

# Stimulus

Newsletter of the  
Eastern Ontario  
Chapter of the Society  
for Technical  
Communication

Volume 33, Issue 2 – November/December 2006

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**STC**  
SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

## November Program Meeting

### *All I Want for Christmas...*

**Dust off your Strunk and White's!  
Polish up your thesauri! Take 'em  
out for the night and show them  
off with pride!**

What books or resources are you  
hungering for? Want Santa to bring  
you an update for that dog-eared  
and well-loved copy of the Chicago  
Manual of Style that your grandpa  
gave you? Do you have some  
favourite resources that should be  
on someone else's wish list?

Come and share your wish list (and  
your favourite resources) with other  
technical writers on Tuesday,  
November 21, at Upstairs at the  
Real Canadian Superstore on  
Richmond Road. The meeting starts  
at 6:30 p.m.

Have a little food, check out some  
of the classic resources we'll be  
bringing along (hey, bring along  
your own!), and listen to our special  
guest, Ottawa poet Nicola Vulpe.



Please RSVP by November 19 at  
<http://www.stceo.org/program.htm>  
if you will be attending.

In anticipation of this topic, our  
Webmaster has created a starter  
list of books that she thinks should  
be on your bookshelves. The  
Writer's Bookshelf (located at  
[http://www.stceo.org/Resources/  
Bookshelf/index.htm](http://www.stceo.org/Resources/Bookshelf/index.htm)) will be  
updated with other classic (and  
perhaps not-so-classic) references  
over the next few weeks. Have a  
look at them and think about what  
other titles you think should be a  
part of this resource list. ☺

## Competition Update

### *Call for Judges*

Thanks to Brian Williamson and  
Peggy Vice stepping forward to take  
on the roles of co-managers of the  
competition team, we've been able  
to hold our technical publications  
and online communication  
competitions this year.

Judging will take place during  
November and we are currently  
seeking competition judges. If you  
have at least three years of  
experience as a technical writer or

editor and would like to review some  
of the best documentation in Eastern  
Ontario, contact Brian or Peggy at  
[competition@stceo.org](mailto:competition@stceo.org) for more  
information.

We provide complete training and  
support to ensure consistency and to  
help you get the most out of the  
experience. Being involved in the  
competition is a valuable learning  
opportunity for judges as well as  
entrants. ☺

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#### Submissions

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to have considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer.

Please e-mail articles to [stimulus@stceo.org](mailto:stimulus@stceo.org). Most major electronic formats are supported for both Mac and PC but our preference is for Microsoft Word, plain text, or HTML formats. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications. We reserve the right to edit articles for length, clarity, and suitability.

Writers' guidelines and the current year's publishing calendar are available at [stceo.org/stimulus.htm](http://stceo.org/stimulus.htm).

#### Submission Deadlines

All materials are due two weeks prior to publication. The submission deadline for the January/February issue is December 15, 2006.

#### 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 (in print or electronic format) of the publication containing the article.

#### Advertising

Advertising space is available on an issue-by-issue basis. Rates vary depending on the size of the ad – please e-mail the editor for more details. We reserve the right to refuse any advertising request.

## October Meeting Summary

# Seeing the Forest Through the Trees

Fifteen technical communicators attended the October 24th program, "What makes good documentation", held at Upstairs at the Real Canadian Superstore.

The evening was divided into two presentations. The guest speaker, Ken Farr, presented his award-winning publication, *The Forests of Canada*, and discussed the key elements that he felt must be attended to during the development and publication of a successful document: scope, audience, taxonomy, and luck.

#### Scope

*The Forests of Canada* was created at the request of the Assistant Deputy Minister as an official gift to dignitaries and attendees of the 2004 World Forestry Conference.

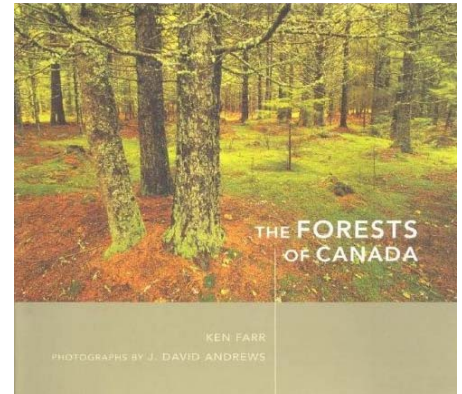
Ken was the lead writer for the project, which was completed in two years, from the receipt of the initial request to delivery of the book at the conference. (Four years is the norm for such a project.) He was able to complete the project in this short time span because he had access to the Forestry Research Centre of Canada, 500 Canadian research scientists, a skilled photographer, a strong graphic design team, and excellent editors.

Ken also suggested that the scope of the project was easily defined. The fact that the subject lent itself to easy analysis, as there are only a certain number of species and regions, simplified matters.

#### Audience

In reviewing the book, one cannot help but be captured by the beauty of the photography. The uninitiated reader can easily appreciate the work of Ken and his team, who made the transition between the scientific words and the decorative aspects seamless for the general audience.

Ken pointed out that the decorative elements needed to be there.



However, "boring elements, such as bark on a tree" had to be included as they were just as important as botanical information.

#### Taxonomy

*The Forests of Canada* includes four seasons worth of photography. Because the graphic and aesthetic elements were as important as the scientific content, the text was balanced around the visuals.

#### Luck

With any topic, some lend themselves to good documentation better than others.

The second half of the evening was facilitated by STCEO president, Mimi Richard-Golding, who culled her personal library for writing samples for an exercise that introduced attendees to the criteria used by judges during the local competition.

Book subjects included origami, personal finance, indexing, small-space gardening, Dungeons and Dragons, pool and billiards, and cookie baking.

Participants applied the guidelines to their selected volumes and compared their observations with their neighbours. An insightful conversation about their findings finished off the evening.

More information about the *Forests of Canada* book can be found at [http://www.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/cfs-scf/national/what-quoi/forests/index\\_e.html](http://www.nrcan-rncan.gc.ca/cfs-scf/national/what-quoi/forests/index_e.html). ☺

## President's Message

# *A Smorgasbord of Chapter Happenings*

By Mimi Richard-Golding, STCEO President

Hello STCEO Members,

At the time of writing this message for Stimulus, the weather has turned grey and the first snowfall has begun. Nothing is sticking to the ground; however, it's serving as a reminder for the winter program cycle.

### November Program Meeting

On November 21 at Real Canadian Superstore, the Chapter will be hosting a discussion of what's on your wish list. I think this is an opportunity for technical communicators to meet, eat, and perhaps imbibe while reviewing resources that we may have started to take for granted. Share your diamonds with your colleagues, and walk away with a list of titles you may not have considered before.

### Volunteer Update

One of the spin-offs from the successful September event is that Brian Williamson and our Treasurer, Peggy Vice, have stepped forward to represent the competition organization team, which means that the 2006 STCEO-hosted competition is a go! Wahoo! Thank you, Brian and Peggy.

Also from the September meeting, Coreen Corcoran has stepped forward as the PR Manager. Welcome aboard, Coreen!

### STCEO Competition

We are looking for judges to review the 2006 Competition entries. Please contact Brian and Peggy at [competition@stceo.org](mailto:competition@stceo.org) to put your name forward.

### Federal Government Classification

We received a request from a member to bring awareness to Federal Government employees of the impending classification review that could see CS-classified technical writers reclassified into a different group, such as AS (Administrative Services).

Government employees are a well-hidden bunch, and outreach to this group is tricky. As a first initiative and attempt to gauge interest, we've added a short form on the STCEO Web site at <http://stceo.org/Temp/cs.htm> for CS-classified government technical writers to identify if classification (or reclassification) is important to them.

### Continuing Education

Also, we've received requests for advocacy and support to petition Algonquin College to reinstate the evening Technical Writing courses that were available at the Woodroffe campus.

These days, there seems to be a market for professional development courses that are available 24/7. Is there a homegrown market here? Is there enough interest locally to petition Algonquin for reinstatement of the program? Please register your interest at <http://stceo.org/Temp/algon.htm>.

### Announcement Mailing List

Currently irregular announcements (usually about an upcoming program or webinar) are sent to the STCEO membership only (as is a copy of *Stimulus*). Sometimes these

announcements are shared with Chapter lapsed members or non-members.

If you are not currently a member of the STCEO and are interested in receiving these irregular notices by e-mail, please sign up at [http://stceo.org/notice\\_list.htm](http://stceo.org/notice_list.htm).

### International Student Technical Communication Competition (ISTCC)

The ISTCC ([http://www.stc.org/comp/studentCompetitions01\\_ISTC.asp](http://www.stc.org/comp/studentCompetitions01_ISTC.asp)) is an international student documentation competition open to high school students (grades 10-12). I've prepared a letter of introduction and invitation to 26 high schools in the Ottawa-Carleton area to invite students to submit work of a technical nature for competition. The closing date to receive the student work is December 27, 2006.

There will be a call for judges in early January 2007 to sort through entries (up to three will be selected to be forwarded for international competition). Unlike our fall competition, the local version of the ISTCC is not as rigorous, and will provide only light feedback to students, and a paper award from the Chapter for meriting documentation.

### STCEO Scholarship

The Chapter is current reviewing its policy for dissemination of the Chapter's yearly scholarship. More information will be available on our Web site ([stceo.org](http://stceo.org)) shortly. ☺



## Ascend the Summit

May 13 – 16, 2007

Minneapolis, Minnesota

For more information, see:  
<http://www.stc.org/54thConf/>

## Feature Article

# From the Desk of...

By Mimi Richard-Golding

I was looking for some salve for my latest embarrassment: sending out an e-mail to the Membership, with a standard, top-20, egregious error. (If you haven't found it, good for you! It makes me feel better.)

So I did some research on quotes about mistakes. With great pleasure, I found these:

We're all capable of mistakes, but I do not care to enlighten you on the mistakes we may or may not have made. *Dan Quayle*

Assert your right to make a few mistakes. If people can't accept your imperfections, that's their fault. *Dr. David M. Burns*

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing. *Georges Bernard Shaw*

Every great mistake has a halfway moment, a split second when it can be recalled and perhaps remedied. *Pearl Buck*

As I reflect on what it means to make a public mistake (versus private mistake, or a mistake that is caught before it gets out of hand), I start to wonder if, as a technical communicator, I have the option to slip up.

Some people hold others to very high standards. Take, for example, STCEO judges reviewing a given year of competition entries. We, as a Chapter, are known to have impeccably high standards.

Frequently, the STCEO Best of Show forwarded to the next level receives an award at the International Competition. Given this history, if you receive an award from this Chapter, consider it a true recognition of your efforts to create a quality product.

"To err is human... Is this an excuse or a *valid* reason for oversights when you are a writer?

I'd like to say that, as a writer, it's the be-all and the end-all of my craft, my *raison d'être*, my love, and my passion. I can't say it's all of those, though, on a good day, it's many of them. Writing, especially technical writing, frequently gives me joy and satisfaction because, usually, I'm able to express myself so that I am understood. On a really good day, I can act as translator between a software developer and his eventual audience, reducing the likelihood of a barrier to use. This simple act brings me a selfish kind of satisfaction.

On a bad day, work is sluggish, and muddy, and nasty, and brutish. Putting together two words that will make sense to me in the morning is like trying to write while drunk; it's an interesting exercise, but you're going to pay for it later. It's during these episodes of writer's block that I am more likely to encounter my nemeses: homonyms and contractions.

*Hi. My name is Mimi and I have grammar issues.*

(A noteworthy memory I have regarding grammar was when I spent a summer away from home. I sent the usual homesick notes, filled with tales of adventures I'd

had, and requests for care packages containing something familiar. While the cookie and clean underwear filled boxes were few and far between, my Dad never failed to edit and return my correspondence and provide guidance on how I could improve my prose. Thanks, Dad.)

So, fast forward, through the years I've worked as a technical writer. What have I learned? I have learned that some of us are a bit more obsessive about correct grammar and may find it easier to not make these pedestrian mistakes. Others, like me, have cheat sheets or set their spell-checker dictionaries to look for these recurring errors or, where possible, have compassionate friends, who are literate and may share a passion for words, to review, edit, and critique our work.

Regrettably, that's not always an option. Life interferes. Life speeds by us, and cockiness slips in. "Eh! I don't need an editor this time. It's just a little message." I push the Send button, satisfied my work is done well.

Until the next day.

"Oops!" followed by a lot of blue air. How could I... I should have known... Argh!

To err is human, to forgive divine. I guess I am human, or maybe that's just an excuse.

*What do you do to avoid the seemingly avoidable silly errors that creep into your documentation? Submit your suggestions to [stimulus@stceo.org](mailto:stimulus@stceo.org).* ☺

I never make stupid mistakes. Only very, very clever ones.

- John Peel

## Treasurer's Report

# November/December Financial Report

By Peggy Vice, STCEO Treasurer

It is a little early in the year for a financial report, however I thought the membership should know that our expected rebate from STC for this year will be \$3,431.00 USD. That translates at today's rate into \$3,868.23 CAD, a drop of 16 percent from our budgeted amount of \$4,600.00 CAD.

Since 2003-2004 our rebate has declined by 54 percent (see Table 1). This decline reflects a decrease in membership and an increase in the value of the Canadian dollar.

Table 1: Membership Rebate Over Four Years

Year	Rebate in CAD	Change YoY	Change in %	Membership
2003-2004	8423.68			239
2004-2005	5206.00	-3217.68	-38.20	192
2005-2006	4425.00	-781.00	-15.00	178
2006-2007	3868.23	-556.77	-12.58	158

YoY = year-over-year, CAD = Canadian dollars, USD = US dollars

On a more positive note, our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration was a resounding success with an unprecedented number of attendees. Program Manager Barbara Long and the rest of the executive are to be congratulated for keeping close to budget while coping with a significantly larger number of guests than expected. We went slightly over-budget on our spending, but the number of non-member entry fees more than compensated for this.

Hopefully we can make up any shortfall from our rebate with non-member entry fees to our program events. Please do your best to convince your colleagues and friends to join us at these events. I still hope to come in on budget at the end of this year. ☺

## Upcoming Webinars

We are currently seeking new sponsor locations for upcoming webinars. If your company has a meeting room available and is willing to play host for any of these events, please let us know at [webinar@stceo.org](mailto:webinar@stceo.org). STCEO will pay for the webinar, provided there are more than four paying attendees. The November 22 webinar will be held downtown at Transport Canada.

You can attend one of these educational seminars with your colleagues in the Ottawa area at a very reasonable price -- \$20 (including GST) for STCEO members, \$30 (including GST) for non-members.

Upcoming webinars include:

**November 22, 2006**  
**Selling Technical Communication Services-Both Inside and Outside Your Organization**

Presenter(s): Robert Dianetti

**December 6, 2006**  
**Creating Training that Sticks**

Presenter(s): Maggie Haenel

**January 17, 2007**  
**The Xfactor-From HTML to XHTML**

Presenter(s): Neil Perlin

For information about start times, locations, and how to sign up, visit [stceo.org/education.htm](http://stceo.org/education.htm)

## A Student's Point of View

# The 40-Year-Old Student

By Susan Asistores, Algonquin College

I was so excited when I was accepted in to the Technical Writer program at Algonquin College that I decided to go to the information session for new students. After all, it had been a while since I had been a full-time student and I wanted to make sure I got off on the right foot.

The session began with everyone gathered in the cafeteria. Later, as students broke off in to their programs for the campus tour, it became obvious that I was not like the other students. Not only was I the only student there from the Technical Writer program but I was also at least twenty years older than everyone there! It made me wonder if I was in the right place. Now, with September behind me, I have no doubt that I am in the right place. It is so much fun being in the

Technical Writer program, learning practical things and knowing that I will have a chance to use everything I learn.

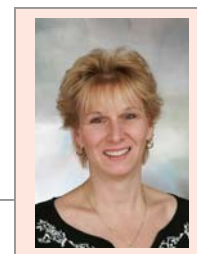
Before leaving my job and deciding to go back to school I had made a list of some of the things I enjoyed most about all the jobs I had held. The top five are: teaching, learning new things, working with people, working on a variety of projects at once, and of course writing. I wonder... Could there be a more perfect fit? ☺

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*Susan Asistores is a student in the Technical Communication program at Algonquin College. This column is the first in what is hoped to be an ongoing series of peeks inside the world of a technical writing student.*

## *Stand Up and Be Recognized*

By Cindy Currie, STC Fellow and Region 1 Director



### Member Recognition Programs

It's time to consider the individual contributions of your community members and identify one or more members for a **Distinguished Community Service Award (DCSA)**! This program acknowledges the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities. Please visit [http://www.stc.org/recog/awards01\\_DCSA.asp](http://www.stc.org/recog/awards01_DCSA.asp) for more information, including the program guidelines, nomination form, and list of previous winners. *I know there are many deserving members out there, so please take the time to nominate them!*

STC also recognizes the exemplary dedication by student members to a student or professional community and its activities through the **Distinguished Service Award for Students (DSAS)** program. Please visit [http://www.stc.org/recog/awards01\\_DSAS.asp](http://www.stc.org/recog/awards01_DSAS.asp) for more information, including the program guidelines, the nomination form, and the list of previous winners. *I'm sure there are deserving student members out there too, so let's get them recognized!*

**The deadline for both DCSA and DSAS nominations is November 30, 2006.**

Please send completed nomination forms to me at [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org) by November 30. I will review all region 1 nominations and make my recommendations to the board as to the members from region 1 who will receive the awards. As long as all submitters do a thorough job of completing the nomination form, I foresee no issues with putting forward your candidate(s) to the full board, which will vote on all DCSA and DSAS recipients for 2007 in December or January.

### Community Recognition Programs

I'd also like to encourage all communities to plan to apply for a **Community Achievement Award (CAA)**, and be recognized for your accomplishments this year. The program has recently been revamped to bring it more in line with STC's new strategic priorities. In addition, a new base level category of award ("Fundamental") has been created to recognize communities that are clearly meeting (but perhaps not exceeding, for whatever reason) the baseline criteria for running a successful community.

As I reviewed the community reports just prior to the October Board of Director's meeting, I was concerned when I saw that most communities were not planning to apply for this award this year. I realize that many communities are experiencing challenges, but most of you are doing some really good, creative things to keep your communities going and you should be recognized for those efforts!

So, be sure to check the [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) website for the updated information on the CAA program. I looked just before sending this article out, and I did not see that the new information has been posted yet. The deadline for these awards is in the spring. More on this as we get closer.

### Region 2 Conference Report

Kudos to the Region 2 conference planning committee for an outstanding conference! Some highlights are called out below:

- Great collection of presentations and expert speakers – a really good program with lots of globally recognized speakers and hot topics! I participated on a panel discussion called "Technical Communication

Meets Business: Where Do We Go from Here?" which seemed to be very well received.

- Sponsorships – the conference planning committee did a fabulous job of covering their costs through corporate sponsorships! Many lessons to be learned from their successes in this area.
- Town Hall Meeting – Our new Executive Director, Susan Burton; President, Paula Berger; First Vice President, Linda Oestreich; and Second Vice President, Mark Clifford held a Q&A session with Region 2 conference attendees to that provided a forum for members and others to meet these influential STC leaders and get answers to their most pressing questions. This event was very well attended.
- Chocolate Raffle – Yes, a personal favorite of mine, and I won a nice assortment of European chocolates! The Transalpine chapter (aka the "chocolate" chapter) has been doing this for a number of years now. All monies raised were donated to a local charity. (**Tip:** Consider doing something similar to raise money for a charity near you or to raise money for your community. You could split the proceeds, donating half to a charity and retaining the other half for your community.)

Here's how it worked: many who attended the conference brought an assortment of chocolate from their city, region, or country. These were all displayed on a large table near the conference registration desk for all to see (and drool over), and I spent a great deal of time here. Committee

*(Continued on next page)*

**Director's Report**  
(Continued from previous page)

members sold (a limited number of professionally printed with the conference logo) raffle tickets throughout the conference. Mid-way through the conference, they SOLD OUT of raffle tickets!!!! And, a black market for Chocolate Raffle tickets sprang up!

At the end of the final day of the conference, all the chocolate was bundled into a number of small assortments and raffled off during the closing reception (complete with champagne, hors d'oeuvres, and cakes!). Executive Director Susan Burton and former Region 2 Director Vici Koster-Lenhardt acted as Emcees for the raffle. It was quite a lively affair and seemed to be thoroughly enjoyed by the whole crowd!

**Board Meeting Report**

The Board met in London on October 12-13, with a workshop day on the 12<sup>th</sup> and our official face-to-face fall board meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup>. The board's focus during this time was on membership, marketing, partnerships, and the 2007 budget, which we have now finalized.

Please visit [http://www.stc.org/PDF\\_Files/101306\\_BoardReport.pdf](http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/101306_BoardReport.pdf) to read the official meeting minutes. You can also access a slide presentation containing status updates on all STC committee work, as well as summaries of regional community reports from the Director-Sponsors at [http://www.stc.org/ppt/061013\\_BoardStatusSlides.ppt](http://www.stc.org/ppt/061013_BoardStatusSlides.ppt).

**Making Life Easy!**

It's almost here! World Usability Day (WUD) is November 14, 2006 and promotes the value of usability engineering and user-centered design and the belief that every user has the responsibility to ask for things that work better. The Usability Professionals' Association ([www.usabilityprofessionals.org](http://www.usabilityprofessionals.org)) is doing that by encouraging, organizing, and sponsoring 36 hours of activities at the local level around the globe, all occurring on this day. The UPA, UPA chapters, and allied organizations (of which STC is one!) will all hold events revolving around the common theme – "Making life easy!" The focus this year is on accessibility and inclusion.

Organizing STC's participation in this event are Rahel Bailie and Jerome Ryckborst. As we get closer to the day, look for more information about how STC is

participating and for events in your area. For more information, visit [www.stc.org/wud](http://www.stc.org/wud).

**Out and About** – My chapter visit plans for this year continue to take shape and look like this at the moment:

- Tech Valley Chapter, November 15, 2006
- Northern New England Chapter, January 2007
- Boston Chapter, STACIES, February 2007

And, I'm working with the Canadian communities (Eastern Ontario, London Ontario Student, Southwestern Ontario, and Toronto) on a possible joint visit or "sweep" through Ontario province to visit all of these chapters in a single trip sometime next spring.

Please let me know what your program plans and events are for this STC year and if you'd like to me to visit your chapter or attend a special event. I will continue my visits as your interest and my finances and schedule permit. ☺

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*Cindy Currie is an STC Fellow and the Region 1 Director. She can be reached by e-mail at [dir1@stc.org](mailto:dir1@stc.org) and by phone at 603-488-5027.*

## Membership Update

By Barbara Jordan, STCEO Membership Manager

At the end of October, we had 173 members including 80 senior members, 87 regular members, and 6 student members.

In contrast, we had 182 members in 2005, 202 in 2004, 234 in 2003, 244 in 2002, and 287 in 2001.

The STC has 15,451 members total in 134 chapters and 20 SIGs.

Welcome to the following new members:

**August**

Steven Bishop, Kari-Lyn Danyluk, Geneva Holloway, Anita Rotheram, and Nicholas Taft

**September**

Jonas Barter, Karen Lomas, and Pam Simons

**October**

Susan Asistores, Karen Melanson, Tahira Shadforth, Patricia Singer, Teresa Wilde, and Cindy Zakoor

**Did you know?**

Back in 1958, society membership cost \$5 a year. By 1983, STC membership cost \$50 a year. ☺



Renew by January 1, 2007, online at <http://www.stc.org>. Your prompt renewal ensures that you can continue to take advantage of membership benefits.

## From the Editor's Desk

If you go to our Web site right now, you'd swear the chapter sprang, fully formed, into existence a little over a decade ago. Other than a few references to this being our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a chapter (October 1, 2006, to be exact), there is little historical content on the site and little historical documentation in the possession of the current or recent members of the Executive.

With the help of our program manager, Barbara Long, whose father was a technical writer, we've managed to reach out to a couple of members of the Executive from the 1980s: Jim Gallagher, who was the president in the early 1980s, and Henry Knoll, who was the newsletter editor from 1981 to 1983.

Both, to my surprise and extreme pleasure, had in their possession copies of Stimulus from the 1980s and they've given them to us. Jim Gallagher also had some really incredible documents from the very early days of the chapter (and even before the chapter was formed).

We're going to be scanning and releasing those old issues of Stimulus (in random order) once a week. Every Friday evening beginning November 17, we'll be uploading one issue (in PDF format) through the STCEO blog, which is at <http://blog.stceo.net>. Ultimately they'll be added to the list of issues in the Stimulus section of the main site but their first appearance will be in the blog.

As a little taste, the back page of this issue includes an article from the November 1981 issue. That full issue will be the first of the old newsletters that will be uploaded, so be sure to check it out.

We've also included other snippets of information gleaned from those old newsletters and documents throughout this newsletter. It seems very appropriate that this, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, should also be the year we reclaim some of our history.



[stimulus@stceo.org](mailto:stimulus@stceo.org)

## The Scoop

By Penny Lange

### Members' Corner

On October 19, yours truly (**Penny Lange**) gave a guest-lecture on marketing writing to the students of the Algonquin College Technical Writer program. (This field trip to Algonquin is a twice-yearly event.)

### Upcoming Events

#### Ottawa Independent Writers

On November 29, Natalie McLean, author of *Red, White and Drunk All Over: A Wine-Soaked Journey from Grape to Glass*, will speak about wines and writing.

For more information about this and other upcoming events, go to <http://www.oiw.ca>

#### Editors' Association of Canada (EAC), National Capital Region

Monthly meeting: November 13, Cartier Place Suite Hotel, 180 Cooper St., Brittany 1 & 2, 7:30 p.m.

For more information about this and other local EAC events, go to [www.editors.ca/branches/ncr](http://www.editors.ca/branches/ncr) ☺

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*If you have an item you'd like to share in this column about a new job or contract, a conference you've attended, or other newsworthy events, please send an email to [plange@PennyLangeAssociates.com](mailto:plange@PennyLangeAssociates.com) (I'd like to have more news to share than what I've been up to lately.)*

## Employment News

Don't forget that we've reinstated the announcement mailing list for job posting. STCEO members may sign up by sending an e-mail to [webmaster@stceo.org](mailto:webmaster@stceo.org) with their name, STC member number, and preferred e-mail address.

## Montreal Workshop

The Montreal chapter of the STC is hosting a workshop entitled "How to Document APIs", presented by Josée Laganière.

This workshop is intended for technical writers who have little or no programming experience and wish to learn how to document Application Programming Interfaces (APIs).

The workshop will be held at Ruby Foo's Hotel in Montreal on November 20, 2006, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The cost is \$175 for STC Montreal chapter members, \$195 other STC members, and \$215 non-members.

Get more information at [http://www.stc-montreal.org/events/workshops\\_e.shtml](http://www.stc-montreal.org/events/workshops_e.shtml).

## RoboHelp® X6 Beta

Earlier this year, Adobe Systems Inc. announced that it would be releasing a long-awaited update to its RoboHelp online help program, but they didn't give much in the way of details or timeframes.

At the DocTrain conference in Boston on October 3, Adobe announced that they were ready to beta test RoboHelp X6, and their Web site now indicates that they are planning to release the upgrade in the first half of 2007.

## Feature Article

# Technical Communicator Certification - Boon or Bane?

By Bill Thomas, Senior member, Rocky Mountain Chapter STC

Since I first joined STC in 1974, there have been discussions of whether Technical Communicators form a profession and whether certification would be a good idea. There have been roundtables, articles, recommendations, and hallway discussions in companies, chapter meetings, and presentations at STC conferences.

With the STC re-vitalization and transformation initiative, there has been renewed interest in certification and a new task force has been formed to look into answers. From STC President Paula Berger's July Board Meeting Minutes, "I have asked Jonathan Baker and Dan Wise to lead a Certification Evaluation Task Force. The purpose is to investigate the issue of certification from all sides – value to employers and members, financial impact, feasibility of implementation, interest level – and report to the Society in May 2007 about their findings." Jon Baker is a Program Manager within Technical Publications Operations within EMC Corporation and Dan Wise is an editor with the International Code Council.

Meeting weekly for the last month, Jon and Dan and a cadre of 18 STC members all across the country [USA] and in Canada have been meeting via conference call to determine the starting point and progress of this task. Once the questions have been hammered out and organized, the task force members will take these questions and attempt to get them answered in preparation for making a formal report to the STC board.

Questions typically asked have been along these lines: Is there a body of knowledge defining this profession? What would be the core competencies required? Would certification help or hurt the cause of the technical communicator in the field? How would employers react to certification? Would academia respond positively to a professional body of knowledge and teach standard courses to develop certified students? Would STC provide post-graduate, continuing education courses? Should certification be based on

knowledge, experience, or both? Would there be levels of certification (basic, advanced, master)? Will there be financial concerns on the part of STC, academia, employers, or practitioners that need to be addressed? Are there international or cultural considerations needing to be addressed? How would certification be marketed to sell the value of such a program and the profession to practitioners, employers, and academia? Would professional certification enhance the group or cause some to leave?

If you have comments or recommendations that this task force might consider, please send your information to [STC\\_CTF@yahoo.com](mailto:STC_CTF@yahoo.com). If you would like to participate in the research the task force will be doing, contact Jon Baker, [jbaker2525@earthlink.net](mailto:jbaker2525@earthlink.net), or Dan Wise, [DWise@iccsafe.org](mailto:DWise@iccsafe.org). We look forward to representing you and the profession to the Board in May 2007. ☺

## September Meeting Review

### *A Wild Success!*

By Kitty MacAlpine, STCEO Vice President



The gallery seemed an enormous empty space as we set up for the event. I worried a little that it would still be very empty even after the start of the event, but I needn't have. Seventy-one people, a record for our chapter, joined us on September 20 for our kick-off meet and greet gathering at Cube Gallery.

People began trickling in before the 6:30 start time. As the official start time arrived, the trickle turned into a wave. We were thrilled that so many people—members, non-

members, and students—had come to help us celebrate this, our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a chapter.

The hot and cold tapas food trays, catered by Lolly Simoes of The House Pub and Restaurant, were delicious...and very well received. Likewise, the sangria fountain saw much activity and was spilling out only suds and foam in the end.

In the absence of Mimi Richard-Golding (who was called away at the last minute), I stepped in to give her speech to the attendees.

I'm terrible at public speaking, but everyone was very gracious about my stumbling and fumbling for words.

All in all, it was a marvellous evening and I—we—thank everyone who came out and made it such a great evening.

Additional photos from the event are at [http://www.stceo.org/Program/prog2006-2007\\_09.htm](http://www.stceo.org/Program/prog2006-2007_09.htm). I hope you'll check them out, and that you will come out to future program meetings. ☺

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2006-2007 Executive**

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**Education Manager**

<vacant>

**Webmaster and  
Employment Manager**

Kitty MacAlpine  
webmaster@stceo.org

If you're interested in any of the vacant positions, please e-mail the chapter's President at president@stceo.org.



**SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION**

**Mission Statement**

The STC's mission is creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication. Our chapter's mission is to work together in a spirit of community to promote and develop professional technical communication.

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# *Blast from the past!*

## *November 1981*

### **Long Live Paper!**

Recently, after reading yet another article on high tech, I had a terrifying vision of thousands of people marching through the streets of Ottawa carrying stacks of paper – documents, books, manuals of all kinds – on their shoulders, marching down Wellington toward Confederation Square where immense bonfires raged.

Paper, my friends, paper is dying as a vehicle for information. It is going the way of the stone tablet. What, oh what, happened to all those tablet carvers? What, oh what, will happen to us?

Is our destiny to sit one day whimpering over the last few beautiful sheets of bond, while some cold-blooded automation of a technician rolls in the final piece of hardware into the office of the present?

And that morning newspaper we used to hide behind on the bus? Will it be replaced by small screens on the backs of seats, activated by currency cards, that will flash official national and international news and, at the same time, leave us dreadfully exposed to the scrutiny of our fellow travellers?

And those dozens and dozens of cheap notebooks that contain the preliminary sketches of at least 20 literary masterpieces, including several theories on why we can never seem to finish what we start? Are we condemned to commit all this intellectual self-abuse to disks and tapes?

And remember how libraries used to smell and what a delicious feeling there was to pulling out those century-old editions – that wonderful sense of continuity.

I suppose, however, that is all not lost, that there will always be some use for paper. After all, I cannot imagine blowing my nose onto plastic sheets or wiping my ... But wait, that is carrying my point a bit too far.

It seems, if one can believe the technologists and futurologists and all the other ogists, that we must resign ourselves to repeating a phrase similar to that chanted after Louis XVI was decapitated: "Paper is dead! Long live paper!"

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*This article, written by then Chapter President Alan Darisse, was originally printed in the November 1981 issue of Stimulus.*