

Stimulus

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

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Notice from the editor:

The 'Writers of the Future' article that was scheduled for this issue will appear in the May/June issue instead, in order that we could include a timelier Rahel Bailie article in this issue.



Program Meetings

Upcoming Chapter Events

Our March event is our annual awards banquet, being held March 28, 2007, at the Chelsea Club in downtown Ottawa.

The event features a full dinner, a showcase of the winning entries, and the awarding of our annual STCEO Scholarship to a deserving technical writing student. This year we're pleased to present Cindy Currie, STC Region 1 director, as our keynote speaker.

Seating is limited at the Chelsea Club and, as of the publication date of this newsletter, all spaces have been filled. We look forward to seeing everyone there who RSVPed.

We are still determining a topic for the April meeting. We will post details on the Program page at stceo.org/program.htm as they become available in early April. Please send any questions to us at program@stceo.org. ☺



February Event Summary

So You Want to Be a Technical Writer

Seventeen interested individuals met at the Real Canadian Superstore in Westboro seeking insight into this thought-provoking topic.

During the casual yet comfortable discussion, Penny Lange, Pearl Prevost, and Dent Tillotson each told of their entry into the field of technical communication and their experiences in the profession.

Penny spoke of challenges faced as a freelancer, such as trying to not work nights and weekends. Pearl talked of the complexities of working in the field as a technical writer and business analyst, including the all-too-common phenomenon of trying to describe what you do as a technical

communicator in a single sentence. Dent told of his earliest experiences as one of the first students to go through the newly-minted Algonquin College technical writing program.

A Q&A session focussed on ideas that have helped each speaker find her or his success in the profession.

"Know your audience," "diversify but don't throw away your past," and the famous (for some) "writing is a thinking process" were some of the pearls of wisdom shared.

Congratulations to Graham Coles and Jesse Towle, winners of the night's door prizes: a full copy of SnagIt and a TechSmith t-shirt, respectively. ☺

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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. 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 May/June issue is April 15, 2007.

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President's Message

What's in a Name?

By Mimi Richard-Golding, STCEO President

I've spent many hours thinking about the question "what's in a name?" Usually the first thing that comes to mind is the *Sound of Music* where Maria sings the line from Do Re Mi – "Me, a name I call myself." (Have I given you all an earworm now?) Once I've purged my mind of the song, I get to thinking about why a name, or in this case, a job title has been so important to me.

I don't think I'm alone in this pondering. In the field of technical communication, we seem to struggle with the issue of identity. Perhaps it is because none of us takes the same path into this profession. We talk about our previous lives as laboratory technicians, secretaries, or disenfranchised computer workers. Some of us dive into the profession directly, volunteering for writing assignments. Others take a more meandering route. And still others, like me, head back to school to fulfill requirements towards a diploma or degree.

When I was breaking into the field, I felt it was critical to have the words "technical" and "writer" within close proximity to one another. I felt it was the key to my future success in the field. The school route was the path of least resistance, or so I thought. After a hard year that had me repeatedly questioning my motivation for this career choice, I graduated and made it through several gruelling interviews to land that first, all-important job with the title Technical Writer.

A rose by any other name

Since then, I've been around the track a couple of times, long enough to have gone through several iterations of names: Technical Writer, Knowledge Management Specialist, Technical Communicator, Information Specialist, Minion of the Ministry of Propaganda, and Information Architect.

How have these titles affected me? Well, in some instances, they've caused quite a bit of consternation as I struggled to explain that the title really meant I was a technical writer, which usually means I have to explain what a technical writer does; then again, the job title I'm assigned by my employer doesn't adequately reflect the skills that I bring to the job.

Perhaps the whole issue of earning or being conferred a title is overrated. What would happen if we take an approach of christening ourselves? Rebrand ourselves to suit the work we're doing. When a title becomes stale, we can come up with another moniker. This approach would allow each of us to retain our individuality while expressing a great deal of creativity. For those office workers who must retain a corporate directive, there are still many options such as Technical Writer Unit 2, One of Four, or Alpha Writer.

I like that. I guess it's time to order business cards with my new title:

"Diva of Documentation"



Congratulations!!

Please join us in congratulating chapter president, Mimi Richard-Golding, on the birth of her fourth child, son Timothy Henry Golding, who was born on January 24, 2007.

Mom, baby, and family are doing great!



Feature Article

Content and Convergence: Another Move Away From Content Silos

By Rahel Baillie

When technical communicators think of content management, our minds naturally go to the world of structured authoring and XML content management. If someone were to map out the direction of structured authoring over the last couple of decades, it would be a relatively simple path, from DocBook SGML to DocBook XML to DITA XML, with a few detours along the way for specialized DTDs (such as S1000D, used for aircraft maintenance).

It's probably surprising, then, to realize that in the content management world, this type of content management is considered a niche market so specialized that industry pundits haven't even bestowed on it a sexy acronym, and are just now starting to look for a common vocabulary to talk about it. There's a current attempt to call this "component content management" but whether the term will stick - well, as the term is being coined from outside the industry, that remains to be seen. So far, single-sourcing has been the most persistent terminology used, but even that only addresses a relatively small aspect of this type of content management, which is known by terms such as structured authoring and XML content management (SAXCM is a bit of a racy acronym, but after all, SAX sells!).

Where the action is, both in terms of market size and in movement, is on the Web side. Web content management systems (WCMS) are used not only for Web sites but intranets, extranets, and portals - a fancy name for a site where some content is password protected, and sometimes different content is served up, depending on the role of the person coming to the site or logging in. Variants of these Web systems are also used for e-learning, knowledge management,

collaboration, e-commerce, and a host of related applications - but let me not get distracted from my premise.

The systems used for marketing purposes have their own entourage to support their functions. There are Digital Asset Management (DAM) apps to handle all the still and moving images in low- and high-resolution, thumbnails, and print-quality downloads. To go with that, Digital Rights Management (DRM) apps are needed to control access and usage of the digital assets. Also part of the entourage is Search Engine Optimization (SEO) software that helps drive traffic to the site, and Really Simple Syndication (RSS) software that syndicates content from the site.

Where this all becomes interesting is in the convergence of these two worlds, in the intersection of the worlds structured authoring and WCMS. We came from a world of content silos, and progressed to a world of content management silos: SAXCM and WCM. But, many would say, what about Enterprise Content Management Systems (ECMS)? Doesn't that remove silos, and let an organization share and re-use content across the entire enterprise? Well - and you probably won't be surprised at the answer, yes and no.

If you consider an organization a closed system, you very well might look at ECM as a solution to getting content out of CMS silos. However, as the saying goes, "the devil is in the details" and the actual execution to get everyone's content across the enterprise readied for ultimate shareability does take a concerted, corporate-wide, executively-sponsored project to guarantee success. And yet, aren't we rapidly bypassing the ECM stage? Now, we are entering a new phase where collaboration tools,

social networking tools, and tools barely entering the market are ready to change the landscape yet again.

The technical communication world is preparing for this world of convergence and integration with DITA, where topic-based content can be re-used within a document or a department, or shared with the rest of the organization or with partner organizations. The DITA standard allows content to travel, even boomerang, and be as usable when it arrives as when it left its author. In the Web world, similar standards have emerged and continue to emerge in the forms of everything from microformats to entire mark-up languages as a way of making content transportable.

The next few years will hold some interesting developments for technical communicators. The convergence of content types will have far-reaching implications, and any predictions would need to change as user reactions to new technologies affect user expectations, the way that del.icio.us and digg has affected searching for information. It's certainly a time when we need to keep ourselves aware of industry trends and align ourselves more closely with other content developers that touch our work. ☺

Rahel Baillie is principal of Intentional Design Inc., focusing on performance improvement for communication products, and content management consultant in Strategy A Consulting Group, a multidisciplinary consultancy helping organizations find effective ways to manage content as valuable corporate assets.



March/April 2007 Region 1 Director's Report

Spring Cleaning STC-Style

By Cindy Currie, STC Fellow and Region 1 Director

It's time to brush up on the candidates, polish your Community Achievement Award application forms, and dust off your business wardrobe and get ready to head to the (new, updated!) annual conference to put a new shine on your technical communication career! So, my advice to you is:

Get out (er, online?) and vote!

The STC election / balloting opens soon, so here is your opportunity to participate in choosing the leaders that will take us forward into the future and continue to shape the profession of technical communication! For detailed information about this year's slate of candidates, visit www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp. All candidates are very willing to be contacted for further discussion about their views, so please take advantage of this opportunity to ask your burning questions.

The voting will be conducted from early March through mid April. Get to know the candidates' views and make a truly informed decision about who you think can best guide STC to new levels of professional leadership and global recognition. The percentage of members who voted last year (about 18%) was up nearly 5% over the previous year and we are looking forward to another big increase this year!

If you vote electronically, it's a breeze again this year. If you vote by paper ballot, please be sure to fill it out and return it quickly.

Shine up and submit your Community Achievement Award application!

Community leaders, it's time to put the final polish on your Community Achievement Award (CAA) applications. Your 2007 application form should reflect activities and events conducted between April 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007.

The CAA recognizes a community's (SIG, professional or student chapter) accomplishments in achieving the Society's goals through a wide range of programs and activities. Additional information, including the newly updated CAA guidelines and the CAA application forms are available at: www.stc.org/recog/awards01_comAchievement.asp.

I am available to review applications as a sanity check (dir1@stc.org) if you'd like a fresh pair of eyes to look yours over before you send it in. The application form and supporting materials must be emailed to the STC Office (peg@stc.org) by April 5, 2007.

Note that the CAA should be particularly interesting to community officers because pursuing the award criteria ensures that your community provides value to members, even if your community does not apply for the award. Studying the criteria can also help your community officers develop strategic and tactical plans.

Ascend the Summit!

This year, make the Technical Communication Summit (STC's 54th Annual Conference) your primary source for career education. Whether you're a senior or novice practitioner, manager or individual contributor, the Summit is designed to further your professional growth and develop your job skills.

To learn more about the conference and to register, click on the Technical Communication Summit logo online at www.stc.org.

Don't miss this event; it's going to be the best STC conference ever! We've heard your feedback and have incorporated it into this conference, STC's flagship annual event.

Send your incoming leaders to Leadership Day!

The annual Leadership Day event is being held as usual the day before the conference begins, on Sunday, May 13. This year's schedule is choc-a-bloc full of exceptional information for new and incoming community leaders.

And, the Leadership Community Resource (LCR), STC's new definitive resource for community outreach and support, is officially being launched during this event. Come learn what the LCR offers community leaders and how it all works to ensure that STC communities can become strong, self-sufficient entities, with various levels of support available to them, as required.

This event is highly recommended for incoming Chapter and SIG Officers!

Take in a Region 1 conference!

Two communities are holding conferences in March:

- Philadelphia Metro Chapter, 4th Annual Conference, Current & Future Trends in Business Communication, March 17, 2007 (with workshops on March 16, 2007) www.stcpcmc.org
- Rochester Chapter, Spectrum 2007, 49th Annual Conference, March 23, 2007, www.stcrochester.org

Each is a high-quality event with lots to offer attendees on many levels. Check 'em out!

Attend a Board meeting!

The STC Board of Directors recently held its winter Board meeting in Arlington, VA. The focus of this meeting was on Communities, and many strategic community-related topics were discussed, including:

(Continued on next page)

- Society/Community relationship models
- Greater parity between types of communities
- Even more flexible membership options
- Restructured dues models
- Flexibility for geographic communities (chapters) to group themselves in ways other than the traditional STC "regional" model (virtual communities, SIGs, were never bound by this model)

Look for additional information on these topics and more as the board continues work on reshaping and improving the Communities area to ensure more valuable services are delivered to all.

Socially, we were treated to an evening reception held at the STC Office with many members of the Washington DC chapter attending. It was fun to meet and mingle with some old familiar faces and many new ones!

In case you are not aware, the STC Board meetings are open meetings (all except the Executive Session portion of these meetings), so any STC member may attend. I encourage you all to do so when you can. "They are enlightening," so says everyone who's ever attended! The next Board meeting will be on May 12 in Minneapolis, MN (in conjunction with this year's conference). Be there!

Drop by if you're nearby
My community visit plans for this year have been firmed up, and they look like this at the moment:

- Boston Chapter, STACIES, February 28, 2007
- Rochester Chapter, Spectrum Conference, March 23, 2007
- Southwestern Ontario Chapter, March 27, 2007
- Eastern Ontario Chapter, March 28, 2007

I hope to see many of you at one of these events! Check the individual community websites for more information, and do plan to drop by if you're nearby to any one of these locations. ☺

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.

A Student's Point of View

Resumes, Portfolios & Interviews...

By Susan Asistores, Algonquin College

Refreshed after the holiday break, we started the second semester of the Technical Writing program, the last before our two-month work placements. The placements, which are completed in cooperation with local organizations, provide us with an opportunity to apply our skills to actual writing projects in an on-the-job setting.

The work placement process is somewhat similar to looking for a job. We update our resumes, assemble our portfolios, and prepare for our interviews. Typically, we interview with three potential organizations. Jim Catton, the coordinator of the program, pairs us with these organizations based on interest (ours and the organizations'), skill sets, and availability.

To help us prepare for interviews, Ingrid Berljawsky, a documentation manager with Bridgewater Systems, provided us with some valuable insight into what managers will expect from our resumes and cover letters. Ingrid also gave us some great pointers on assembling our portfolios, and provided us with some useful tips for achieving success on our writing tests.

As a follow-up to Ingrid's presentation, Nathalie Adams, a human resources advisor with Bridgewater Systems, shared some interview dos and don'ts, and provided us with the inside scoop on what interviewers are looking for. For many of the technical writing students, Nathalie's presentation was a crash-course on interviewing skills, something that

will no doubt prove useful for our upcoming interviews.

The interview process is scheduled to begin in March with final decisions made in April in order for the work placements to start in May.

Portfolios in hand and armed with the knowledge imparted to us by our instructors and guest speakers, we go forward with nervous anticipation of the new technologies we will learn and the tools we will strive to master. ☺

Susan Asistores is a student in the Technical Communication program at Algonquin College. This column is the third in an ongoing series of looks inside the world of a technical writing student.



Ascend the Summit
May 13 – 16, 2007
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Visit stc.org/54thConf/ for full details

From the Editor's Desk

The Future of the Chapter

It's been over a year since I joined the STCEO council as Webmaster, and my thoughts have been turning lately to the upcoming Annual General Meeting (AGM) in May. (Pretend that I'm wearing all of my STCEO hats—newsletter editor, Webmaster, and vice president—as I write this even though I *am* taking up the editorial section of the newsletter to do so.)

Maintaining the status quo

As in most years, there was no actual voting involved in the election of the executive members of the council last May. Only one person stepped forward to stand for each position—at the very last minute in the case of the vice president and president—and all were accepted by acclamation.

As I pore over the old issues of Stimulus, it's become apparent to me that this is an endemic problem in this chapter. Rare are the years when chapter members are able to choose from among a number of candidates. While I can't say that the chapter has suffered for the lack of choice in executive members, it has suffered and continues to suffer for the lack of enthusiasm that the lack of volunteers for council positions represents.

Are we there yet?

We—Mimi and I and the rest of the council—made a commitment this year to throw all our energies at the Web site, newsletter, and program offerings, all in an attempt to revive interest and enthusiasm in the STC and in this chapter. It seems to have been effective, but has it been enough?

The Web site has been redesigned and has had new content added over the past several months, with more new content on the horizon.

The newsletter has been spruced up and published in print form every two months (give or take a week or two) since the start of this term. We've also submitted it to the

annual STC newsletter competition. Our September meet and greet event was a great success, and subsequent program meetings have enjoyed reasonably high attendance rates.

Has our enthusiasm been infectious? Since 2000, chapter membership has declined by 10 to 40 members annually, from a high of over 311 members in 2000 to a low of 182 at the end of 2005. At the end of 2006, we had 184 members. Not only did our membership count **not** decline by the expected 10-20%, it actually grew by a small margin. But it's too soon to tell if that is a new upward trend or just an anomaly.

Sustaining the momentum

Assuming it's an upward trend, how do we maintain that growth? How do we keep members interested in all that the society and this chapter have to offer? The quick answer is to keep doing what we've been doing and to find out what else members want from the chapter.

To do everything we want to do—maintaining current offerings and seeking out new ones—we need enthusiastic volunteers. I suspect that we will lose a council member or two this year as they move onto other things or just take a long-deserved break. If other volunteers don't step forward to fill the empty slots, then our ability to sustain this chapter as we have in the past is compromised and any hope we have of future growth and expansion is gone.

In the absence of a volunteer in any council position, it falls upon the president or another council member to take over until a replacement is found. If they are already overextended, then something has to give.

What are our options?

If we have a council similar to this year's, then we can hopefully continue on as we have been doing.



If we have a larger, more complete council, then we can begin to look towards reclaiming some of the activities and events that we used to offer.

Both require volunteers. Some time in April, we will post a list of positions that are or will be available for the coming year. At the same time, we will begin accepting nominations for the elected positions: president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer.

Start thinking about it now. Time and energy commitments vary from position to position. Position descriptions are available on the site, but you can also contact the current chapter president (president@stceo.org) or vice president (vice-president@stceo.org) if you have questions about volunteering for any position or team. If you don't have the time to commit to a council position, there are numerous other ways to help. For example, you can help out as part of one of the existing teams, such as the Newsletter Team (hint, hint). Or you can send us news or other content for the site or blog (we'd love to have some additional bloggers, if that kind of thing interests you). Or you could just offer us feedback—how do you think we're doing?

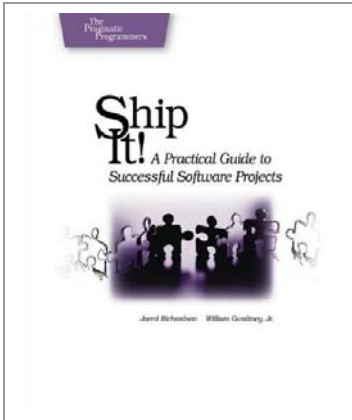
If we wind up with the same problem as last year, with virtually no one stepping forward early on to fill key council positions, then we may be forced to become a "resting" chapter, a chapter offering reduced services to its membership for a term or longer. That may well mean no program meetings and no competition. How important are they to you?

stimulus@stceo.org

Book Review

Ship It! A Practical Guide to Successful Software Projects

By Chris Bridgen



Published by O'Reilly and Associates
198 pages
CAN \$: 41.95

ISBN: 0-9745140-4-7

You write manuals for software. You are used to weeks- or months-long development cycles. The stacks of detailed, versioned specifications sit in neat piles on your desk. Sometimes, up-to-date screen captures are included. If you are blessed, they contain scraps of customer use cases.

Your designers haven't read and embraced *Ship It! A Practical Guide to Successful Software Projects*. If they had, you would face new hardships. No longer would you feast upon the fatted spec. Your designers, freed by the techniques and tools outlined in this book, would be too busy churning out clean, versioned software to write anything useful to you, except, perhaps, new software development methods.

The authors, Jared Richardson and William Gwaltney Jr., favour a three-pronged approach to software

development. Two of the prongs are sensible. The third, like the middle prong of a trident, sticks deep.

The first prong covers tools. It may be hard to believe in this age of terabit storage and information management, but many software shops do not use code repositories. The authors' argue that a simple system whereby developers write code locally, then submit it to a central repository where regular builds are automatically generated and tested is bullet proof. In theory, this practice resembles the documentation source control used by mature technical writing teams.

Prong two points out that software designers spend too much time sitting in pointless meetings and managing mounds of administrivia. What they aren't doing is collaborating. Richardson and Gwaltney Jr. make a convincing case that a few changes, implemented by leads and direct managers, can quickly alter designers' ability to work well together, and work only on what needs doing. Our old friend the prioritized list gets a gold star. The list keeps ambitious product managers in line. If the feature's not

above the priority line, discussion stops.

Prong three is where the pain begins. The authors write favourably about the beast called agile development. Agile development favours results over bureaucracy, interactions over process, responses to change over sticking with plans, and working software over writing documentation.

Savour the last statement. First, imagine a world where you have full access to a daily software build. Dream that the build installed and ran with ease. Further, dream that this build contains working software. And the working software matches customer expectations. The software was user-friendly, with sensible menus. Then poof! The golden cloud dissipates.

Comprehensive design specifications work day or night. Development software loads, in early cycles, not so much. Good specs are as essential to good documentation as sensible GUI screens are to positive user experiences.

A useful book, if only to learn how the other half thinks. ☺

Chris Bridgen is a senior information developer at Alcatel Lucent. He plans to stop writing software documentation.

Upcoming Webinars

March 28, 2007

Visible: The New Valuable

Presenters: Austin Skaggs and Christine Granger

April 11, 2007

Creating Interactive CBTs with Captivate-in Half the Time

Presenter: Kevin Siegel

May 2, 2007

Choosing the Right Usability Technique (to answer the right question)

Presenter: Whitney Quesenbery

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

Treasurer's Report

March/April Update

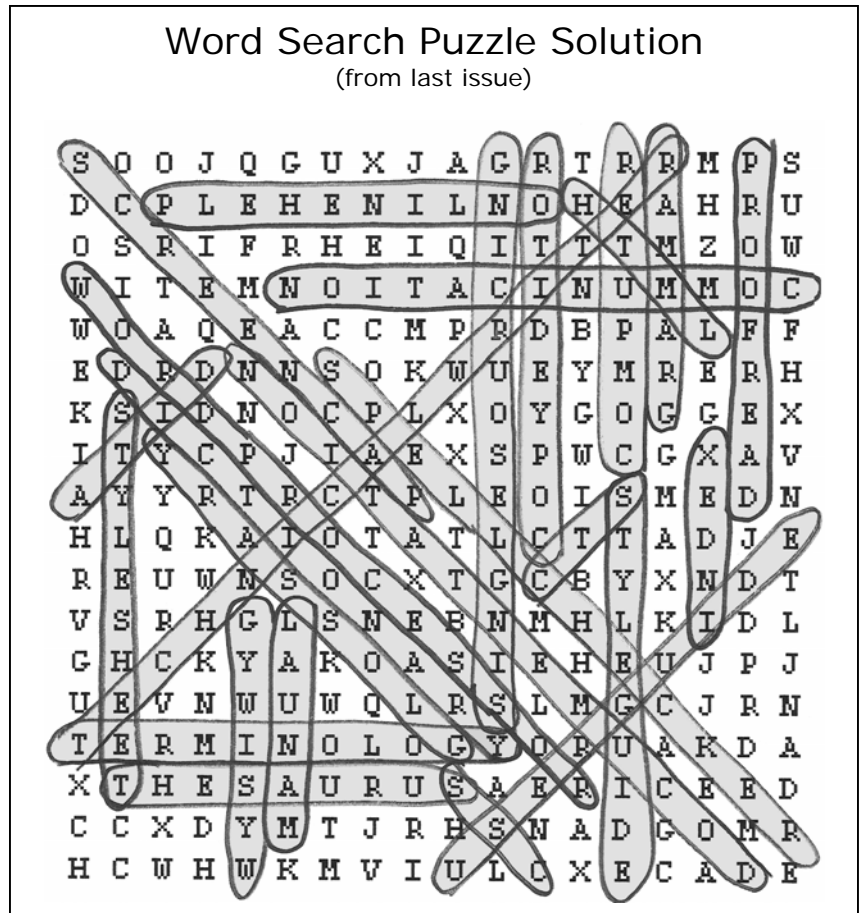
By Peggy Vice, STCEO Treasurer

Finally, our second rebate cheque from STC head office has arrived. From the e-mails flying back and forth between treasurers, I gather that STC has started sending some overseas rebates by e-transfers, and those communities were serviced first. With the time spent organizing the new payment method, cheques were issued about a month late.

As I indicated in an earlier report, a decline in membership and the rising Canadian dollar has caused our rebate to be smaller than originally budgeted. Kitty is doing such a great job keeping costs down for each Stimulus issues that those savings, along with delaying the January meeting and not having a Christmas party, have offset the rebate revenue loss. I still hope to meet the bottom line we projected in our original budget. ☺

Word Search Puzzle Solution

(from last issue)



Membership Update

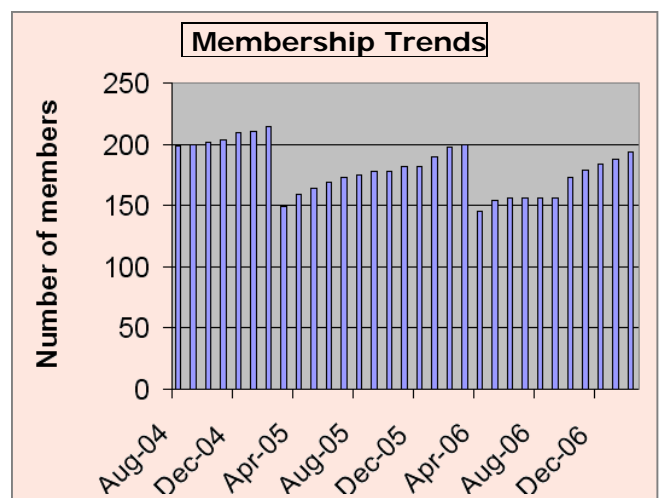
At the end of January, we had 188 members including 85 senior members, 98 regular members, and 5 student members. At the end of February, we had 194 members including 89 senior members, 102 regular members, and 5 student members. We also have two sustaining members.

Congratulations to the following new senior members:

- Susan Brown
- Deborah Kirkham
- Audrey M. Cormier
- Karen D. Melanson
- Darlene R. Hawkes

Please welcome the following new and transferring members to the chapter:

- Mitchell Delachevrotiere
- Mohamed Hammoud
- Deborah Kirkham
- Kevin Law
- Donna Truelove
- Laurie McCoubrey
- Donghai Zhao
- Helene Williams
- Patricia Dales
- Robert Hennessy
- Leslie Bayford
- Kathleen Gordon
- Chris Bridgen



The chapter receives a portion of the dues you pay for your STC membership and relies on these rebates to survive. But did you know that the later you renew your membership, the smaller the chapter's portion? If you wait until after June to renew, the chapter gets no rebate at all. Please help support the chapter and renew as soon as possible. If you've already renewed, thank you. ☺

The Survey Says...

What Do You Look For in a Program Meeting?

The following article, an editorial by then-editor Henry Knoll titled "What Chapter Meetings Do To Me", appeared in the May 1983 issue of Stimulus. Despite having been written over 23 years ago, the topic is still very timely.

Each year, the chapter Executive tries to come up with a new roster of interesting program meetings,

with varying degrees of success. This year's meetings have turned out to be mostly socializing/networking events set around casual but fairly broad technical writing-related discussions. Have these been effective?

It's been awhile since we've done a survey but this seems as good a time as any. What do you look for in

a chapter meeting? Are you looking for education or training? Networking opportunities? Socializing? A little bit of everything? We've set up a survey on the site at stceo.org/Temp/survey07.htm—please take a few moments to go there and let us know what you would like to see in future programming.

Our Chapter has no life after officiousness. For years I suppose one Chapter executive after another has been wrestling with ideas about programs for a season, programs that could be of interest to as many members as possible.

The underlying axiom is that meeting with a topic that is professionally relevant to many will be attended by many. That's fair enough. In a community which understands success, happiness, etc. only quantitatively, what can you do? A successful meeting is one where many people are in attendance, whatever else the merits or demerits of the meeting. But why did I say 'relevant'? I don't even like relevant topics - not during my leisure time I don't. During my leisure time the only thing that's relevant to me is irrelevance.

That may be an important factor to consider generally; namely, that our Chapter meetings occur necessarily during people's leisure time. And at that time many may seek pleasure, not pleasure derived from accomplishment (one can do that all day at work, if one wants), but pleasure from being entertained, from being at peace with oneself. Therefore, from my point of view every Chapter meeting we hold should be an entertaining event.

I would gladly listen to a speaker at our meetings, provided he aims to be more entertaining than educating. The fact is that when I want educating, STC meetings are not my first, second, or third choice. Instead, I stay at home and read on the subject on which I want to be informed. It leaves me in control of the situation. If the author starts to drivel, I skip a few paragraphs or pages; if he still drivels, I find another source of information. And I can do this with my feet up, pleasant music in the background, and whatever else makes the absorption of information painless. This control I don't have while sitting in a meeting-hall. If the speaker there starts to drivel, what can I do? Endure - that's all.

But I would not even mind having information shovelled into my head, provided it is merely a short forward to good socializing. Then I would take my subjection to information fallout the way I would take bitter medicines: momentary endurance for eventual relief.

I would be unfair not to qualify at this point: there have been very worthwhile STC meetings, where something new was said and entertainingly so. How many, though? Two or three, even four in ten. So what are members of our Chapter to do, wager the worth of an evening of

precious leisure time at odds of 3 or 4 to 10 for attendance at another oppressively officious meeting? Or attend as a matter of duty and commitment? I have the chance to peruse the newsletters of other STC chapters. In many newsletters a common element is a map for finding the way to the next party - or call it chapter meeting, if you wish. What makes our meetings all the sadder is any speculation on the fun they could be: our Chapter is rich in very witty, very intelligent, and very personable people (just part of our trade).

Let me quote from R.L. Stevenson's essay *An Apology For Idlers*, just to broaden the point of view a bit.

Extreme busyness, whether at school or college, kirk or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality; and a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity. There is a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people about, who are scarcely conscious of living, except in the exercise of some conventional occupation.

and so it goes on condemning STC chapters that have no life after officiousness. ☹

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vacant positions, please e-mail
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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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The Scoop

By Penny Lange

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

On March 21 Elizabeth Macfie will
present "How Do I Get the Work"?
Networking for Freelancers at the
Cartier Place Suite Hotel, 180
Cooper St., Brittany 1 & 2, 7:30
p.m.

On April 18 Susan Davis will present
*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective
EAC Members*. Same time and place
as above.

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

Ottawa Independent Writers

The 2nd Annual OIW Writers'
Retreat will occur from April 20 to
22 at the Marguerite Centre,
Pembroke. The deadline for
registration is Friday, April 16. For
more information about this and
other upcoming events, go to
www.oiw.ca

If you have an item you would like
to share in this column about a
new job or contract, a conference
you've attended, or other news-
worthy events, please send an
e-mail to plange
@PennyLangeAssociates.com

Cryptoquote

OIJ DIKJZ VJQKO RZ NXMSFXSJ KB DNJXQMJBB, XMU LJ XNN
TMRL OIXO MROIKMS UJQOXDOB BR VFDI ZQRV OIKB XB UR
FMZXVKNKXQ OJQVB. - SXNJM

(The solution will appear in the next issue.)

