	Genetically Engineered Foods: The Opportunity to Enrich Lives or Harm Them?	Emily Burris	Hagerty H.S.
Achievement	$25	Necessity of Copper Recycling	Taylor Chapman	Hagerty H.S.
Achievement	$25	Copper: The Heart of Cardiovascular Health	Emily Gottfried	Hagerty H.S.
Achievement	$25	The Effects of Wheelbase and Track on Vehicle Dynamics	Shehan Sirigampola	Winter Springs H.S.
Honorable Mention	Certificate	Take A Deep Breath...	Thomas Calhoon	Hagerty H.S.
Honorable Mention	Certificate	Anabolic Androgenic Steroids	Taylor Livingston	Hagerty H.S.
Honorable Mention	Certificate	Silly Putty	Rachel Martin	Hagerty H.S.
Honorable Mention	Certificate	Gardasil: A Vaccine for Cancer?	Jessica Swerdlow	Lake Brantley H.S.
Honorable Mention	Certificate	DNA An Overview	Jessi Wood	Hagerty H.S.

[1] Won Distinguished Award in international competition, #1 rated paper, $1,000 award.

Thank you, officers, for your continued support of the chapter!

If you missed our last meeting...
(Continued from page 4)

More photos from our April 2007 meeting!

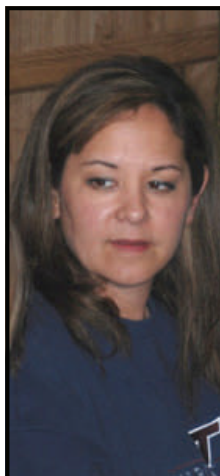Mansfield Burlingame

Taylor Chapman
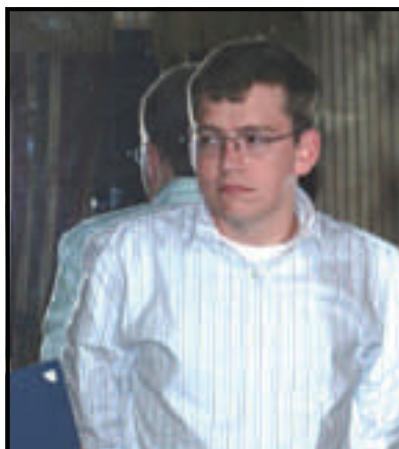

Jenna Nikles

Maurice Uchegbu
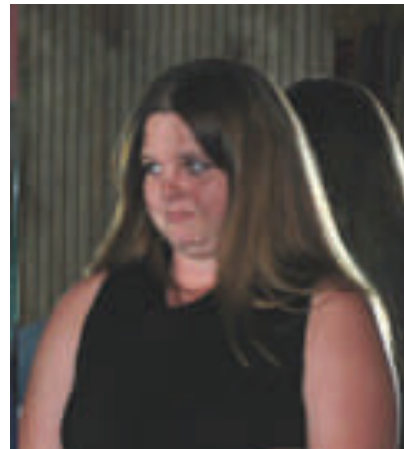

Trent Daniel

Emily Gottfried

Shehan Sirigampola

2007 Melissa Pellegrin Scholarship Award winners:

Daniel Beck

Ashley Carney

Memo to Members

The *Memo to Members* invites writers to submit articles to be considered for publication. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article or post it online, and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if your article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications. Permission to reprint any material herein is given provided that credit is given and a copy of the issue is sent to the editor.

From the Editor's Desk...

You are very fortunate to belong to a vibrant, full-of-life, STC community — Orlando! So many other STC chapters are struggling and many have all but collapsed.

I have noticed that there seems to be a couple of indicators that reveal when a chapter is heading in the wrong direction:

1. The chapter newsletter is published less and less frequently. Eventually, the newsletter ceases to be published at all.

2. The chapter website is updated less and less frequently Eventually, it too, ceases to exist.

In my opinion, these two features of an STC community are as revealing of the current health of a chapter as blood pressure and heart rate are to you and me.

In the case of the Orlando chapter, both our newsletter and our website are alive and well.

These two features are not simply the products of the webmaster and the editor. Indeed, we are only the assemblers of the information. If it weren't for you, the members, there would be no story for us to tell. Thanks for making Orlando the chapter of distinction it is!

—Dalton Hooper

Corner of Distinction

Rachel Eichen

Kudos to Rachel Eichen, our FTC liaison!

If you have ever met Rachel, you know that she does not lack enthusiasm or energy! Rachel has definitely been a strong connection between our Orlando chapter and UCF. Rachel is also this year's winner of the Distinguished Service Award for Students. Congratulations, Rachel!