

*From the President*

## Mentoring

by **Visnja Beg**

*Visnja works as the Documentation Manager for the XDE Automations IPT of Rational Software Corporation in Kanata. She is the chapter's President.*

I am sure all of us can remember that one individual in our professional lives that either influenced our decision to pursue a technical communications career, or provided the guidance we needed to do the job well. Perhaps, it wasn't just one individual, but a group of individuals that inspired us and showed us the way.

For most of us, we continue to model our behaviour and work habits after those individuals. They were, or still are, our mentors.

The early part of anyone's career is a difficult time. We often have questions about our job and about the industry that we sometimes have no one to answer. We at the STC Eastern Ontario chapter hope that we can help new technical communicators in answering some of the questions you may have. But we only meet once a month, and sometimes you just need someone you can call and ask that question. This is the role that a mentor plays.

For the mentor, the role of guiding a more junior technical communicator can be a very rewarding and satisfying experience. If you are like me, having someone look up to you for guidance and advice is great for the ego, and can give you a great deal of satisfaction knowing that you have helped someone as you were once helped yourself.

As I mentioned in my last article, one of the chapter's goals this year is to start a mentorship program. The first thing we need are volunteers that can offer their time as mentors. You don't need to have many years' experience, or any one type of experience. Even if you have worked only for a few years in the field, the knowledge and wisdom you have gained in those few short years can prove invaluable to someone just starting in technical communication.

If you think you would like to volunteer as a mentor, or would like to sign up to be mentored, please send me an email by the end of February, 2002 at [president@stceo.org](mailto:president@stceo.org). We will take it from there.

I would also like to hear from you if you have any experience in leading or establishing a mentorship program. We are always looking for expertise from our membership in the programs we undertake.

Take care and have a very Happy New Year! 🐾

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### STCEO Competition in Home Stretch

The STCEO 2001-2002 Technical Publications and Online competition is finally in the home stretch. After an intensely busy judging phase, the results are in and have been distributed. The fun part, the Awards Ceremony, is planned to be held in early March. Details will soon be e-mailed and posted on the web site.

The STC competition has a long and interesting history. The first event was held in 1969, some 32 years ago! The STCEO competition dates from the late 1980s and Laurel Simmons initiated our first online competition in 1995-96. The number of entries has varied greatly, from around 90 print and illustration entries in the 1980s to none in 1996-97 when no competition was held. This year there were 30 entries in all: 25 in the Technical Publications category and 5 in the Online category. 🐾

*Hal Floysvik*  
Competition General Manager

## Greetings in the New Year

### Kitty Aughey

*Kitty is the STC Director-Sponsor for Region 1, which includes the Eastern Ontario Chapter.*

Winter is the season for many holidays. Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Ramadan, and the Chinese New Year are only a few of the many cultural and religious holidays we celebrate. What is hoped for in all traditions is that they lay the groundwork for a better world.

The events of September 11th changed all of us in America. We embraced patriotism, marveled at the bravery of firefighters, police and all emergency workers and, reached out to our families and friends. We hug and kiss those closest to us more often and are thankful we have them. We appreciate all we have and we are generous in giving to those less fortunate. Yes, we have changed...perhaps, for the better.

We are getting on with our lives. In that context, I want to relate to STC. In 2001, we developed a new logo and a new mission statement: STC: Designing the future of technical communication. We kept a steady membership and had a successful annual conference in Chicago. It was a good year!

In 2002, we begin the year with the election of Society officers. On the ballot are two people running for Director-Sponsor of Region 1. I have enjoyed having this job for three years. It has been my favorite job! It is so important that everyone votes and it is so easy to do online. Please don't forget.

As of January 1st, Region 1 will change. The France, Sweden and UK chapters will move to Region 2. This puts all the European chapters in one region. Philadelphia Metro and the New Jersey Chapters will move to Region 1 - Welcome! I look forward to meeting with the new chapters and I will miss those chapters that are moving.

Please remember that the job of a Director-Sponsor is to "be there" when you need support. I am always willing to travel for chapter visits...just waiting for an invite.

My best wishes to everyone for a Happy and Peaceful New Year!

Kitty ☺

## Money good

### Stimulus Staff

The chapter had \$19,749 in its bank accounts as of December 31, 2001, reported John Holgate, the Chapter Treasurer, at the January Executive meeting.

Major sources of income are the membership dues rebate, the competition, and the advertisements in the membership directory. The biggest expenses have been for the directory and the monthly meetings. Monthly meetings are free of charge to all members and form a large part of the annual budget. One area of concern is that a large number of people have said that they will attend, but then don't show up. "This costs us unnecessary expenses for catering," John said. ☺

## Stimulus

*Stimulus* is the newsletter of the STC Eastern Ontario Chapter and is published six times per year. It is distributed free to chapter members, libraries, other STC chapters and interested organizations.

### Reprint Policy

All material herein is copyright of STC, Eastern Ontario Chapter. Other STC chapters are welcome to reprint articles from *Stimulus*. In return, we ask that you credit the author and *Stimulus* and send us a copy of the publication containing the article.

### 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 e-mail articles and advertising copy to [stimulus@stceo.org](mailto:stimulus@stceo.org) or mail to the address below. Articles and media will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope. Most major electronic formats are supported for both Mac and PC.

### Submission Deadlines

All materials are due on the 15th of the month prior to publication.

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## One semester down, one and a half to go

### Matt Rockall

*Matt is the Student Representative from the Algonquin College Technical Writing Program on the Chapter Executive.*

Those of us in this year's Algonquin College Technical Writer Program have one thing in common; our interest in writing pre-dates our entrance to the program. Many of us have written creatively in the past, have prided ourselves on a clever turn of phrase in a letter or article, and have generally been pretty impressed with our diction. That is, until our daunting encounters with the red pens of some of our teachers.

'Top down structure!' 'Summarize!' 'Indent this.' 'Don't indent that.' (Imagine all these comments in red ink and then multiply and diversify logarithmically.) Write, rewrite and then...reorganize the piece completely and restart the process at the first step! Wait a minute. Is that a bulleted, lettered or numbered step? Is that a step, a stage, a phase or a fraud on the page? I'm afraid you'll have to read to the end to find out. Top-down structure is on Christmas holiday.

*“Technical writing is not done for glory.”*

Allow me to paraphrase some of the advice we were given on our first day. 'Technical writing is not done for glory. Your name will rarely be on anything you write and your purpose is not to keep people hanging on until the last line. You will be writing for people interested in the point, not the prose, and you need to give them that at the top so that they can find out what they need to know quickly and can bail out as early as possible. Unlike other writing, your goal is to be transparent, so the reader can get what they need without distractions; and effective, so they can read as little of it as possible. However, unlike many poets, playwrights, novelists and journalists, you will get paid.'

Imagine our consternation, the classroom full of Pulitzer aspirants. We scoffed at the notion. Transparent? My goodness, what kind of goal is that? Pshaw! Nevertheless, reassured by the prospect of untold riches to come, we set to the tasks put before us.

*“Imagine our consternation, the classroom full of Pulitzer aspirants.”*

Three months later, our heads are crammed with knowledge about electronics, computer hardware, logic systems, diodes, circuits and Boolean algebra. Add to this list a decent grounding in Adobe FrameMaker, WinHelp and RoboHelp, and then top it all off with a sprinkling of documentation project management. The result is a deeper understanding of our planned future professions.

What about the actual writing? Well, we all wrestled with the unfamiliar challenge of writing precisely what we mean without colour, bells or whistles to distract and, we are gradually climbing the pyramid of top-down structure.

Next term has many new challenges; more software, hardware, telecom and network technology; a further exploration of document planning, management and design; a help documentation project for Algonquin's Blackboard E-Learning system; and, at the core of the program, an intensified study of writing itself.

After three months, have we learned anything? Absolutely. Are we better writers? We are, without exception. Have I enjoyed this rare opportunity to write something without top-down structure? I have indeed. 🐸

# Technical communicators hold own during economic turmoil: survey

## Gordon Brown

*Gordon is a senior information developer with Nortel Networks. He is the chapter's Vice-President.*

A survey of the effect of the economic downturn on Canadian technical communicators indicates that our profession in many ways held its own amidst the turmoil in the high-tech industry over the past year. While some respondents reported deep job cuts, hiring freezes, and declines in salary or benefits in 2001, others reported no layoffs or salary cuts.

A surprisingly high number of respondents — 60% overall — reported no layoffs in their departments last year. Of the 40% who reported layoffs on the 28-question survey, the cuts ranged in size from 75% down to 10%.

Of those who lost their own jobs, three of seven had already found new jobs in the field by the time they filled out the survey. For one respondent, finding a job took only six weeks, while another reported little success after seven months.

In another surprising result, only 50% of the respondents reported terminations of contractors or temporary employees within their companies.

The Society for Technical Communication Eastern Ontario chapter (STCEO) collaborated to survey the economic downturn with Dr. JoAnn Hackos of the Center for Information Development Management (CIDM). The Canadian subset of an American-based CIDM survey was open from October 12 to 29.

STCEO invited the presidents of all eight Canadian STC chapters to encourage member and non-member technical communication managers to participate in the confidential survey.

But while we received 40 replies, at

least 50% were from the Alberta chapter of the STC, based in Calgary, and 27.5% came from this region. Other members logged on from the Canada West Coast chapter, which had

### Ottawa companies didn't lean on contractors

The most striking fact of the Ottawa response to this survey was evidence that many companies did not appear to turn to contractors for help through the downturn.

Fully 73% of respondents reported that contractors were in fact cut due to the slowdown. And at four of the companies all contractors were let go. Another reported that 60% of contract staff were terminated. Further, all 11 respondents said outsourcing was not being considered for the future.

On a more encouraging note, only 1 in 11 respondents reported slowdowns or reductions in total projects as a result of the downturn.

Eleven technical communication managers from Ottawa responded to the online survey Canada: Coping With the Slowdown conducted October 12-29, 2001. That figure represents at least 2.2 per cent of all Ottawa high tech businesses.

Survey participants who filled out the online poll hosted by Zoomerang.com answered questions prepared by the CIDM in collaboration with STCEO. Respondents represented 5 companies in Kanata, 5 in Ottawa, and 1 in Nepean, all former municipalities of the newly amalgamated City of Ottawa.

As of last July the Ottawa Business Journal listed 503 high tech companies in the Ottawa region and outlying areas on its mailing list. 📧

five participants.

Of the 11 non-STC members who participated, at least 7 were from Ottawa, due to a broader mailing to non-member technical communicators here. The total number of participants

*see **Technical communicators hold own** on page 6...*

# Benefits unaffected in economic slowdown: follow-up survey

**Rick Lorenz**

*Rick is a writer at MOSAID Technologies and is the chapter's Membership Manager.*

The STCEO Eastern Ontario Chapter (STCEO) worked with The Center for Information-Development Management (CIDM) to survey managers in technical communications. The initial survey is described in the article on page 4.

On November 19th, follow-up survey questions were sent to the 37 participants of the first survey. In one week, we received results from 12 respondents, which we forwarded to CIDM for review and possible use.

12 responses are not enough to characterize the state of technical communications in Canada. However, they are interesting and may strike a chord. Comparing the results to the other survey suggests these respondents were harder hit by the economic slowdown than those who didn't participate.

Note that the identity of the respondents to the second survey was not retained, in order to preserve anonymity given the sensitive questions.

Below are the questions and a summary of the responses. There were only 11 responses to each question. The twelfth person wrote: "All questions not applicable: no layoffs, no terminations, no reductions in budget; we are busier than ever - I can't keep up." Timewarp!

## Layoffs

If you have experienced lay-offs in your department, how does the percentage compare to company-wide lay-offs?

**Summary:** Their departments had similar or slightly higher lay-off percentages, compared to the rest of their companies surveyed.

## Layoffs by industry

If you have experienced lay-offs in your department, to what industry does your company belong (hardware, software, telecommunications, etc.)?

**Summary:** Most of their companies belong to the software industry.

Smaller percentages belong to the hardware or telecommunications industries.

## Contract employees

If you have terminated contract employees, how is your department handling the same amount of work with less help? Are you limiting deliverable formats? Are you reducing the number of deliverables? Are you single sourcing?

**Summary:** All are working harder, and most have reduced deliverables.

## Benefits

If the slowdown has affected employee benefits, what benefits have been affected?

**Summary:** In most cases, benefits haven't been affected. Pay was frozen in some cases. However the question didn't explicitly ask about pay, so perhaps pay was frozen more widely than the responses indicate.

## Survey details

For more information about the CIDM and STCEO surveys, see the Extra edition of *Stimulus* posted on the STCEO website at [www.stceo.org](http://www.stceo.org)

## Travel

If your travel budget has been restricted, is it due to fears of terrorist attacks or reduced budgets?

**Summary:** All travel restrictions are due to reduced budgets, not fears of terrorism.

## Training

Is there any difference between training held locally and training that requires travel? Are employees more likely to attend training held locally?

**Summary:** In almost all cases, employees are more likely to attend local training.

see *Economy* on page 8...

# Technical communicators hold own

*(continued from page 4)*

from this region was 11. The overall proportion of members to non-member respondents was 73% to 27%, or about 3 to 1. Two respondents did not indicate where they live in Canada.

While the number of survey responses from Alberta and Ontario may make the survey statistically relevant for our regions, the low or non-participation of other regions likely renders the survey statistically irrelevant for them.

## *68% experienced no salary cuts*

And while 32% had experienced salary cuts, or changed roles, 68% of respondents (25 people) experienced neither.

More pervasive were budget cuts for software purchases, with 68% of managers reporting cutbacks there, and hardware purchases, with 51% of managers reporting cuts there. The silver lining in that story is that those expecting to purchase software or hardware in the new year (answering either "yes, definitely" or "yes, perhaps") added to a healthy 72% of respondents.

In terms of benefits, the overwhelming majority reported the economic slowdown had no effect last year: 72% to 28% (28 respondents to 11).

Travel and training budgets also remained unchanged for more participants than for those who reported significant decreases. But for both travel and training the combined responses for "Decreased Significantly" and "Decreased Somewhat" outnumbered those who reported

"Remains the Same".

In the area of telecommuting, 85% reported that policies had not changed in 2001, but several commented that telecommuting never was encouraged.


## *"Reorganizations were not uncommon..."*

Reorganizations were not uncommon, but just over half of managers reported the status quo unchanged and outsourcing was also uncommon, with 85% stating that there had been no increase in outsourced work.

And while there was a split between the negatives and the positives, only 17% of all managers reported project cancellations as a result of the slowdown.

In terms of stock options, 27 of 40 respondents' companies offer them. Of those, 74% continued to offer options while 26% did not.

Zoomerang.com provided the web questionnaire software and secure hosting site.

For details of the survey, see the Extra edition of *Stimulus* posted on the STCEO website at [www.stceo.org](http://www.stceo.org) You can also find more information at [www.infomanagementcenter.com](http://www.infomanagementcenter.com) and [www.zoomerang.com](http://www.zoomerang.com) 

## Membership

# Renewal time at hand

### Rick Lorenz

*Rick is a writer at MOSAID Technologies and is the chapter's Membership Manager.*

Did you know your membership expired on December 31, 2001? However there is a grace period before the STC cancels your membership.

Why renew? The chapter needs you, and you need us. The chapter is built on active and dynamic members, getting involved by writing newsletter articles, participating in the competition, and attending meetings. In return, the chapter provides a newsletter, website, membership directory, growth and feedback through the competition, and monthly meetings featuring leading members.

Beyond the local level, the society provides useful publications. These include up-to-date facts in *Intercom*, *Technical Communication*, and the annual salary survey. The annual conference is a great opportunity to learn and meet others in your field from across the world. SIGs (special interest groups) provide additional

opportunities.

An important benefit, especially during downturns, is the opportunity to "network", which really means building relationships with people in the area. For writers from all levels, but especially those starting out, membership shows commitment to the profession.

So if you haven't already renewed, then act soon! The easiest way is by credit card through [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

### Eastern Ontario Chapter Membership Statistics

as of December 31, 2001

|                           |            |
|---------------------------|------------|
| <b>Senior Members:</b>    | 72         |
| <b>Regular Members:</b>   | 229        |
| <b>Student Members:</b>   | 14         |
| <b>Total Members:</b>     | <b>315</b> |
| Sustaining Organizations: | 1          |

## Awards

# Award honours editorial excellence

### Editors' Association of Canada

The Editor's Association of Canada will recognize the editor's often invisible contribution to written communication with the Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence for 2001. The award carries a cash prize of \$2000. Nominees must be editors who worked either in-house or on a freelance basis. The award is for an editor's contribution to a work published in Canada in French or in English during the 2001 calendar year. Any type of written project—book, magazine, report, software documentation—is eligible, as is any type of editorial work.

#### Deadlines

Monday, February 11, 2002, is the deadline for the receipt of nominations. Monday, February 25, 2002, is the deadline for the receipt of supporting documentation.

#### Nominations

Nominations may be made by anyone involved in the work: publisher, editor, author, designer, or other person. You can also nominate yourself. Nominations require two parts: a letter of nomination and a package of supporting documentation.

#### Questions

For further information about the award, call Nancy Flight, Tom Fairley Award Co-ordinator, at (604) 737-0488 (day) nor (604) 222-9242 (evening), or email her at [fairley\\_award@editors.ca](mailto:fairley_award@editors.ca)

## executive

### STC Eastern Ontario Chapter 2001-2002 Executive

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# Economy

(continued from page 5)

## Telecommuting

Did your department have a telecommuting program before the slowdown?

**Summary:** Three-quarters did not have a telecommuting program before the slowdown. This question follows #16 from the other survey, which showed that 85% of companies did not change their telecommuting program due to the economic slowdown.

## Telecommuting facilities

Does your company provide hardware and software for telecommuters?

**Summary:** Two-thirds of companies provide hardware and/or software for telecommuters. Apparently not to the technical communications departments (see #7).

To see individual responses to the survey, see the files posted on the STCEO website at [www.stceo.org](http://www.stceo.org) 📄



## STC Eastern Ontario Chapter

### Mission Statement (2001/2002)

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

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## Passionate Collector Required

Do you have a passion for history? Are you a collector? If so, then you're just the sort of person the chapter is looking for.

We need an archivist to care for our historical documents as STC approaches its fiftieth anniversary.

If you are interested, please contact Gordon Brown, the chapter's Vice-President, at [gordon.brown@nortelnetworks.com](mailto:gordon.brown@nortelnetworks.com)