

# Stimulus

Volume 25 No. 5 May/June 1999

Next event

## AGM, Elections, display of prizewinning publications, May 27

by Lynda Simons, President

First of all I would like to thank those of you who responded to my article in last month's newsletter and to Rick Lorenz's notice on the Web site by stepping forward to take active roles next year. As well as volunteers for occasional and sub-committee duties, we now have candidates for the positions of Secretary, Vice-President, Newsletter Editor, Program Manager, Education Manager, and Web Manager. I look forward to announcing who all these wonderful people are on May 27. I am pleased to say that we are almost in a position to continue next year. But we still have a few bugs left to fix.

### Some good news

We still have no candidate for President. On the bright side, however, we have society approval to continue without a President (Let's face it, what do I do, anyway? It's not a bug; it's a feature!) As next year's Past President, I am prepared, at least for a while, to continue acting as President, but we cannot continue without a Treasurer. I hope to have this problem solved before May 27.

So, we have, potentially, found a way to move forward; we just need a Treasurer. Nonetheless, please remember that this society is run by volunteers. It can thrive only if its members—ideally, *all* its members—contribute actively in some way.

### Opportunities still available

If you are interested in serving in any capacity, please let me know. As well as a Treasurer, we still need a PR Manager,

a Volunteer Co-ordinator, and Competition Managers. And the more occasional volunteers and sub-committee members we can find, the more likely we are to avoid repeating this situation again next year. If you would like information about any of the positions, email or call me. My phone number and email address are on the back page.

### Let's build on our successes

We've had a very successful year, with unprecedented attendance at the monthly meetings and high calibre submissions to the competitions. (The winning entries in the print competition will be on display at the May 27 meeting). Our Web site continues to attract an ever-growing number of

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visitors. Let's all work together to make next year an even greater success, instead of the nonevent it was threatening to be.

### All contributions welcome

If you appreciate all that the chapter provides and wish to offer ideas, to help out a little, or to take a leadership role, be sure to join us. As usual, you can enjoy light refreshments and socializing from 5:30 to 6:00 pm and after the formal business of the AGM and elections we hope to have a short presentation or two, as well. Check the Web site for last-minute details.

**Date:** Thursday, May 27, 1999

**Time:** 6:00 to 8:00 pm

**Place:** RA Centre, Courtyard A  
2451 Riverside Drive

**Tel:** 733-5100

**Cost:** This event is free to all. 🍷

## inside

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## The end of an era?

by Tim Scapillato

*Tim Scapillato is currently using RoboHELP to develop on-line help for an architectural space measurement application at Public Works and Government Services Canada*

This issue of *Stimulus* is the final one for the current chapter executive. The upcoming elections on May 27 will see a new slate of candidates take over the reins.

Or not.

As our current President, Lynda Simons, says in her message on the cover of this issue, there was a very real possibility that our chapter would no longer exist after the end of this month. The nominating committee had been unable to find candidates willing to stand for election (or acclamation) to an executive position. Most of the current executive members have served multiple terms and are preparing to step aside and let new blood flow into the organization's leadership. Alas, there seemed to be no new blood ready to flow. Without an executive in place, the chapter could cease to function. It is as simple, and dramatic, as that.

Although, as Lynda explains, the situation is less dire now, the chapter still needs you to take an active role.

Please give serious consideration to taking on an executive position if you have any interest at all in helping to keep this organization alive.

This issue also marks the end of my second term as editor. As rewarding an experience as it has been, personal and work-related circumstances make it impossible for me to continue for a third term. I call now for anyone interested in working on the publication of our newsletter (should we still have a chapter next fall) to contact me or Lynda Simons. Our co-ordinates are listed on the back page.

The new newsletter team will take over

at a time when the format of the newsletter, and its method of distribution, is coming under increasing scrutiny. Electronic publishing options were discussed by the executive at its final meeting. Ultimately it was decided that major changes should be debated and implemented by the next executive. Several ideas were considered—from an e-mail version to electronic distribution of a PDF version to full publication on the web. The motivation for these discussions was the shortage of volunteers willing to step forward and help out with the production of the newsletter. If the production team remains at two, as it is now, or even dwindles to one, there may be

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no choice but to publish electronically, or drastically downsize the current publication format. This final issue, a four-pager, is symbolic in that regard.

I have enjoyed managing the production of *Stimulus* over the past two years. It has been an incredible learning experience—for free. Anyone who wants to learn—or brush up on—project management, desktop publishing, or writing skills, or who simply wants to enhance his or her résumé, is encouraged to consider taking over for at least one term.

Hopefully there will still be a chapter on which to report. 🐾

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## Stimulus

*Stimulus* is the newsletter of the Eastern Ontario Chapter of the STC. It is distributed free to chapter members, libraries, other STC chapters and interested organizations in the region.

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<b>Editorial assistance</b>	vacant
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### Re-print Policy

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### Submissions

*Stimulus* welcomes submissions on topics relevant to technical communicators in the Eastern Ontario area. We reserve the right to edit articles for length, clarity, and suitability.

Please send electronic copy (Mac or PC, .RTF

or .TXT files). Mail diskettes or hand them to the editor at a meeting, or send files via email.

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# Opera is sweet music out of the cacophony

by Bill Burns, ILE

(Reprinted from the April 1999 issue of The Sidebar, newsletter of the Snake River Chapter)

I bet more than 25% of the readers of this newsletter are still using Netscape 3.1 on their computers at home.

Why? Well, because the forbidding size of the newer Netscape and Internet Explorer versions makes downloading an onerous chore. The current browser heavyweights weigh in at a minimum of 14MB for the installation files alone, not to mention the footprint they create on your hard disk. So many of us slog along, missing all of the cool new Web technologies, hitting sites that use CSS and JavaScript with abandon, while ignoring the display limitations of older browsers.

## Users rave about Opera

But a new voice is beginning to emerge in the Web browser counterpoint. Opera Software has struck a sweet note with its Web browser, Opera (currently at version 3.51). Users are raving about Opera for a number of reasons. First, Opera is

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*"...free browsers may provide more of a disservice than a service to users."*

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compact. The executable installation is a mere 1,263KB. This file may still take a while to download on the Web, but it doesn't come close to being the bandwidth hogs that Netscape and Microsoft are. Second, Opera supports JavaScript, CSS, and some plug-in technology like Flash animation and Shockwave. Third, Opera is fast. While both Navigator and Internet Explorer strain to pump Web data through their plaque-damaged, cholesterol-heavy arteries, Opera zips along quickly, displaying data faster than either of its bloated competitors.

## Less is more

Although Opera's feature set is great, what I like best is its lack-of-feature set. Opera software is still working on a complete mail client, and it supports news, but it doesn't include many of the other seldom-used features that have become the anathema of the average Netscape or Internet Explorer user. (Yeah, right, net conferencing. And me without my home T1 connection.) Its simplicity is its strongest selling point.

## So what's missing?

Opera still lacks in some areas. Although it's reputed to have the best CSS support out of all the browsers, it still can't handle positioning and some other style-sheet attributes. It also gets a little confused with redirect commands from Flash sites, even though it supports Flash animation. No doubt, the Java Script *du jour* at Netscape and Microsoft will occasionally cause Opera to sing off-key.

## Fast research tool

But Opera typically performs without errors and as a Web research tool, Opera's speed more than makes up for its lack of support for proprietary flavours of CSS and JavaScript.

## Small price to pay

Unlike Netscape and Internet Explorer, Opera comes with a price tag, albeit a small one. It costs \$35 USD for a license. However, as the makers of Opera note, "free" browsers may provide more of a disservice than a service to users. You can decide for yourself whether Opera is worth its price. You can download a 30-day trial version at <http://www.operasoft.com>. 🐉

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Not available for PDF version of  
newsletter. See under  
Conferences in chapter Web  
site.

### **STC Eastern Ontario Chapter**

#### **Mission Statement (1998/99)**

Our chapter's mission is to work  
together in a spirit of community to  
promote and develop professional  
technical communication

- ◆ by advancing and facilitating the  
development of educational programs
- ◆ by setting professional standards
- ◆ by drawing on the strengths of  
our sustaining and individual  
members

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