Letter from the President
by Mark Lockwood, STC/SM President

Hello STC/SM members! Welcome to our first newsletter of the chapter term. Our chapter newsletter, TECHcomments, continues to remain our publication of record, with features and reporting from tech writers and STC/SM volunteers. Thank you to all the newsletter contributors and to all the other people and companies contributing to our chapter activities in 2009-2010.

Setting Goals for Professional Development with STC: Donate Your Skills

STC and STC/SM provide ideal forums for professional development projects. For those new to the profession as well as for experienced writers, personal growth opportunities can be as enriching outside of the workplace as on the job. From keeping up with trends, tools, and technologies, and attending sessions and webinars, to volunteering, networking, and enhancing your technical writing skills, STC continues to offer multiple channels for continued learning.

We would love to hear from you, and we welcome your participation at the chapter level. Please feel free to come out to events, use any chapter resources that come with your membership, and volunteer. We offer position-based opportunities, but we also appreciate the efforts of volunteers for special projects. For more information about volunteering, contact us at nominations@stc-sm.org.

Society Elections—Renew by February 28, 2010

The STC elections are coming up soon, held from March 9 through April 8, 2010. STC members vote for Director, Secretary, and Nominating Committee positions. Information on casting your ballot will be sent to you prior to the opening of the election. Please visit the STC 2010 Election Information: Get to Know the Candidates web page on the STC website for more information, available at http://www.stc.org/2010/01/stc-2010-election-information-get-to-know-the-candidates.asp, or the 2010 Election and Candidate Information page on STC’S Notebook website, available at http://notebook.stc.org/2010-election/.

As a reminder, members must renew or join by February 28, 2010 to vote in the 2010 STC society election. Renewing members will also be eligible to vote in the upcoming STC/SM elections for the 2010-2011 term, along with all who are members at that time.

Call for STC/SM Membership Renewals for STC’s 2010 CHAPTER RENEWAL CHALLENGE

Our membership drive was a success, and we had a great time at the January STC/SM Program Meeting giving out STC/SM T-shirts and other prizes to the winners. The chapter now has an opportunity for another membership drive offered by STC. For those of you who already renewed your STC/SM chapter membership, thank you—you are already helping the chapter compete for prizes. However, in case you have not yet renewed, your chapter membership expires in March. In addition to continuing to invest in your professional development and represent the profession throughout Southeastern Michigan, your renewal can help our chapter quality for the following raffle prizes:

- One 23” Full HD LCD Monitor
- One Terabyte (TB) Desktop External Hard Drive
- One 2010 STC Summit Registration
- One 2010 Basic Membership Upgrade to Gold
- One 2011 Basic Membership Renewal

Our chapter is automatically enrolled in STC’s 2010 Chapter Renewal Challenge, where each chapter competes against the other chapters in their categories. The chapter in each category with the highest renewal percentage rate wins. Winning chapters must reach a qualifying renewal rate of at least 60 percent. The Challenge runs from February 4 through March 19, 2010. Should the chapter win the challenge, STC/SM will hold a raffle for STC/SM members at the April 2010 STC Chapter Program. See the Chapter Renewal Challenge webpage on the STC website, available at http://www.stc.org/membership/chapter-renewal-challenge.asp.
STC/SM 2010 Membership Drive
by Mark Lockwood

As announced through the STC/SM Chapter Listserv, STC/SM Members renewing their memberships by the December 31, 2009 deadline received an automatic entry in the STC/SM 2010 Membership Drive Raffle. These chapter members were notified by email of their entry into the raffle.

STC/SM held the official raffle, drawing names for all 12 prizes publicly, at the January STC/SM Chapter Program Meeting at Thomson Reuters in Dexter, MI. (Note: STC/SM volunteers—except for speakers who are members—were excluded from eligibility.) The chapter president facilitated the drawing, performed by one of our guest speakers for the evening, Debbie Littlepage.

Each member eligible for the drawing was entered and was able to win one prize from among the following items:

- 10 STC/SM T-Shirts
- 2 Western Digital 1TB External USB 2.0 Hard Drives

Raffle Winners

We are pleased to announce the winners of our raffle prizes. Winners who did not attend the January STC/SM Program Meeting will be receiving their prizes soon by mail.

Congratulations to all the winners!

Hard Drive Winners
Mr. Thomas B. Glennan
Ms. Kristin Hatcher

T-Shirt Winners
Mr. Thomas Beverly
Mr. John R. Forkin
Mr. Michael Granger
Ms. Sandra M. Harlacher
Ms. Diane Hinton
Ms. Patricia Martz
Mr. Barry Adam Matthews
Ms. Sally C. Paul
Ms. Linda Sue White
Ms. Rhoda L. Wilburn

STC/SM Summer ’09 Networking Lunches:
Meet the New President & Vice President!

by Mark Lockwood

Continuing a traditional chapter activity, STC/SM organized two networking lunches in August 2009, offering members and other professionals the opportunity to meet the STC/SM President and STC/SM Vice President for the 2009-2010 chapter term, as well as other STC/SM members in a fun, relaxed setting. In addition to mingling with peers and discussing STC/SM, this was an occasion to enjoy conversation with people who share professional interests.

The lunch meetings were spread out geographically to give members from different regions of the chapter an opportunity to attend. The STC/SM Vice President, Maryann Bowen, hosted the first lunch in Ann Arbor, MI. Mark Lockwood, STC/SM President, hosted the second lunch in Royal Oak, MI. The President and Vice President attended both lunches.

We had a fun time at both lunches—a great opportunity for getting to know several STC/SM presidents, talk tech writing with other professionals, and discuss a range of issues. The STC financial crisis was discussed, as STC/SM supported the society while maintaining enough funds to continue chapter initiatives. We also discussed the need for member participation and some ideas for upcoming possible projects. Meeting and interacting with other members is a great way to get excited about possibilities—for STC, STC/SM, the technical writing profession, and our individual careers.
STC/SM January Program Recap—Microsoft® SharePoint® for Technical Communicators
by Jamie Burklund

On January 20, 2010, STC/SM members met at Thomson Reuters in Dexter MI for a presentation on Microsoft SharePoint by Debbie Littlepage and Sharon McDonnell. SharePoint is a Web-browser-based collection of Microsoft software that provides elements designed to ease team and organization effectiveness. SharePoint is primarily a collaborative workspace for businesses and includes document libraries, collaboration functions, process management and search modules, and a platform for document management. SharePoint can also host web pages, wikis and blogs.

The first presenter, Debbie Littlepage, is the director of the Project Management Practice of a large consulting firm. Her background is not exactly technical, but is technical enough “to be dangerous,” she said. Littlepage uses SharePoint as a backdrop to the Project Management office in her company. Always emphasizing that communication is key, Littlepage praises SharePoint as a tool for facilitating project portfolio decisions and managing projects. She uses it to communicate project statistics to stakeholders and as a platform for project rescue, when necessary.

Since the term “stakeholder” includes anyone impacted by a project, communication channels are vast. That means that misinformation can spread quickly. "Things can go haywire if you don’t manage communications,” Littlepage said. This is one reason SharePoint has become such an invaluable tool to so many companies: the software not only teaches employees to be self-sufficient, but it’s also consistent and easy to navigate. Littlepage said, "If you can navigate around one of these pages, you can navigate any."

Sharon McDonnell, STC/SM Treasurer and Senior Analyst at Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan, provided a case study involving Microsoft SharePoint. Although she admits that she’s still learning the software, McDonnell praises SharePoint for making documents much easier to find. Instead of dealing with files within files and path names too long to e-mail, SharePoint provides a platform for team members to easily access documents that are public to the company. "It's an effective social collaboration tool,” McDonnell said. SharePoint also makes documents searchable, which helps it integrate well with office tools. There are calendars to utilize for team meetings, task lists, picture libraries, and announcement tabs, all of which are searchable.

McDonnell has even created a wiki for her department. This wiki includes a list of frequently answered questions (FAQs), answers to technical questions, keyboard shortcuts, links, tutorials, a glossary, a “how-to” section, and an employee spotlight tab. This is a less technical side of SharePoint that lets a company’s personality shine through. The possibilities of wikis and blogs are yet another facet of SharePoint that encourages social communication within a business.

The presenters feel that Microsoft SharePoint can serve as a vital tool for successful communication in any company. It promotes self-sufficiency among team members, which increases confidence and proactivity in a project. The wide array of functions available within SharePoint may be overwhelming at first, but the presenters made it clear that the software is worth learning and introducing to your company.
Member Spotlight: Deborah Stacy

Why did you decide to become an STC member?
I first joined as a student. I’d guess that was in 1998. One of my professors at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) strongly recommended joining STC, as did some writers I worked with during my internship. My main goal in joining STC and getting involved in the local chapter was to network with other technical communicators.

Why did you decide to pursue technical communication as a career?
I’ve always enjoyed writing, organizing content and editing. After deciding to attend EMU and reviewing the descriptions of many majors, written communications jumped out at me. I took my first technical writing class during my third year and I knew I was in the right place.

Where are you currently employed?
Thomson Reuters Tax and Accounting in Dexter, MI. I started as an intern in 1998. My current title is Supervisor, Technical Communications.

What are your job activities?
I write help, getting-started guides (and other PDFs), and training materials; I edit whatever the Development staff request feedback on, including graphical user interface (GUI) text, email messages to users, etc.; I provide feedback on marketing materials; and I do a million other things. In addition, I supervise a team of four writers working on these same types of projects.

What is an example of a project you are particularly proud of?
My team recently worked with the company’s network team to set up our own help servers. We are now delivering a few help systems for web-based apps and many, many PDFs and screencasts to these servers. I love that I can redeliver a document at any time, without causing any work for the Development staff.

What do you find most interesting or satisfying about your job?
In regard to writing, I love the feeling of accomplishment at taking a complex process and explaining it well and concisely. In regard to editing, I enjoy helping other writers to improve their work and improving our documentation in general. In regard to supervising, it’s very satisfying to remove roadblocks for writers so they can continue with project work.

How has your STC membership helped you with your career?
It’s given me the opportunity to learn from other members what processes are at their companies, what software they’re using, and what kind of issues they’re running into.

What advice do you have for students as they are entering the field of technical communication?
Be ready to learn, ask lots of questions, and take copious notes. If your employer doesn’t have a style/process guide, try to get buy-in to start one. They’re invaluable!
STC/SM October Program Recap—Program Management: Have You Considered Coming Over to the “Dark Side”…?
by Jamie Burklund

On October 29, 2009, Joyce Zerkich joined the STC/SM for a discussion on project management. Her presentation, entitled “Project Management: Have You Considered Coming Over to the ‘Dark Side’…?” was attended by several members of the chapter at RelWare in Farmington Hills, MI.

Zerkich is the Project Manager/Scrum Master at Reliance Software Systems, Inc., known as “RelWare” to STC members. Like most of us, Zerkich has previous experience in many different fields. She began working in finance with Ford Motor Company, and when she left the company—with 20,000 others—she had earned her MBA. This accomplishment led her to work with hardware and software all over the world. On her eventual transition to health care from working with a corporate auto company, she says that there was one common ground: strategic planning.

So, what do project managers really do? “They do whatever they want to do!” Zerkich said. Project managers not only have the responsibility of planning, executing and closing a project, but also of taking care of the smaller steps along the way. It is a project manager’s job to create clear and achievable project objectives, build project requirements and manage the cost, time and quality of every project.

Since a project manager’s goal is often to represent a client, he or she must determine and articulate the exact needs of the client, based on what is known about the firm being represented. Of course, these tasks aren’t foreign to technical communicators by any means. Being clear and concise while still representing a client or objective is a major goal for any project a writer takes on.

When working together, a project manager expects a technical writer to “produce easily understandable information in a professional format,” Zerkich said. A project manager’s mission is to facilitate the creation of a product that has enough information to help the client and decrease customer support through clear instructions. This is where professional communication comes in. Zerkich suggested that a technical writer “seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

Zerkich spent a majority of her time discussing the Project Management Professional (PMP) exam. Prior to taking the exam, which consists of 200 questions and lasts four hours, the candidate must go through an application process and pay a fee of at least $400 in order to become a certified PMP. Zerkich does not recommend taking the exam right out of college, as showing project management skills with education as well as experience is what qualifies a candidate for the exam. Zerkich suggested doing volunteer work with the Red Cross or Focus Hope to gain the knowledge and experience expected of an applicant.

And how does one prepare for the exam? Zerkich studied the PMBOK Guide (the project management “body of knowledge,” according to Zerkich) for two years, and used quizzes and an interactive CD provided by a local woman. Other options include classroom courses and online self-study offered by various institutions, at costs that fall within a broad range.

If project management sounds like something you’d like to pursue as a career, Zerkich advised that you research whether you can receive the needed training, as well as the certifications or further education needed to change your career path. Of course, Zerkich also suggested feeling passionate about a new path before moving to a different job. Zerkich encourages you to ask yourself a few questions: Can I use and build on my current skills? What does my resume show? What can I prove?
WMS-STC November Program Recap—
Microsoft® SharePoint®
by Sharon McDonnell

On November 4, 2009, the WMS (West Michigan Shores)-STC Chapter hosted Harrison Withers of Media 1 (http://www.m1tech.com/) and Melissa Chiaramonti of Meijer, Inc. for a co-presentation on Microsoft SharePoint. The program was held at Dematic Corporation in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Withers was first up and discussed the reasons to consider using SharePoint. He pointed out that the advantages include SharePoint’s ability to:

- leverage the existing network structure
- tie into desktop applications such as Word, Excel®, Outlook®, Project®
- develop platforms for business applications
- offer content management, collaboration and usability features

Withers showed what an out-of-the-box SharePoint site looks like and how it can be manipulated and customized for your company’s purposes. He then showed screenshots of the site he helped develop for one of his clients, Hewlett Packard—quite a sophisticated site that is used extensively by the client.

Withers discussed some best practices also. He says that we need to retrain our community to:

- substitute email attachments with links to a shared document on SharePoint
- put frequently asked questions (FAQs) into lists or wikis
- publish our newsletters as blogs
- put job aids into wikis
- put manuals into wikis or shared document libraries
- put standard operating procedures (SOPs) into dashboards

Chiaramonti’s perspective was geared toward what someone might ask a technical writer to do in terms of SharePoint. She also discussed some of the pitfalls and difficulties that she encountered in getting started and in getting people to use SharePoint once it was developed. She gave some tips for how to respond to those who resist the changes that invariably follow a migration to a new environment.

The presenters distributed a list of resources to learn about SharePoint that includes:

- http://pathtosharepoint.wordpress.com
- http://www.endusersharepoint.com
- http://www.bitsofsharepoint.com/ExamplePoint/
- http://www.thesanitypoint.com/
- book: Seamless Teamwork by Michael Sampson

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STC Conference Scheduled for
May 2-5, 2010 in Dallas, TX

Register right away for the Technical Communication Summit ’10, to be held at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower in Dallas May 2-5, 2010. Featuring more than 80 sessions, and including keynote presentations, vendors demonstrating the latest tools and technologies, and technical writers from around the world, the conference in Dallas, TX promises to deliver an outstanding educational experience for attendees. Additional information is available on the STC Web site at http://conference.stc.org/
I Went to the 2009 STC Conference with the STC/SM Member Summit Support Award and Here’s My Report
by Marianne Ibrahim

Hmmm… What to sign up for - ?

Last year I had the opportunity to go to the 2009 STC Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA. As cut-off day to register at the early bird price approached and after finally getting confirmation that my employer would not pay my way for the full conference (or even for one day), I decided to sign up anyway. I felt most comfortable signing up only for the one-day rate, because my husband is currently unemployed and also a full-time student. I chose the first full day of the conference to be my one day so that I could both see the keynote speaker, David Pogue, whose writing I’ve always enjoyed, and be present for the excitement of the first day of the conference.

A wonderful surprise from STC/SM - !

As the conference time drew closer, I happened to check my home e-mail address and found a message from STC/SM that had been sent a few days prior about money that was available to anyone who wanted to go to the conference. Since the message was a few days old, I was sure that others had seized this opportunity and that there would be nothing left for me. But on the off-chance that there was some funding still available, I responded to the e-mail, writing that I had signed up to attend one day but would love to attend more of the conference if possible. Much to my surprise, my inquiry was not too late! There were still funds available and there was enough to cover the difference so I could make it to the full conference.

My initial apprehension fades…

As excited as I was about being able to go, I was still a bit apprehensive, since I didn’t know anyone else who would be attending. I didn’t know anyone from the local chapter or anyone from the national organization. I didn’t even know anyone in the whole of the technical communication field who would be attending, for that matter. When I arrived at the conference, the night before Opening Day, my apprehension lasted all of about 10 minutes once the First-Timers Session started. The First-Timers Session was open to everyone—those registered for the full conference and those coming for just one day.

Lots of people to meet

At the First-Timers Session, I met Laura, who is originally from Germany but now works for IBM in London; there were a couple of people from Toronto. The next day at the Opening General Session and Keynote Address, I met Ben from Israel and had the opportunity to get to know him. (I was also able to enlighten him about David Pogue who, he agreed afterward, is really a great speaker.) In addition to the international attendees, there were many people from the U.S. whom I met in the Education Sessions or in the Expo Hall. Everyone was incredibly nice and friendly throughout the conference. From a first-timer’s standpoint, it was also really interesting to see the variety of people who are interested in or who work in the technical communication field.

You should apply for an award, too - !

STC/SM is again offering awards this year for anyone interested in attending the STC 2010 conference in Dallas. If you have never been to an STC conference, I highly recommend taking STC/SM up on this wonderful offer and attending the conference, even if it is for just one day. Nearly nine months after I attended the 2009 conference, I still reflect fondly on all that I learned and on those that I met, not to mention the great southern food I discovered while visiting Atlanta. All of that is a result of STC/SM’s support and the award that I received to attend the conference.

Marianne Ibrahim has been an STC-SM member for three years. After being introduced to the field of technical communication through a Web design program she was in, she decided to pursue a technical writing certification. She is now looking to fulfill her dream of becoming a full-fledged technical communicator.

STC/SM ’10 Member Summit Support Program

To support our chapter members and encourage greater attendance at the STC 2010 conference, STC/SM is announcing a support program exclusively for STC/SM chapter members. The application deadline is May 11, 2010.

Get the details at the STC/SM ’10 Member Summit Support Program web page on the STC/SM Chapter website, available at http://www.stc-sm.org/services.htm#STCSM10MSSP.
Reading Round-Up:
A Review of *Technical Writing* by T. A. Rickard

by Justin Blumberg

Technical communication students such as myself who are still learning and who are still impressionable can benefit from reading as much as doing. Since reading texts related to the field is both mysterious and useful for us students, I felt that spending time with an older text about technical writing could be intriguing. It could be a way to learn about technical writing in the present by reading about it from the past. I admit that I approached this book, T. A. Rickard’s *Technical Writing*, published in 1920, with equal reticence and curiosity; it was, after all, published 90 years ago. However, my curiosity was satisfied and I truly felt like this book was a learning opportunity for anyone interested in technical writing in much the same way as taking a refresher course in some skill or knowledge that you have already internalized. And, for anyone with a sense of humor regarding the writing deficiencies of our scientists and other professionals of the world, know that this book reminds us all that these problems have always existed, even as far back as the early 1900s.

This slim volume of 178 pages is the outgrowth of “five lectures delivered before the engineering classes of the University of California in 1916.” The opening chapter, entitled “General Principles,” details the scourge of illiteracy—the poor writing of engineers, engineering students, students of technical colleges and, generally, persons of high education—and does so with great humor. The author feels that universities and other schools seem to have done a great disservice to their students by letting them advance into the working world without having firmly grasped the tools of communication. As A.S. Hill, professor of rhetoric at Harvard University, is quoted as saying, “Every year Harvard sends out men—some of them high scholars—whose manuscripts would disgrace a boy of 12; and yet the College can hardly be blamed, for she cannot be expected to conduct an infant-school for adults.” Our author’s recourse is to have engineering colleges “refuse degrees to illiterate students or to those who show no regard for precision of language.”

The remainder of the book sets out to detail the means and method for successful writing. As a student, I appreciate both the author’s purpose in writing this book as a guide and his narrative voice speaking as “a student, not as a master; as an amateur who has become a professional, not as a professor.” It is a reminder that maybe even I myself could become a professional through continued learning and through practicing just the sort of things the author discusses in this book. The book has 14 chapters the last 13 of which discuss such things as “Naturalness,” “Clearness,” “Precision,” “Superlatives and Other Diluents” and Style. For example, in Chapter III, “Clearness,” the author insists that clearness is “absolutely essential” and quotes Quintilian when he writes, “It is not enough to use language that may be understood; it is necessary to use language that must be understood.” He advises us to “REMEMBER THE READER,” not use words we don’t really know and “avoid using words of similar sound, but of different meaning, in the same context.”

The author speculates about whether good writing is innate but finally argues that it is developed through constant practice. I think this book can serve as a fine reminder of what being a technical writer is about and may even serve as a fun writing reference.

Other books by T. A. Rickard:


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Book Information

Technical Writing
Author: T. A. Rickard
John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY, 1920

This book can be purchased at Amazon.com and can also be found online, in full, on Google Books.

About the author: “T. A. Rickard, 1864–1953, was an internationally prominent mining engineer and historian of the mining industry. His greatest legacy was an extraordinary and lengthy career in technical writing and publishing. …Rickard commenced his publishing career in New York as editor of the *Engineering & Mining Journal*…”


About the reviewer...

Justin Blumberg is currently a graduate student studying Written Communications at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, MI

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Links to Other Organizations
Check out what other organizations are doing. Get information on programs you can attend and activities you can participate in.

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**stc-sm.org**
Society for Technical Communication Southeastern Michigan Chapter

**wms-stc.org**
Society for Technical Communication West Michigan Shores Chapter

**neostc.org**
Society for Technical Communication Northeast Ohio Chapter

**http://www.hu.mtu.edu/~stcclub/**
Society for Technical Communication Michigan Tech Chapter

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**detroit.iabc.com**
International Association of Business Communicators Detroit Chapter

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**prsadetroit.org**
Public Relations Society of America Detroit Chapter

**cmprsa.com**
Public Relations Society of America Central Michigan Chapter

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**miupa.org**
Usability Professionals’ Association Michigan Chapter

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**amwa.org**
American Medical Writers Association

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**detroitastd.org**
American Society for Training and Development Greater Detroit Chapter

**astdannarbor.org**
American Society for Training and Development Ann Arbor Chapter

**mm-astd.org**
American Society for Training and Development Mid-Michigan Chapter