

Stimulus

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

Volume 33, Issue 3 – January/February 2007

Inside This Issue

Competition Update	2
The Scoop	2
Membership Update	2
President's Message	3
Feature Article: Two Screens or Not Two Screens	4
Poetry: Half Empty	4
An Interview with Jim Catton	5
Director's Report	6
From the Editor's Desk	7
Letters to the Editor	7
Blast From the Past	7
Word Search Puzzle	8



February Program Meeting

So You Want to be a Technical Writer

In an effort to bring interesting and informative programming to the widest audience, we have re-scheduled the next program "So you want to be a technical writer" to February 21 at Upstairs at the Real Canadian Superstore, 190 Richmond Road.

(Please note that this means that there will be no program meeting in January.)

The evening will be a panel discussion with representatives offering varying perspectives of technical communication, and will be a good opportunity for the TW-curious, for current Technical Writer students, and even for current, hard core, technical communicators.

Come out for the casual and comfortable discussion of what it means to be a technical communicator in 2007. ☺

November Meeting Summary

All I Want for Christmas...

Approximately a dozen members and non-members met at the Real Canadian Superstore on Richmond Road on November 21 to listen to Ottawa poet Nicola Vulpe and share their favourite technical writing resources.

Most attendees brought books with them and these were displayed on a table at the back of the room for others to have a look through during the pre-meeting mingling.

Nicola helped kick off the meeting by sharing funny anecdotes from the world of technical writing. He then read a selection of poems from his published works. If you haven't read any of his poetry, I urge you to pick up a copy of one of his books.

The second part of the evening commenced with our chapter president, Mimi Richard-Golding, sharing the resources she'd brought



with her. Each person who brought in books did the same in turn. It was a very enlightening session, and the books and web resources shared were quite mixed, with both classic and new items represented.

We'll be posting a list of the resources on the Web site soon. Please share your favourite resources with us by sending an e-mail to webmaster@stceo.org. ☺

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.

ISSN 1911-2556 (Print)
ISSN 1911-2564 (Online)

Managing Editor

Kitty MacAlpine, stimulus@stceo.org

Mailing Address

Stimulus Editor, STC Eastern Ontario,
P.O. Box 78039, 1465 Merivale Road
Nepean, ON K2E 1B1

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. 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.

Submission Deadlines

All materials are due two weeks prior to publication. The submission deadline for the March/April 2007 issue is February 15, 2007.

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.

Competition Update

Thanks to Our Judges

By Peggy Vice, Competition Co-Manager

Twelve very dedicated writers worked diligently to judge the entries in this year's STCEO Competition. I would like to thank Christina Abbott, Ingrid Beryljasky, Lynda Courtemanche, Josh Dixon, Mimi Golding, Barbara Jordan, Stela Kostova, Vicky Lemon, Rick Lorenz, Ludmila Minkova, Jim Pederson, and Kish Quereshi for their enthusiasm and effort. I would also like to give a special thanks to Kitty MacAlpine for

her timely assistance with many last-minute details.

We had 21 interesting entries covering a broad range of topics and categories. Entrants will receive the judges' evaluations early in the New Year. The membership can learn who won what at our annual Awards Banquet on March 28. A list of award winners will be in the May issue of *Stimulus*. ☺

The Scoop

By Penny Lange

Upcoming Events

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

On January 17, Paul Byrne will present *How to Make a Positive First Impression* at the Cartier Place Suite Hotel, 180 Cooper St., Brittany 1 & 2.

For more information about this and other local EAC events, go to www.editors.ca/branches/ncr

Ottawa Independent Writers

On January 31, Tom Shoebridge will speak about *The Ins and Outs of Screen Plays and Play Writing*. For more information about this and other upcoming events, go to www.oiw.ca

Members' Corner

In conjunction with a recent guest-lecture to the students of the Algonquin College Technical Writer Program, yours truly (Penny Lange) held a book bazaar for the students. **Penny Lange & Associates** matched the "take" from the bazaar, and all proceeds were donated to ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation. Many thanks to the colleagues who donated books on writing and technology and thanks also to Jim Catton, head of the program, for his support. ☺

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

Membership Update

At the end of December, we had 184 members including 82 senior members, 91 regular members, and 7 student members.

We also have two sustaining 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. ☺

President's Message

Bits and Pieces

By Mimi Richard-Golding, STCEO President

Education

Did you know that 26 high schools were contacted earlier this fall and invited to participate in the International Student Technical Communication Competition (ISTCC) for 2006? This was an outreach program to acknowledge and encourage technical communication skills throughout our community. Regrettably, at the time I wrote this column, no entries have been received. Well, maybe next year.

STC Headquarters offers bi-weekly webinars for an economical \$99 USD. (You can pack a lot of technical communicators into a boardroom for that price!) Check our Web site at stceo.org/program.htm for more information.

If you are bringing this event to your office location and would like host the event for the broader technical writing community, please send an email to president@stceo.org.

Membership has its privileges

With the New Year, all good things must come to an end. For those of you who may be reviewing your billing statements or projecting budgets into the future now is the time to join or renew your STC membership.

For those of you who missed (or misplaced) the November-December issue of the STCEO *Stimulus*, the PDF version has been uploaded to the site (stceo.org/Stimulus/Issues/2006-1112.pdf). This version offers full-colour!

Judging the competition for this year's online and technical publications competition has wrapped up and we've begun planning the awards ceremony for March. Keep an eye on the STCEO Website for more information. I've requested a visit from the travelling exhibit of the top winning entries from the international

competition (www.stc.org/comp/travelingExhibits01.asp) for this event and hope to have my request accepted. This would provide another excellent opportunity for event attendees to get a look at what makes good documentation.

Online registration is now available for the Technical Communication Summit, STC's 54th Annual Conference and EXPO, scheduled for May 12-16, 2007 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Register now to take advantage of the Early Bird Registration rate of \$645, and make the Technical Communication Summit your primary source for learning and networking. See www.stc.org/54thConf/register/index.asp for more information.

Talk to me

Not all things *light* are good for you. For example communication with our membership has been light.

We're a smallish band of volunteers trying to support technical communicators in our region. Without comments and suggestions from our constituents, well, we're only as good as ... To put it another way, unexpressed expectations lead to disappointment.

Looking over our shoulders Did you know that the STCEO has a blog? If you're looking for something a little less formal, and much more stream of conscience, log into the <http://blog.stceo.net> to read the details behind the scenes. Our Webmaster, Kitty MacAlpine, has been posting older issues of *Stimulus* (the latest is from May 1983 when James Gallagher was president and Henry Knoll was the newsletter editor).

I've been in an interesting position to receive these archived files (thank you, Mr. Knoll!) and to be one of the first people who got to read the back issues. My, oh my! How things haven't really changed. For those of you waiting for the

annual STC salary survey, this is a heads up to let you know the news from HQ is that the survey "is being updated, revamped and reworked to be more inclusive, easier to read, and more up to industry standards" and is scheduled to come out in Spring 2007.

Changes in the issuance of the STCEO Student Award

We've decided to make changes to the issuance of the STCEO Student Award. Instead of limiting the award to Algonquin College students, we've modified the process to offer a broader range of students the chance to show their skills and interest in the work of the Society. Entry into the award competition is an opportunity for students to receive feedback on their work, and may pique their interest in submitting their work for future STC International Competitions. Information about how to apply is available at stceo.org/studentaward.htm.

Any college or university student wishing to be considered for the award is asked to self-nominate by sending their contact details (including name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address), a short statement (up to 250 words) describing their motivations as a technical writer, and a writing sample to be reviewed by the Executive and judges. ☺

“ If language is not correct, then what is said is not what is meant. If what is said is not what is meant, then what ought to be done remains undone.

- Confucius ”

Feature article

Two Screens or Not Two Screens

By Kitty MacAlpine



Ah, that is the question. One that, in all honesty, I'd never seriously considered before.

Cut to last year. A colleague of mine is extolling the virtues of having two computer monitors, but I am secure in the knowledge that one 19-inch monitor is more than adequate. My old home computer was an iMac with a 14-inch display—the 19-inch monitor on my new home PC is a glorious luxury and far more than I need.

Ahem. Like Bill Gates and the infamous (and apocryphal) “640K should be enough for anybody” quote, I may be forever linked, in the eyes of that colleague, with the comment “One monitor is enough for me.”

At the time, my massively huge 19-inch CRT monitor took up most of the corner of my office desk, elevated on two laptop platforms to raise it up to proper eye level. Adding a second monitor would have been problematic—there just wasn't room without taking a hatchet to some shelves and rearranging the workspace. I'm a creature of habit. That was too much change.

Several months later, I'd had time to warm up to the idea of having a larger desktop in Windows—trying to work with two instances of RoboHelp while creating French and English versions of help files was growing more annoying on the limited single screen. When management offered two 19-inch flat panel monitors to replace my existing 19-inch CRT, I couldn't

refuse. (Well, I could but who in their right mind would?)

It takes a little getting used to. Unless your eyesight is extremely good and you can sit far back from the screens or you have the type of monitors that can pivot to portrait orientation, you're going to be continually moving your head back and forth. And moving windows between the screens is odd at first.

But it won't take very long before you are addicted to life as a dual-monitor-user. You'll wonder how you ever survived with one. (“*You only have one monitor? How quaint.*” Kind of like Betamax or 8-track tapes.) For a time, I lived a double life, using two monitors at work but only one at home. My level of enjoyment at home began to decrease as I began jonesing for that extra Windows desktop real estate. It's a powerful addiction.

When the option came up at work to borrow another monitor from the old office CRT graveyard, I leapt at the chance. Had to buy an adapter for my computer because my video card was designed for outputting to a monitor and a flat panel TV, not two monitors. Had to open up the CPU and reseal the video card after I pushed it out of place plugging in

Half Empty

By Kish Quereshi

It feels like not enough
It feels half empty
When what everyone else sees
Is all good and plenty

Count your blessings
Stop your slacking
But when it is quiet and dark
Thoughts are of what is lacking

We are lucky
We work hard
Not enough to ourselves
But we deal our own cards

Too tall, too short
Not enough, too much
Our time goes by
With barely a touch

Our job is to create
From nothing to magic
If we can't see our worth
That's more than tragic

Half empty, half full
Not tragic, not bull
Too fat but don't force it
Not everything fits in a corset.

the adapter. Blew a power supply. But it all turned out OK in the end, and I'm happily dual everywhere.

My only problem now is that two monitors are quickly becoming insufficient. If I ever win the lottery, a nice Zenview multi-screen display (perhaps like the picture below) is in my future. I'll need a bigger apartment, though. ☹

Kitty MacAlpine is a technical writer with the federal government, where she writes online help and user guides for internal government applications.



Algonquin College Technical Writer Program

An Interview with Jim Catton

By Susan Asistores, Algonquin College

Q. Can you describe (briefly) the Technical Writer program?

A. The technical writing program is not for everyone. Since it's a one-year program, all the students come in with a post-secondary education or work experience, which has developed their ability to write. So, the focus is really about teaching them about technical communication, planning, tools (like RoboHelp, FrameMaker, and Dreamweaver) and job networking.

Q. What is the aim of the "Technical Writer's World" course?

A. The objective of this course is really to provide a context for the students to learn more about technical writing: What is it? What do technical writers do? What skills do they need? This course is in large part the job networking aspect of the program. It provides a win-win situation for the student and the speaker: students get an overview of the various companies where placements are available, and speakers get a chance to meet potential placement candidates.

Q. What are you looking for from speakers?

A. I am looking for speakers to provide information on the products their companies provide, the relationship of the technical documentation to those products as well as the structure or inner workings of the documentation department, and the tools they use to perform their jobs.

Q. Some students were surprised that there were not more speakers from fields outside of the high tech industry. Do you find it difficult to find speakers from outside of High Tech?

A. Yes. Since I worked in the high tech field, that is where my contacts are. I would love to get more contacts from other fields like biotechnology, the medical field, or government. The program applies to such a broad range of fields; any time there are experts from a technology-based field that need to inform, instruct, or persuade non-technical people, there is a need for a technical writer.

Q. If someone was interested in being a speaker or providing a work placement opportunity for one of the students who should they contact?

A. Me! They can e-mail me (cattonj@algonquincollege.com) or contact me by telephone at 613-727-4723 ext-3327.

Thanks Jim!



Susan Asistores is a student in the Technical Writer program at Algonquin College. Jim Catton is the Coordinator of the program.



Upcoming Webinars

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.

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. STCEO will pay for the webinar, provided there are more than four paying attendees.

Upcoming webinars include:

January 17, 2007 The Xfactor-From HTML to XHTML

Presenter(s): Neil Perlin

January 31, 2007 ANSI Z535.6 - A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-Accompanying Literature

Presenter(s): Steven Hall and Elaine Wisnie

February 7, 2007 Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets

Presenter(s): Heather

February 21, 2007 Working in Global Teams

Presenter(s): Melanie and Makarand

For information about start times, locations, and how to sign up, visit stceo.org/education.htm.



Ascend the Summit

May 13 – 16, 2007

Minneapolis, Minnesota

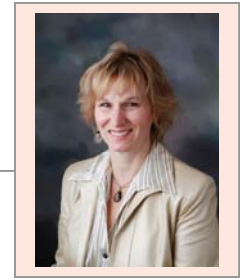
For more information, see:

<http://www.stc.org/54thConf/>

January/February 2007 Region 1 Director's Report

New Year, New Focus!

By Cindy Currie, STC Fellow and Region 1 Director



Board shuffle deals new hand

The Society-level events over the past several months include the resignation of a board member (Region 5 Director, Sherry Michaels) and the shuffling around of some responsibilities and focus areas among remaining board members. As a result, I have shifted my focus from the Communications area to the Communities area. I have assumed the chair of the Community Affairs Committee and I am really enjoying the work. I also have oversight of the Leadership Community Resource (LCR), Virtual Communities, and Community Recognition committees. Watch for some important and valuable changes in all of these areas.

Give the board your input!

Monitoring and acting on the needs of the membership is one of the most important practices that STC engages in. To help facilitate this practice, the board adopted a knowledge-based governance (KBG) approach in 2005. KBG is a business-based model of using information and insight to aid strategic decision-making. The KBG approach enables and encourages STC members to provide information to the board prior to board meetings, and forms a valuable part of major decision-making. The result is better decisions that more closely meet member needs because the board has current and relevant data from members.

The STC board now regularly gathers member input just prior to each face-to-face (F2F) board meeting. The next meeting is February 2-3, 2007 in Arlington, VA. The primary focus of this meeting will be on communities. Look for another KBG survey in January. Your responses will form the basis of many of the board's discussions during this meeting, so please take advantage of this opportunity to provide timely input to the board.

Have you renewed your membership yet?

Membership renewal season opened on November 1, so if you have not yet renewed your membership, please consider putting that near the top of your "to do" list. You'll want to be sure that you are eligible to vote in STC's upcoming annual elections, and be able to take advantage of member discounts on registration for the conference this spring.

Preliminary slate of candidates announced!

Annual election season is rolling around again. The preliminary slate of candidates was announced in November. This year's slate includes one candidate for President, one candidate for First Vice President, two candidates for Second Vice President, six candidates for three Director positions, and four candidates for two Nominating Committee positions. Anyone who is interested in running for elected office this year can use the petition process to be added to slate at this time. The final slate will be announced in February. The voting will be conducted during March. Get to know the candidates and make a truly informed decision this year. The percentage of members who voted last year was up nearly 5% over the previous year and we are looking forward to another big increase this year!

Ascend the Summit!

Registration for the **Technical Communication Summit** – STC's 54th Annual Conference – is now open with great early bird registration fees for members and non-members alike through February 28, 2007. Check out the conference site at www.stc.org/54thConf/index.asp for all the details as they unfold.

Don't miss this event; it's going to be the best STC conference ever!

We've heard your feedback and have incorporated it all into this conference, STC's flagship annual event.

Update on Distinguished Community Service Awards (DCSA)

It was great to receive so many nominations for DCSAs this year. There were eight nominations from region 1, up from three the previous year, which is an increase of 167%! Note to submitters: these nominations have been approved by the board. At some point, I will list the recipients, but mum's the word right now as their communities have plans to honor these individuals in some special ways in upcoming months.

Out and about

My community visit plans for this year continue to take shape. My firm plans look like this at the moment:

- Northern New England Chapter, January 10, 2007
- Boston Chapter, STACIES, February 2007
- Eastern Ontario Chapter, March 28, 2007
- Southwestern Ontario Chapter, March 29, 2007

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

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

From the Editor's Desk

The December 25, 2006, issue of Time magazine featured a series of articles crowning "You" (yes, that's you, me, and everyone else) as the "Person of the Year", for making the Internet the interactive playground that it has become.

The vagueness that is the "Web 2.0" buzzword is a pet peeve of mine and I read "Time's Person of the Year: You", by Lev Grossman, with some frustration. Until I reached the following comment:

"Some of the comments on YouTube make you weep for the future of humanity just for the spelling alone, never mind the obscenity and the naked hatred."

Ah, that's much better. Having just read some YouTube comments that were a barely literate combination of atrocious spelling, complete lack of punctuation or capitalization, and overuse of text speak*, I had begun wondering myself if we were seeing the death of the English language as we know it.

Now, I can LOL and AFAIK with the best of them and I can be a bit smiley-heavy in a casual forum environment, but there's a time and

a place for it and a limit to how abbreviation-filled a text message can get before it starts becoming painful to read. The first time my niece sent me a message through MSN Messenger, I would have reached through the phone line to throttle her if I could have, her writing was so terrible. My schoolteacher grandmother, who liked to spring grammar pop quizzes on us when we came to visit, must have been rolling over in her grave.

Then I started envisioning the writers of the future, thumbs on Blackberries, cranking out user guides full of "omg !!11!! u r pwned f u c @ msg". Oh, the horror! Oh, the inhumanity! Check out our next issue for a full article about my nightmare vision of the future and the joy that will be the "new" user guide.

** If you haven't had the joy of reading text speak (or its cousin, leetspeak), count yourself lucky and head over to en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SMS_language and en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leet_for_a_crash_course.*



stimulus@stceo.org

Blast From the Past

One of the items we were lucky enough to receive from Jim Gallagher, who was STCEO president in the 1980s, was a copy of the November 1958 issue of the Society of Technical Writers and Editors newsletter. A PDF version of the full issue has been posted to the STCEO blog (at blog.stceo.net) but we thought we'd share a couple of old job openings, circa 1958, with you here as well:

TECHNICAL WRITER: To write reports, formula specifications, and other technical data covering activities in Product Development laboratories. Degree in Chemistry or Journalism, plus technical writing experience in food or chemical industry desired. Position offers excellent growth opportunity in expanding program.

PUBLICATIONS ENGINEER: Supervise publication activities involving fulfillment of customer handbook requirements. Design data reports and company reports. Minimum of B.S. in Electrical Engineering and experience as supervisor in this field.

Montreal Workshop

The Montreal chapter of the STC is hosting a workshop entitled "Visual Design Principles for Writers: Enhancing Usability and Readability", presented by David Deskin.

The workshop will be held at Ruby Foo's Hotel in Montreal on January 29, 2007, 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.

Letters to the Editor

I am interested in contributing an article. What kind of topics are you looking for? – AM

We're looking for articles on pretty much any topic that would be of interest to technical writers. Past topics have been quite varied. Did you attend a technical writing event and would like to share your experience? Did you read a book that you would like to review? Do you have tips for using tools?

If it's at all relevant to technical writing, we'd be happy to hear about it. If you would like to write an article but don't have a topic in mind, let us know. We can help.

How long should articles be? Would two pages be too long? – JG

While we have occasionally published multi-page articles in the past, shorter articles are much easier to place in any given issue. A full-page article is approximately 750 words and anything under that length is ideal. Short filler items such as jokes or quotations and reviews are always welcome. ☺

If you have any questions about writing in general, the STC, STCEO, or this newsletter, please send them to stimulus@stceo.org.

**STC Eastern Ontario
2006-2007 Executive**

President

Mimi Richard-Golding
president@stceo.org

Vice President

Kitty MacAlpine
vice-president@stceo.org

Past President

Barbara Jordan
past-president@stceo.org

Treasurer

Peggy Vice
treasurer@stceo.org

Secretary

David Hitchcock
secretary@stceo.org

Program Manager

Barbara Long
program@stceo.org

**Membership Manager and
Volunteer Coordinator**

Barbara Jordan
membership@stceo.org

Public Relations Manager

Coreen Corcoran
pr@stceo.org

Competition Managers

Brian Williamson & Peggy Vice
competition@stceo.org

Education Manager

<vacant>

**Webmaster, Employment
Manager, and Newsletter
Editor**

Kitty MacAlpine
webmaster@stceo.org and
stimulus@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.

Address

P.O. Box 78039
1465 Merivale Road
Nepean, Ontario K2E 1B1
<http://www.stceo.org>

Word Search Puzzle

All of the words in the list on the right can be found in the scrambled puzzle below. Words may be hidden diagonally, horizontally, or vertically and may be written forwards or backwards.

The solution will appear in the March/April issue.



Word List

- COMMUNICATION
- COMPUTER
- COPYEDITOR
- CSS
- DICTIONARY
- DITA
- DOCUMENTATION
- GLOSSARY
- GRAMMAR
- HTML
- INDEX
- MANUAL
- ONLINE HELP
- PROOFREAD
- SCREENCAP
- SINGLE-SOURCING
- SPELL CHECKER
- STC
- STYLE GUIDE
- STYLESHEET
- TECHNICAL WRITER
- TERMINOLOGY
- THESAURUS
- USER GUIDE
- WORD PROCESSOR
- WYSIWYG

