

TechniScribe

Orange County Chapter

Southern California Unified Art, Online, and Publications Competition

Awards Banquet held April 15, 2000 at the Wyndham Garden Hotel in Costa Mesa, By Jill Eisenbach, Editor

Each year the Society for Technical Communication (STC) sponsors an international competition in which technical communicators have the opportunity to receive recognition for their work. Preliminary competitions are held by STC chapters to award recognition to technical communications on a local or regional level. Top winners in those competitions advance to the international level.

Our first regional competition in Southern California was a tremendous success. There were many award winners, including 21 Distinguished Technical Communication entries, all forwarded to the Society's International competition. There were three categories: Art, Online, and Publications documentation. And there were three levels of awards; Distinguished, Excellence, and Merit. Listed are highlights of winners from our very own Orange County Chapter, including best of show for all categories.

Art

- ◆ Sandi Giles, and Rick Morgan both of The Write Connection won three awards for *Merit*.
- ◆ *Best of Show*: "The Digital Force" Dean Sipe, Greg Gonzalez, Sr., and J. F. "Cal" Callahan, QUALCOMM

Online

- ◆ Julie Atkins of iMet Technologies, Inc. won an award for *Excellence*.
- ◆ Merrie Rivas and Randy Johnston both of Sage Software, won an award for *Distinguished* and two awards for *Merit*.
- ◆ *Best of Show*: "Intuit's TurboTax Home & Business Tax Library 1998" Sharen Gerchman, Rita Quinn, and Bruce Meyer, Intuit

Publications

- ◆ Elaine Perle Rubenstein of iBASEt won an award for *Merit*.
- ◆ Maribel Swanson of iMet Technologies, Inc won an award for *Excellence*, and an award for *Merit*.
- ◆ Sandra McClintock, and Pamela Moseberry both of Pacific Bell, won an award for *Excellence*, and two awards for *Merit*.
- ◆ Randy Johnston, and Merrie Rivas both of Sage Software, won an award for *Excellence*, and three awards for *Merit*.

- ◆ Sandi Giles and Rick Morgan both of The Write Connection, won an award for *Distinguished*, and an award for *Merit*.
- ◆ *Best of Show*: "Intuit's ProSeries Evaluation Guide, 1998" Wayne Boeck, Jan Harris, Justine Gibb, Intuit

A special congratulations goes to Sandi Giles, former OCSTC President for her manual (see above) winning at the International level. Sandi received an award for Merit.

All International level awards will be on display at the International Conference and it will also be recognized at an awards banquet being held at the conference. Also, the display will be added to the STC Pubs Competition Roadshow and sent to chapters throughout the organization over the next year for viewing. Winning an International-level award is very prestigious and we are all very proud of our award-winning members and their accomplishments.

Sandi's gracious comments: I can't tell you how thrilled I am that we have dedicated members who are willing to work hard for several months to make it possible for people like me to be honored for hard work well done. There's no better
(Awards, continued on page 11)

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Chapter Chat

By Mark Bloom, OCSTC Chapter President

Recently, a woman contacted me to set up an interview. She was working on her Masters thesis about volunteer organizations. She told me that she found my name on our Web site. We agreed to meet one evening.

She belongs to one volunteer organization, and she was curious if all such organizations have the same problems, concerns, and obstacles. We talked for a few hours. She wanted to know how we ran our chapter, what types of problems we had, and how the organization helps its members.

By the end of the interview, she had all the information she needed to continue her work and I had an insight I hadn't realized before: my involvement with STC has helped me become the person I am today.

Sure, I could have made the move from Massachusetts to California without STC's help. In fact, even though I initially joined STC for this reason, it was my hard work and a little luck that landed me my job in Orange County.

Sure, I probably could have climbed the corporate ladder to the managerial position I hold without help from STC. I did it on my own, doing my homework, reading the books, and learning the practices.

But my decision to get involved in STC led me to meet and befriend other technical communicators whom I grew to respect and admire. They encouraged me. Serving as a chapter leader provided me a "testing ground" for all the skills I would need to be a successful manager, leader, and coach.

By entering STC competitions, I was able to test my strategies for online deliverables. I won a few awards, giving my words the weight of a recognized expert. More than anything else, though, this experience helped me gain confidence in my abilities.

Today, despite a lack of formal education in the industry I've chosen to call my own (I have but a Bachelor's Degree in German), I lead a creative services team for a division of America Online. I have presented at chapter meetings around the region, led several all-day workshops, given seminars at a regional conference, and presented a session last month at the 47th STC Annual Conference.

I am not bragging, but merely reinforcing my statement that getting involved with STC helped make me the person I am today. This story could be yours, too. Ask yourself what you've done for your career lately. Then get involved in our dynamic chapter.

Editor's note:

Please see related article regarding membership appreciation on page 4.

June Meeting Preview Past Meets the Future; A Discussion with Former and Current OCSTC Presidents and Leaders

By Mary Ann Stacy

What lies ahead in the future of human communication? What should you do to be ready? What is really the most important thing to know? What is truth?

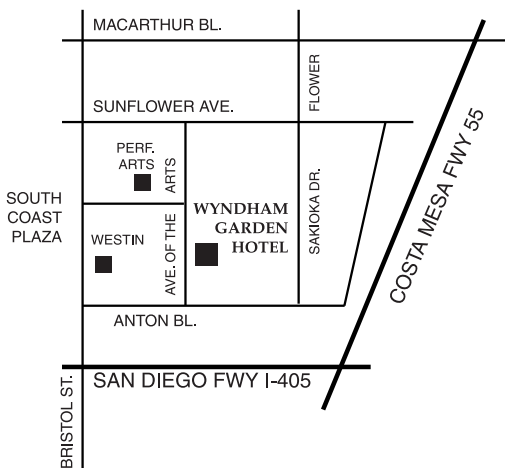
To save all of us the inconvenience of climbing to the lofty heights, and trying to breathe the rarified air of their lonely mountain hermitages, we are inviting the wise ones of Orange County to come down to us and share their knowledge.

We are indeed fortunate to have in our little corner of the world, world-class experts in communication.

We'll set up a table, seat our venerable sages, and ask them to give us the sum total of their wisdom in five minutes or less. We'll provide an egg timer for those for whom time is but an illusion of maya.

We have invited such illustrious personages as: Sandi Giles, Sel Handler, Jerri Houdayer, Jeff and Elaine Randolph, Jack Molisani, Jean Gabriel, Bill Darnell, Brian McCaleb, Sharon Burton-Hardin, John Sands, Joy White, Jay Goldberg, Tom Underwood, Don Pierstorff, Becky Gingras, and current OCSTC President, Mark Bloom.

Don't miss this exciting, meaningful, and fast-paced evening. It may change your life!



When:

Tuesday, June 20, from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Where:

Wyndham Garden Hotel
3350 Avenue of the Arts
Costa Mesa, CA
(714) 751-5100

Cost:

- ◆ Members with reservations, **\$20**
- ◆ Students with reservations, **\$15**
- ◆ Non-members with reservations, **\$22**
- ◆ All walk-ins, **\$30**
- ◆ No-shows billed **\$10**

Reservations:

Reservations are due by 5:00 p.m., Friday, June 16. If you call later, you will be billed the walk-in fee, so make your reservation early.

You can register by any of the following means:

- ◆ Register online at www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp
- ◆ Send e-mail to Jeff Randolph at erandolp@ix.netcom.com.
- ◆ Call the OCSTC hotline at (949) 863-7666
- ◆ Call Carolyn Romano at (714) 894-9221. Leave your name, membership status, and phone number.

Directions

From the 405 Freeway: Exit at Bristol. Go north to Anton Boulevard and turn right. Turn left onto Avenue of the Arts (the second signal). The Wyndham Garden Hotel is about one block ahead on the right. Turn into the driveway, and turn left into the parking structure. Parking is free.

From the 55 Freeway: Exit at MacArthur Boulevard, turn left on Flower, then right on Sunflower. Turn left on Avenue of the Arts and proceed one block south. The hotel will be on your left.

Publication Information

The Orange County Chapter of the Society publishes the *TechniScribe* 11 times a year. Articles published in this newsletter may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is properly given and one copy of the reprint is sent to the *TechniScribe* editor. Rights to articles appearing in *TechniScribe* revert to the author upon publication. Reprinting articles in non-STC publications is subject to the author's approval.

Send articles to:
jille@earthlink.net

Use Word and save files as RTF (Rich-Text Format). This will allow me to read all versions of Word. You can also send an article in the body of an e-mail message.

Subscriptions are available for \$10 per year to members of other chapters.

The deadline for submission is the 10th of the month prior to publication. The editor reserves the right to deny publication of any material. Submissions will be edited for clarity, length, and appropriateness.

Please include a 25-word biography about yourself when submitting articles.

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About STC

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest organization for technical communicators. Its more than 20,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students.

Dues are \$115 per year, plus a one-time enrollment fee. Membership is open to anyone engaged in some phase of technical communication, interested in the arts and sciences of technical communication, and in allied arts and sciences.

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OCSTC Members have an "Unfair Advantage" as employment candidates turn into successful employees...

Written by a few grateful OCSTC Members

Dennis Hanrahan: After seven years as a technical editor at Unisys, I decided that I was ready to get back into writing, which I had done earlier in my career. The problem was that I didn't have any recent writing samples, so how was I going to convince a potential new employer of my capabilities as a writer?

Fortunately, I'd had the foresight to become active in OCSTC and had served for two years as editor of the *TechniScribe*, picking up several STC newsletter competition awards along the way. This gave me everything I needed to get hired: writing samples, recognition, and references whom I'd developed by working with them on the newsletter.

I'm grateful for my new position as a documentation specialist at Pacific Life, where I work with several other OCSTC members who are serving in similar positions. I absolutely owe it all to OCSTC...it really does provide an "unfair advantage!"

Jill Eisenbach: I am so very grateful about my new technical writing position at Magellan Software I (also) owe it to OCSTC as Dennis mentioned. Being an active member for over five years has given me confidence, and knowledge about producing high quality documentation that you just don't get most of the time at your job alone. Being tied to a desk, and looking at the same four walls day in and day out just isn't enough to keep you at the cutting-edge. You need that unfair advantage. My recent interviewing skills have dramatically improved.

I was able to show a professional portfolio and sample work. I was also able to illustrate problem solving, and how the company can end up with award-winning documentation. Thank you so much OCSTC. Thank you for the unfair advantage.

Junelle A. Budzinski, Lead Senior Technical Writer at ATL Products: STC has provided a support network for me down through the years. As a learning resource, the training seminars are great and economical. As a networking resource, I was introduced to the Write Connection through STC and as a result of this introduction I have just started a new job! I have also made friends through STC. Meeting quality people that you have something instantly in common with is a winning combination. I must admit I have not been active within the organization, time is at such a premium! But I would definitely recommend anyone involved with technical communication to check out STC and join!

Linda McPherson: My participation in OCSTC has been the biggest factor behind my success as a technical writer. I have learned so much and gained experience and the confidence to affect job interviews and my overall sense of myself professionally. I have attended meetings fairly regularly and taken classes offered by the Education Committee. Assisting in the FrameMaker classes and with editing of our award-winning *TechniScribe* has involved me within the chapter and allowed me to meet some truly outstanding people. I feel invested in the chapter now and will go on volunteering as much as I can. Thank you all for what you have given me!

Have you recently been hired or been promoted in your job? If so, why not jot it down and share your experience with us? Let's continue to encourage each other; besides, inquiring minds want to know.

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Membership News

By Dennis Hanrahan, VP Membership

This is the last *TechniScribe* issue under the editorship of my friend, Jill Eisenbach. As you know, Jill won awards for Merit and Most Improved in this year's newsletter competition, and picked up a Distinguished Chapter Service Award for her chapter service over the last several years. In addition, she has just started a wonderful new job. I want to congratulate Jill for her enthusiasm and effort, and wish her the best of luck as she enters this new phase of her career.



April was a relatively quiet Membership month... we only gained nine members, including one new, one transfer, and seven reinstates. However, we also had two members who transferred out, so our net gain was only seven, and that leaves us at 398. Over the summer, we need to get busy bringing non-member friends to the meetings so that we can start to rebuild for next year.

Our new addition for April is student member **Irene McClure Bundi**, and our transfer is **Mary Anne Lee**. Thanks also to our former members who reinstated... better late than never! Now, for some June profiles.

Ethan McKinney joined us last November. He is employed at Netgateway in Long Beach as a technical project manager in charge of documentation and form design. He supervises one full-time tech writer and several contractors working on embedded help for Web-based eCommerce applications. He also runs development projects. The company has about 100 full-time employees. He started at Netgateway a little over a year ago.

Ethan has been a student in the Technical Writing Extension program at Cal State Fullerton. He also formerly managed a specialized security monitoring operation at LAX, tutored high school students for their SAT tests, and ran a school board campaign.

The thing he likes most about technical writing is helping people use the company's products. He doesn't look at documentation as something that's tacked on at the end. Especially on the Web, the Help system has to support all the Help features transparently, and he finds great satisfaction in working that out.

Ethan has a BA in political science from UC Berkeley and did graduate work in a PhD political science program at MIT. He was encouraged to join STC by attending the Anaheim Annual Conference and had previously heard about STC activities from the head of documentation at Beckman-Coulter and from classmates at CSUF. Ethan, a Los Angeles native, also enjoys history, international politics, and aircraft.

Pamela Armstead also joined us in November. For the past year, she has been a software product information specialist at Unisys in Mission Viejo. She is also a student in the technical writing program at Long Beach State, and expects to finish in about two or three years.

Pam has a varied background. She taught third to fifth graders for Sylvan Learning Centers prior to working as a tech writer. Prior to that, she worked as a temporary administrative assistant for various companies in San Francisco and Orange County (Charles Schwab, Williams & Sonoma, Ziff Davis Publishing, and Chase Manhattan Bank) for a period of about two years. She also worked for Provident Bancorp as a customer service representative and as an accounting clerk for a major film production company.

What Pam likes best about technical writing is working in a cutting-edge industry, playing with computers, working as a communicator, the fact that every day is different, and the chance to be a perpetual student. She earned a B.A. in history from the University of California at Berkeley and did postgraduate work at Azusa Pacific University, where she earned a computer science certificate in end user support.

Pam got her current job through attending STC meetings. She was encouraged to join by co-workers and presenters at the STC conference. A native of Long Beach, her current interests include reading and writing, literature, film, politics, health issues, travel, and leisure.

Society Level Job Listings

The Society maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download these listings from the Society's Web site at www.stc-va.org.

Orange County Job Listings

Looking for a job?

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC Web site and is updated weekly. Look for the latest postings every Thursday. For convenience, bookmark www.ocstc.org/jobline.htm.

If you have an inquiry or a job to post, send an e-mail message to Jeff Randolph at randolp@ix.netcom.com

A limited number of printed copies of the Jobline will be available at monthly chapter meetings.

Ever wonder why...

Sometimes, they could obtain pork and would feel really special when that happened. When company came over, they would bring out some bacon and hang it to show it off. It was a sign of wealth and that a man "could really bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with a high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food. This happened most often with tomatoes, so they stopped eating tomatoes ... for 400 years. Most people didn't have pewter plates, but had trenchers — a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. Trenchers were never washed and a lot of times worms got into the wood. After eating off wormy trenchers, they would get "trench mouth."

Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial.

(see sidebar on next page for more...)

Technical Writers and the Art of Persuasion

By David Fredericks

Many things that seem as natural and necessary as the air we breathe, like cars, planes, telephones, electricity, and indoor toilets, have the briefest of histories. Even the art of persuasion, as it's used in today's public relations firms—now a multibillion dollar enterprise—began only at the beginning of the 20th Century with John D. Rockefeller.

Rockefeller had amassed one of America's greatest fortunes through oil monopolies during the late 19th and early 20th century, a time of tremendous industrial growth in America. He acquired his fortune, equal to about \$212 billion in today's money, with little regard for workers or public opinion. His was the age of, "public be damned." But a growing agitation between striking miners and company agents caused a conflagration that resulted in the brutal death of some 40 workers and 11 innocent children. From this tragedy there arose such a public outcry, fueled by the birth of investigative journalism, that something in a public relations sense had to be done.

In that hour of need, Rockefeller said that there was one talent he'd pay more for than any other—the ability to mold public opinion. And the man who stepped forward to receive this rare largess was Ivy L. Lee, a pioneer of public relations, whom John Rockefeller, Jr. hired in 1914 to rescue the family's badly tainted reputation. "Crowds are led by symbols and phrases," said Ivy. "Success . . . rests upon the art of getting believed in." Those two simple sentences gave birth to public relations, as we know it today: persuasion made a profession.

Lee soon transformed Rockefeller's public image from ruthless brute to that of noble philanthropist. And today, no public figure, foundation, celebrity, government, or business of any size, could compete without an army of Ivy Lees trumpeting the way.

In most modern businesses, public relations' work seamlessly with marketing, advertising, and merchandising not only to sell products and services but also to shape public opinion. As with individuals, companies need to present a fitting image to customers, employees and the community. And, increasingly, many managers and executives of hi-tech companies turn to technical writers for help in satisfying marketing,

advertising, and public relations objectives. Even advertising agencies turn to technical writers with a creative bent if they can show solid experience writing copy that opens wallets for technical products and services.

Now the Internet is opening doors and unimagined markets for the technically persuasive. We are literally drowning in a sea of technical communication? It's unlike anything that anybody could have imagined a few years ago. And much of this technical and global communication has the express purpose of promoting technical ideas, products, services, and companies through persuasive writing. And much of it cries for editing or complete rewrites by technical writers.

Can All Technical Writers Become Masters of Persuasion?

Clearly many technical writers cannot write advertising or public relations copy. Most technical writers probably don't want to. Advertising does, admittedly, mirror the best and worst of human nature, with many technical writers associating advertising with the worst.

Without question, persuasive (also called argumentative) writing is a different kettle of fish than technical writing. One is about rules; the other is about breaking them. One is about left-brain thinking; the other is about right-brain thinking. One requires a certain amount of introversion; the other a good deal of extroversion. One is about communicating with a captive audience; the other is about capturing audiences. One is about analysis and critical thinking; the other is about empathy and mostly one-sided argument. One is driven by subject matter; the other by the readers' needs, interests, and weaknesses.

But, no matter what labels or definitions you use, nobody in a free market system gets a paycheck unless somebody sells the goods.

Categories of Persuasive Writing

Businesses employ a garden variety of persuasive writing techniques. One technique hits you rather crudely over the head with the language of John Doe; another employs eloquence and erudition. It all depends on what you're selling and to whom. The precise talents, knowledge, and requisite skills you need depend on the product or service, the audience, and the category of persuasion we're talking about.

(Art of Persuasion, *continued on page 7*)

(Art of Persuasion, *continued from page 6*)

So let's discuss a few categories of persuasive writing that business increasingly ask technical writers to do.

Business Writing—Business writers craft letters, reports, position papers, and business plans. They exhibit a high order of business knowledge and writing skill, including familiarity with the products and services of the business in question. Good business writers respect the time of managers and executives by careful organization, well-developed arguments, and a clear, direct approach.

Marketing—Marketing is a word that lacks specificity, so the word is often interchanged with “sales” or “advertising.” Strictly speaking, sales is thought of as the grunt work; salespersons go out and knock on doors. Advertising is the glamorous subcomponent of marketing. Marketing, however, includes every activity that goes into transferring goods and services from producers to consumers—market research, psychographics, product development, design, testing, and much more. Writing precedes, attends, and follows all of these activities.

Public Relations—Public relation writers craft speeches, press releases, stockholder reports, product information, and employee publications. To be frank, public relation writers deal in propaganda. Not propaganda in the pejorative sense that World War II gave it (getting out disinformation), but in its older and more positive sense of teaching and propagating causes, doctrines, and information that reflect and advance the aims and wishes of the client or employer.

Public relations is a highly specialized activity requiring specialized skills and knowledge, especially that of persuasion and the communication arts. Of all the types of persuasion, public relations writers must possess worldly knowledge and the ability to compose compelling arguments with verve, polish, and simplicity.

Advertising—Advertising copywriters create articles, flyers, print ads, brochures, direct mail, and broadcast ads. Often their aim is to convince consumers to buy items sight unseen. At other times, the aim is to generate interest in new products, maintain brand loyalty, or build the prestige and public respect of businesses and public institutions.

What's unique about advertising is that it weds commerce to fine art. It does so because advertising is about getting attention, establishing credibility, and tying symbols to products. If you want to see painting, graphics, typography, photography, and paper stocks of top-flight quality, then look more closely at advertising. Being an effective copywriter has much to do with melding copy ideas with that of graphic artists and working together with mutual respect.

Good copywriting, whether in consumer advertising or trade (business-to-business), is the result of exhaustive research, a keen understanding of human motivation, the ability to translate every feature into a customer benefit, and the ability to compose a compelling sales pitch. Successful copywriting, above all, requires expert salesmanship, which means that it's not necessarily about creativity or originality. A common bromide in the advertising world is this: “If it doesn't sell, it's not creative.” To be a successful copywriter, you have to write as though your life depended on making the sale, which has more to do with appealing to basic emotions than grammar or fine writing.

Technical Writers and the 21st Century

Need I tell any technical writer that our communication job grows broader and more complex by the day. How can it be otherwise? The other half of all scientific inquiry and technological development is publication. The explosion of science and technology creates publication demands that go far beyond what can be accomplished in normal channels. Hence, business now turns increasingly to a less expensive, in-house resource for publication expertise—the technical writer.

(Art of Persuasion, *continued on page 9*)

Ever wonder why continued...

They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a “wake.”

England is old and small and they started running out of places to bury people. So, they would dig up coffins and would take their bones to a house and reuse the grave. In reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realized they had been burying people alive. So they would tie a string on their wrist and lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit out in the graveyard all night to listen for the bell. Hence on the “graveyard shift” they would know if someone was “saved by the bell” or if he was a “dead ringer.”

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Food for Thought

By Vince Francis

What kind of diet should tech writers have? Here is some "food" for thought.

"Chew" on these factors, and ignore detractors, So that you consider "write" foods as you ought.

"Lettuce" consider veggies to start. These could really "grow" fast on a writer. Their vitamins are great, and one could lose weight, But you may not "carrot" all to be lighter.

Fruits should be the "apple" of your eye. "Orange" you glad when so "grapeful" you're feeling?

A date can be great, a prune when you're late, And bananas are always a "peeling."

"Milk" dairy foods for some tasty ideas, the more cheddar, the better, or mozzarellas. But creamery dairy can be quite contrary. Ice cream can make writers big fellas.

After writing for long, get out and "meat" people. You have a "steak" in a social life that is hearty. So just be a "ham," and try out some Spam, and "pork" out at the next writers' party.

(see sidebar on next page for more...)



Just Ask Sandi...

About Employment Matters

By Sandi Giles

California Overtime Legislation/AB 60, and AB 2850/the amendment excluding technical writers as computer professionals.

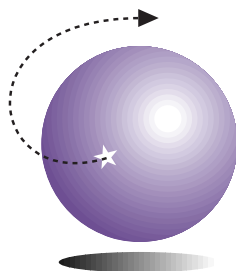
AB 60 is a recent California Bill that requires overtime pay for all hourly workers, no matter what their rate or profession. This legislation requires that ANY hourly worker receive overtime pay if he/she works more than 8 hours in a day or 40 hours in a week.

An amendment to this bill is in the works (AB 2850) that will exempt "computer professionals" from this law. However, legislators are planning to SPECIFICALLY EXCLUDE technical writers from the term "computer professionals."

Regarding the overtime aspect of this issue, here's what one OCSTC member wrote to me in a recent email message: "For the past few years I've made good money as a contract technical communicator; in fact last year I was closing in on six figures. I was able to work 40, 50, or 60+ hours a week and put the extra earnings away to take time off later. If I had been required by law to charge my client time-and-a-half for hours over 8 or over 40 and double-time for weekends, they would have hired a second contractor for the overflow work. Fortunately, I qualify as a 1099 contractor. If I hadn't met the IRS requirements as a 1099, my income would have been seriously impacted and my flexible work schedule would have gone away. It would have hurt me and my client who likes the consistency of getting this work done by one person who they can depend on for quality output."

If you have any views on this subject that you would like to express to your State Representatives, you still have time to write to them before they vote. I did and, to date, I have received a reply from one of my representatives stating that he agrees that the law needs to be reworked and I also received an acknowledgement from Governor Gray Davis stating that he would read and consider my inquiry. In addition, if you want to write to the author of the amendment (AB2850) his name is Mike Honda. If you don't know who your representatives are, you can find out as well as obtain the pertinent contact information by going to the following Web site and typing in your zip code: <http://www.leginfo.ca.gov/cgi-bin/memberinfo>.

PLEASE NOTE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH STC BYLAWS, YOU ARE NOT BEING ASKED TO TAKE AN ADVOCACY POSITION OR POLITICAL ACTION PLAN.



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What's Your Racket?

Forwarded by Andrea Ames

Soon, about 1200 randomly selected STC members and about 600 members of related organizations will receive surveys from the Society's Core Competencies Committee. Why? Technical communicators are a diverse lot, and the Society wants to define who we are and what we do, irrespective of our industries and specialties. Why?

There are several reasons:

- ◆ To help us market ourselves to prospective employers
- ◆ To help us plan our careers and professional development by determining the skills and knowledge required to succeed
- ◆ To help human resources personnel to write job descriptions and evaluate candidates
- ◆ To provide information instructional designers and academic professionals can use to develop, evaluate, and revise courses and curricula

Important stuff!

How can you help? Simple: if you are selected, complete the survey and return it by the due date. All responses will be analyzed and kept confidential by an independent consultant, and the results will be published later this year.

We look forward to your input to this important initiative. If you have any questions or suggestions for the committee, contact Ken Rainey at krainey@spsu.edu.

(Art of Persuasion, *continued from page 7*)

When more technical writers have proved their mettle in the selling aspect of modern business, our standing as professional communicators will rise accordingly. We, after all, have the technical knowledge, the tools, the core skills, and the writing talents to become not only tomorrow's master expositors of technical knowledge but master persuaders as well.

Perhaps, for some of us, our paychecks will look like Ivy Lee's did when John D. Rockefeller laid his fate at Persuasion's door.

Full-Service Employment Resource Available on the TECHWR-L Web Site

Forwarded by Andrea Ames

RayComm, Inc. owners Eric and Deborah Ray announce the addition of "Employment Central" to the TECHWR-L Web site at: <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/employment/>.

The new Employment Central feature is a free, full-service database of technical writing-specific jobs and personal profiles. Employment Central offers a free targeted employment resource for the technical communication community that aims to make recruiting and job hunting easier and more effective than sifting through listings on less-specific employment resources.

"We're ecstatic about the interest and participation so far," comments Eric Ray. "In the first week, companies and agencies added more than 100 job postings to the service, and nearly that many personal profiles were added. We're delighted that we hit on an area that the technical communication community seems to really want and need," he adds.

The Employment Central database is part of the Employment area on the TECHWR-L Web site, which also houses a mentoring program, articles, and topic summaries. "We're working hard to develop this area of the site," says Deborah Ray.

This addition to the TECHWR-L site improves on the old Contractors Database, which provided contact information for contract technical writing professionals. Without any publicity, the Contractors Database grew to include nearly 700 people in its first 18 months. "We've received lots of feedback reporting that people who participated had been contacted for contract work," says Deborah. That usage and feedback indicated that a more capable and versatile employment resource would be a popular component of the TECHWR-L site.

The new Employment Central feature is made possible by TECHWR-L advertisers and sponsors.

For more information about the TECHWR-L Employment Central feature, about advertising on TECHWR-L, or about sponsoring the TECHWR-L site and its features, contact Deborah Ray (debray@raycomm.com) or Eric Ray (ejray@raycomm.com), or visit the TECHWR-L site at <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl>.

Food for Thought Continued...

Fish, shrimp and prawns can be "deep" in appeal. Some writers "seafood," and eat on large "scale." And it isn't at all pushy to eat frequent sushi, and in a "pinch," get yourself lobster tail.

Get yourself "oriented" to oriental foods. Chow mein could become your main chow. You could "wok" a poodle, and add in some noodle. You're getting "doggone" international now.

Let's "taco" 'bout some Mexican food, getting "wrapped up" in a burrito grande. When Mex food you order, try crossing Italy's border. "Hasta la Pasta" is what you could say.

Candies and sweets are the end of any good meal. Though you're full, there's always some space. When with sweets you have flirted, you are now "desserted." Yet not alone, for to sweets there's a race.

Perhaps you can "digest" these palatable thoughts, having "stomach" for the topic at hand. Many things writers ponder, and thoughts sometimes wander, but a tech writer is "hungry" to understand.

Upcoming
Regional Events

Region 5
"Navigating the
New Century
Conference "

October 13 - 14,
2000

Albuquerque,
NM

No Web site information
is available at this time.

Martha Baer, of Wired to Keynote Pan-Pacific Conference

By Garret Romaine past president Willamette Valley Chapter

The keynote speaker for October's Region 7, 8 Pan-Pacific conference in Hawaii is Martha Baer, former managing editor at *Wired* magazine. Ms. Baer will set the tone and define issues for the exciting three-day gathering of technical communicators from throughout the western United States, western Canada, and the Pacific Rim. Visit www.pan-pacific.org.

Ms. Baer draws on a range of experiences, but her primary interest is her connection with technical journalism at *Wired*. She has served as a writer, editor, consultant, producer, and research chief for the publication, guiding it to its edgy, pre-eminent voice while covering technology and Silicon Valley. She also helped launch the website for *HotWired*, the daily digital companion to the monthly magazine. "I was at *HotWired* at a pretty early point," Baer recalls. "I remember when PointCast released its first rev - that was the first animation we saw on the web. At the time, we were really grappling with things like 'Should pictures move?' And if they can only move a little, is it worth it?"

Her job then was a combination of basic journalism and some architecture issues. "We were trying to get every inch of communications capacity out of some really clunky mechanics," she says. It wasn't always easy, and she frequently came up against the early limitations of electronic delivery.

Some of the issues are quite familiar for technical communicators, such as the old "format vs. content" battle. Baer promises to speak to those. "Launching *Wired News* we had questions about doing 'extravagant vs. efficient.' There were five updates a day - we were posting new stories even when we weren't in the office."

Another issue she still deals with is the area of writing styles. In short, technical journalists are allowed to have one! For every publications manager who has dedicated valuable staff time to producing a departmental Style Guide, consider the extreme where individual writing style is encouraged: "At *Wired*, there was no governing voice," Baer says. "It was very eclectic, very respectful of writers' styles. So I have plenty of experience at finding voices that work for the reader. Interestingly, some conventions of prose can destroy clarity. It turns out that using slang and the vernacular is ok for our readers."

For example, in writing simple instructions, from operating blenders to palm pilots, what happens if you infuse the instructions with the vernacular? "Magazines resist being reader-driven, and we were supposed to be oblivious. We were always gauging the market - it's a constant struggle. We couldn't narrow down which profession we were pointed to." Audience analysis for *Wired* "has always been a huge point of debate - the explicit philosophy of the magazine is to never talk down to the reader. But there was this anxiety about knowing what the magazine was saying. We were vilified. People hated that. So we capitulated for a low-brow (7th-grade level) reader. We had to be careful about using technical terms nobody knew yet."

"New leadership was more reader-friendly. Imagine Conde Nast sitting down in front of the owner, Si Newhouse. He's asking, 'Who's Wozniak?' 'What's a megabyte?' 'What's broadband?' We thought we weren't being elitist, but the New York readership and the Silicon Valley readership are worlds apart."

Another issue in technical journalism is the introduction of metaphors. They're a central explanatory device. Says Baer: "Like a ship stuck in a canal' - that's a marvelous way to describe a bottleneck. The best technology writers have a gift for that. Even the most sophisticated writers start to adopt good metaphors. Like, 'this joint works like an elbow.' Sometimes a little metaphor like that can really help. But it seems to be forbidden in technical manuals."

Baer has other experiences to draw on in addressing the conference. A novelist, she wrote *Francesca*, a "dangerously fun" piece of work "with whodunit overtones worthy of Agatha Christie," according to *Harper's Bazaar* and *Newsweek*. Baer also toured with the V-Girls, a humorous study and performance group that has presented works in such venues as London, Vienna, and at Yale University.

Garret Romaine is the program manager for STC's Region 7-8 Pan-Pacific Conference.

April Meeting Recap

"Weblications"

By Zelaikha Akram

At this month's OCSTC meeting, Andrea Ames delivered an in-depth and informative introduction to embedded assistance.

Andrea is immensely accomplished in the architecture, design, and development of online documentation and help systems. In "Just What They Need, Just When They Need It," Andrea simplified and defined complex online documentation problems. She offered solutions that were clear and direct, and provided simple steps to create successful online help and documentation.

Ames revealed that more than 60% of expert and novice users found typical help to be "not helpful." Users complain about the reactive nature of online help that disrupts flow. To prevent "task failure and support task accomplishment," she suggested developing a help system in disguise. "Weblications" are "information-rich interfaces" that perform as both an application and a Web site. Andrea recommended weaving the assistance into the application to create an interface that is designed around information. To visualize this concept she used MS Money and Intuit Quicken as good examples of "weblications."

Andrea gave expert advice on giving wings to your online documents. To overcome current limitations, first it requires full understanding of the users, and proceed to develop thought-out information architecture and interface design. To accomplish this she provided basic and essential facts and a simple sequence of the process. She highly stressed the importance of emphasizing technologies rather than tools.

In this presentation Andrea answered many of the difficult questions needed to eliminate the boundaries of the user interface. She delivered an optimism that establishes a new and sophisticated perspective on embedded assistance. Visit Andrea's Web site at www.verbal-imagery.com to learn more about this exciting and challenging topic.

(Awards, *continued from page 1*)

praise than to win an award from one's peers! I must write to each of the people who worked on the pubs competition committee to tell them how I feel and thank them.

Are you interested in seeing what award-winning documentation looks like? Why don't you consider volunteering next year? Consider one of the following areas for next year's competition: Finance, Publicity, Publications, Entries, Arrangements, Judging, and Recognitions.

Although Bonni will not be chairing this event next year, she will be busy chairing the International level Pubs. You can reach Bonni at bgraham@manuallabour.com if you are interested in chairing and/or volunteering in some way. There's already a stable of judges and a database structure built. Things start up again very soon, around September.

STC Election Results for 2000-2001:

President, Mark Hanigan
First Vice President, Judith L. Glick-Smith
Second Vice President, Edward J. See
Secretary, Jean C. Gabriel
Director-Sponsor, Region 2, Chris J. Benz
Director-Sponsor, Region 3, Rob Houser
Nominating Committee, Clark E. Beck
Nominating Committee, M. Mountford

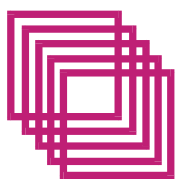
Upcoming Regional Events

Regions 7 & 8
"Y2K Pan-
Pacific
Conference "

October 19 - 21,
2000

Waikiki Beach,
Hawaii

Visit www.pan-pacific.org/ for all the details.



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Calendar of Events

- June 7** Administrative Council meeting at AOL 7 p.m.
June 8 Education/Web-based training group, 6:30 p.m. meeting in Irvine, call Kelly Anderson at (949) 784-8243
June 14 FrameMaker Group (OCFUN), contact Marge Packman at mpackman@cisco.com, or (949) 823-1230
June 20 OCSTC Chapter meeting, 6:30 p.m.
- July 5** Administrative Council meeting at AOL 7 p.m.
July 13 Education/Web-based training group, 6:30 p.m. meeting in Irvine, call Kelly Anderson at (949) 784-8243
July 18 OCSTC Chapter meeting, 6:30 p.m.

In the surrounding area...

Visit the IESTC Chapter Web site at: www.iestc.org.

Visit the LASTC Chapter Web site at: www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm.

FUTURE REGIONAL CONFERENCES

October 13-14, 2000 "Region 5 Conference" - Albuquerque, NM

October 19-21, 2000 "Regions 7/8 Pan-Pacific Conference" - Waikiki, HI

No classes are scheduled this month, stay tuned.

WBT Study Group

By Kelly Anderson

The Web-based training (WBT) study group meets on a monthly basis to study the book, *Designing Web-Based Training*, written by Robert Horn, and to develop a sample WBT course.

At our last meeting, we reviewed the first two chapters of *Designing Web-Based Training* which define WBT and give criteria for evaluating WBT as a method for delivering training. Vince Francis presented an example of the proposed content for our sample WBT course.

Our next meeting will be on Thursday, June 8, at Magellan Software in Irvine. We will review chapters 3 and 4 then break into small groups to begin designing the prototype for our sample WBT course.

For more information, contact me at kanderson@magellan.com.

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