



## Priming the Inspiration Pump

*By Ralph F. Rumpf*

How do you inspire a writer? That has to be a question with at least as many answers as there are writers, or writing professions.

As a free-lance writer, I have the advantage of a wide range of varying assignments with many different requirements both in document formats, requirements and tools. I am often challenged to create something new, even though that may not have been my original intention.

But I have also spent time as a writer in a department full of technical writers; where assignments were repetitive and often boring. I know what it is like to be pigeonholed into a certain type of document with little or no opportunity to try something new. At times it can be very frustrating and very boring work. Your interest and your productivity drop off to almost nothing and you wonder if you should start looking for something different.

Inspiration can be quite unexpected and very productive. From time to time, I like to dabble in a little light science fiction writing for fun. When a story line hits me, I can't keep my fingers moving fast enough. But if I hit a plot or character problem, or the story line goes dry, the words can dry up as fast as spilt water in a desert wind. I can stare at sunsets until I am blind, but nothing seems able to rekindle the flame.

In an ever more competitive work place we have to maintain a high productivity level while maintaining a professional demeanor.

A dose of inspiration from time to time can work wonders in a writer's attitude. But how do you prime the pump?

Inspiration can come in many forms. Normally, we tend to think of it in the artistic sense: the color of the sky at sunset to a painter, the sound of steeple chimes to a composer, a babbling brook to a poet. Unfortunately, most of us can't wait for a flash of inspiration before we start to write; have deadlines.

Instead, we attend seminars, focal groups, classes, brainstorm or take a walk in the woods; everyone seems to have a different key. Sometimes, it can be as simple as getting away from the project for a while. Unfortunately, that is not always an option when the scheduled ship date is looming on the horizon. The key then would seem to be to plan for inspiration. Not exactly what one would consider as a creative approach, but a workable option, none the less. But what do we plan for?

**The Future.** Eventually, a project is going to require that you change a paradigm to meet a client's requirements. If a few people in the

Continued on page 5

### Contents

Presidency Corner.....	2
Parting Words from Kirsten Klassen .....	3
Coming Events.....	3
September Meeting Details .....	4
Officer Meeting Notes .....	4
Conference Postponed .....	5
Editor's Corner .....	6
Director Sponsor Notes .....	7
Final Thoughts .....	8

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WEBSITE: [www.stc-sjvc.org](http://www.stc-sjvc.org)

## Presidency Corner

*By Bethany Rusbasan, Chapter President*

The time has come for the "president" to change hands once more. I'd like to thank Kirsten for her effort, enthusiasm, good ideas, and help. As she is still an active member I know I will be asking her questions in the year to come; thankfully, she has already said okay!

I am looking forward to this year, as I believe we have an exciting meeting schedule ahead of us. With the changes to the meeting schedule this year (described in the Saturday, July 21, 2001/ STC SJV chapter - quick update) and publishing the schedule in this first newsletter of the year, I hope more people can attend the meetings. I know many of us have hectic schedules and many demands on our personal time. For these reasons and others I think Chapter meetings are beneficial as they give us a place to take some time to focus on our profession and become enthused and motivated about it. I know I always do!

Have a great end of summer and see you in September.

Bethany Rusbasan



## STC Mission Statement

*The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.*

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## Parting Words from Kirsten Klassen

This month we welcome Bethany Rusbasan as our new chapter president. Bethany has been an active member of our chapter as president elect the last two years. She has also shared her expertise by giving two excellent presentations since she joined the chapter. I look forward to seeing the changes we'll experience through Bethany's leadership, enthusiasm, and creative thinking.

Many of the other roles in our chapter will not be changing this year. We are indeed fortunate that Ralph will continue to manage the newsletter, Barb the public relations, Mark the web site, and Gary the finances. These people are NOT highly territorial; all of them welcome your suggestions and ideas for how the chapter can grow and thrive. I know Ralph particularly appreciates when we send him articles for the newsletter – so if you've read a book that seems relevant, or attended a seminar, or solved an unusual problem – consider writing it down and submitting it to *Watermark* (it's the only newsletter I know that has no rejection slips!).

We've provided the meeting schedule so you can plan early. The first meeting is an inspiring video presentation by Dewitt Jones, a National Geographic photographer who believes that how we see our work can empower us to reach new heights of excellence. See you in September!

### Coming Events

Although the usual planning meeting was held in July, not all the details were settled for this year's meeting schedule. The following is a list of the proposed topics, dates and meeting locations for this year:

#### September 26, 2001:

By: Mark Stucky / Kirsten Klassen (coordinators)  
Topic: Video of DeWitt Jones, National Geographic photographer and STC conference keynote speaker  
Time: 5:30 IN time; 6:30 MI time  
Place: Mark and Kirsten's home

#### November 6, 2001

By: Gary Futoma  
Topic: Procedure Writing  
Time: TBD  
Place: Tippecanoe Place

#### February 21, 2002

By: Kirsten Klassen (coordinator)  
Topic: Tour of printers with graphic designer to talk about standards of quality  
Time: TBD  
Place: TBD

#### April 10, 2002

By: Mark Stucky (coordinator)  
Topic: Rise and Fall of E-Commerce  
Time: TBD  
Place: TBD

#### June 4, 2002

By: Perry Ballard  
Topic: Branding  
Time: TBD  
Place: Perry Ballard Offices (St. Joseph)

### WMS Competition

It's time for the annual West Michigan Shores STC publication competition. As usual, there are a wide range of technical publication types included in this competition.

The awards ceremony is usually very well attended and allows you to see a wide range of document styles and formats in one place. If you are looking for some exposure and ideas you should check this out.

Submit entries **by October 12th** to the appropriate entry manager:

### Online Communication Competition

Moira Kennedy Green  
3301 Clear View Dr., Holland, MI 49424  
(email: MoiraKennedy@hotmail.com)

### Technical Art Competition

Parker Brown  
Bishop Co., 1125 Millham Rd., Kalamazoo, MI 49002  
(email: PBrown@explainers.com)

### Technical Publications Competition

Terry Callaghan  
Siemens Dematic, D5, 4147 Eastern Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508  
(email: Terry.Callaghan@rapistan.com)

For additional information and entry forms, visit the WMS website at [www.wms-stc.org](http://www.wms-stc.org).

## September Meeting Details

**Topic:** We will have an informal meal (maybe a barbecue) and watch an inspirational video of "extraordinary visions" by DeWitt Jones, National Geographic photographer and 48th Annual STC Conference keynote speaker. His presentation at the conference was easily the highlight of the entire event.

(To take a peek at his work, visit his website at [www.dewittjones.com](http://www.dewittjones.com).) Come and be inspired to take your career to a new and more fulfilling level!

**Date:** Wednesday, September 26, 2001.

**Time:** 5:30 P.M.. (6:30 Michigan time).

**Presenters/Hosts:** Mark Stucky and Kirsten Klassen.

**Place:** 54663 Holiday Drive, Elkhart, IN.  
(See the map for directions.)

**RSVP:** Kirsten Klassen or Mark Stucky at 219-264-0614 or 219-862-7659 or [Kirsten.Klassen@mma-online.org](mailto:Kirsten.Klassen@mma-online.org) by Monday, September 24.

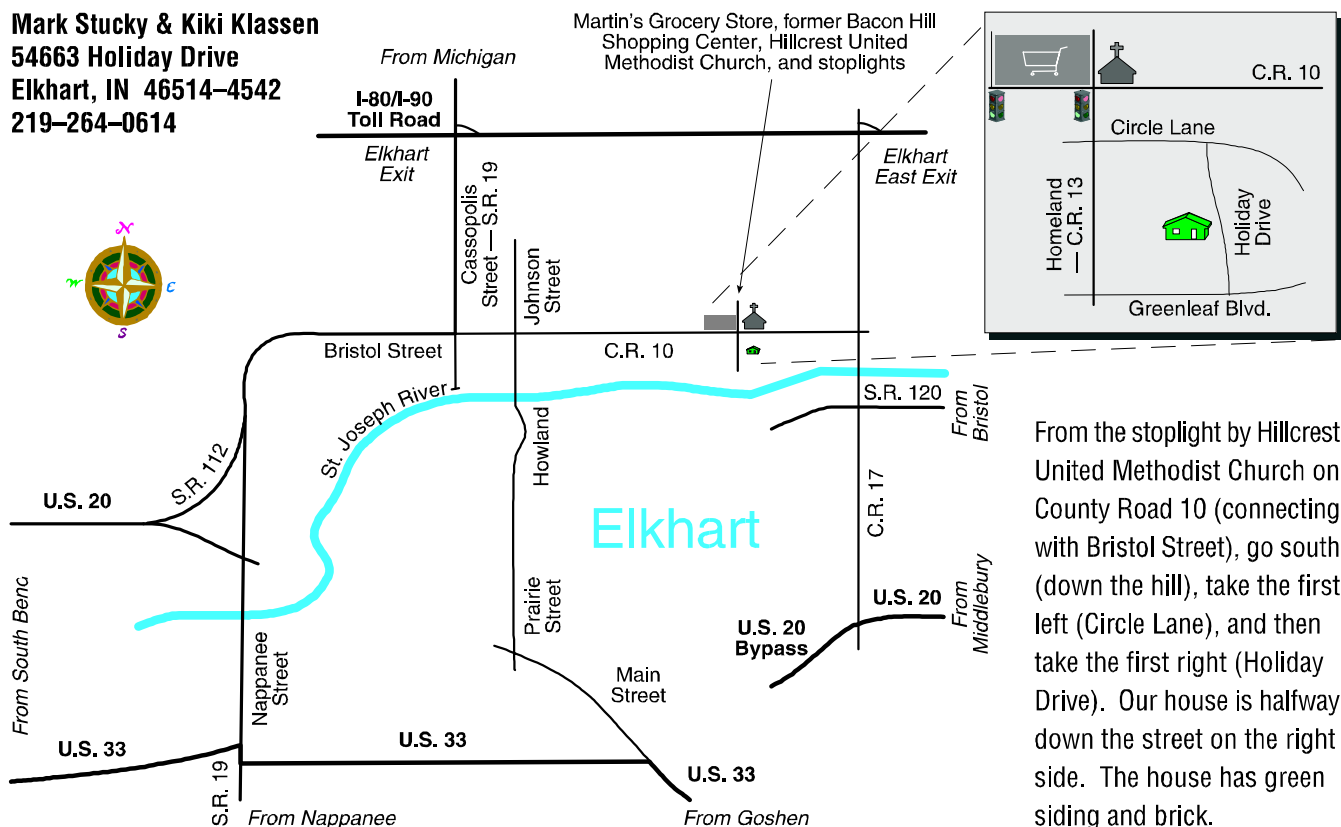
## Officers Meeting Notes

Chapter Officers convened at the Perkins Family Restaurant in South Bend to start the ball rolling for the new season of topics and meetings. These can be reviewed in the Coming Events box on page 3.

A few topics were discussed that are of general interest to chapter members at large and are included here for your information:

- The position of Chapter Employment Coordinator is no longer a viable position and will be filled by the president. Most job notices are e-mailed to the Chapter President for general dissemination.
- If anyone has ideas about other places to put chapter meeting notices, please let Barbara Wellnitz know. Fluctuations in our membership and our small size make chapter visibility a high priority.
- In general, the chapter has maintained a positive budget in the past few years and we may be in a position to spend funds on an evening presentation. If you have any ideas, please contact a chapter officer.

**Mark Stucky & Kiki Klassen**  
54663 Holiday Drive  
Elkhart, IN 46514-4542  
219-264-0614



From the stoplight by Hillcrest United Methodist Church on County Road 10 (connecting with Bristol Street), go south (down the hill), take the first left (Circle Lane), and then take the first right (Holiday Drive). Our house is halfway down the street on the right side. The house has green siding and brick.

## Priming the Pump (continued from page 1)

office are trained in new tools and techniques, they can take the lead in creating new methods for everyone.

**The Present.** Far too many organizations persist in a staid, rigid method of producing documentation. It is hard to say whether they fear change, or a loss of control, but they fail to review their methodologies to determine if other methods or tools can be used more efficiently and at less cost. Staff who are familiar with current tools can often see a better way to approach a problem if they are allowed to move outside the normal envelope. Yes, this will present a challenge to the organization, but the effects of not changing may be far more catastrophic.

**The Unexpected.** Ever encounter a situation where you say to yourself, "Boy, I wish I had thought of that?" Or perhaps a project opportunity is available that would provide additional work, but no one has a clue as to how to proceed? If you can't adapt and succeed, you lose the opportunity. This is the most difficult area to prepare for and often, the most dramatic.

This requires a little preparation for future trends and some free association. I like to think of free association as a shake up. It is equivalent to that situation when the light goes on in your brain. Eureka! It also requires a bit of a leap of faith. To prepare people for this, you plant seeds.

Sometimes an inspirational program, that seems totally unrelated to anything, places a thought in the brain like a seed. It is just waiting for the right combination of circumstances to blossom. And when it does, it can often take an organization into a totally different place. But if you never plant the seed, there is nothing to bloom.

Why not take a chance and plant a seed this month? Join us at Mark and Kirsten's home for a meal and a video that may inspire you in ways that you never would have thought possible.

Or are you too busy with the same old routine?

## Conference Postponed

The Region One/Two Conference has been postponed, and is being planned for the fall of 2002 (rather than January 2002) due to a number of reasons that have come to light over the past few months. The responses we have received indicate three overlapping issues:

- A general concern about weather conditions in the northern New Jersey area in January left many potential attendees wary about travel and the possibility that the conference might be compromised due to weather.
- Preparing for and working on a conference during the holiday season when we are already stretched for time gave many members pause about committing some of that precious time to volunteer for the conference.
- An overall tightening of the economy has left many people without jobs and many businesses keeping expenses to a minimum, leaving little or no budget for benefits such as conferences.

We envisioned a conference with much interaction and discussion, thus we wanted to keep the size of sessions small. This meant we needed a target of about 50 sessions; we received only 35 proposals (for which we are very appreciative).

We will be retaining the proposals that have already been submitted. We will notify you again when we reissue a Call for Proposals for the Fall 2002 conference. We will update you in the future as plans for the new conference move forward and are further defined.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reply to me directly. I appreciate your interest in our conference. With the assistance of many other members, I look forward to creating the type of conference that can benefit us all.

Rich Maggiani  
Region One/Two Conference Manager  
Vermont STC Chapter  
802.658.4207  
802.658.8418 fax

## Editor's Corner

Over the last year or so, I have endeavored to produce the *Watermark* in both a printed and an on-line (PDF) formats. While I want to meet the needs of everyone, it is not practical to produce the newsletter in two formats. I have tried and believe me, with a limited staff of one, it doesn't work well.

Plus there are issues as to what I can do with print space. In the old format, I lost an entire page to a redundant and often confusing meeting notice and mailing label space.

We have managed to greatly reduce the cost of production by producing a PDF format newsletter and e-mailing it to our members. If we utilized the last page for limited advertising, we could provide an additional income source to the chapter. Since we are a small chapter, our budget is very closely tied to our membership rolls. Additional income is nothing to be ignored.

So, after a great deal of consideration, I have decided to change tacks. Henceforth, I will produce the *Watermark* as a PDF formatted, on-line publication as opposed to a printed publication that is converted to a PDF file. This will allow the members who receive the newsletter by e-mail to utilize hyperlinks and other nifty gizmos as they become available. This will also allow us to avoid e-mail entirely by posting the newsletter to the Chapter website ([www.stc-sjvc.org](http://www.stc-sjvc.org)) and providing a notice of availability to members who can retrieve a copy at their leisure. (I will check the feasibility of doing this on our current website and update everyone later.) Since not everyone wants to get an e-mail that takes several minutes to download, this seems fair.

In the interests of everyone who wants a printed copy, I believe the money we save will offset the cost of printing a copy of the PDF version and mailing these individually.

Now, I need your support in a couple of areas to make these changes work smoothly.

First, if you receive the newsletter by e-mail and know of another member who does not have e-mail access, print them a copy so they get the word.

If you are a member who would prefer to receive your copy via the mail, drop me a line and I will make the arrangements. Please understand that this will be a printed version of the PDF formatted newsletter. This also applies to interested parties who want to know more about us. I can set up free 3-month or 6-month arrangements for nonmembers.

Second, if I have room for advertising, getting advertising would be good. If you know of anyone who would like to place a publications type related ad with us, give them my phone number. This applies to free-lance writers, translators, print shops, what have you. Anything that is legal and you think would be of interest to others in the profession, tell them about us.

Third. Switching to a PDF only format allows me a lot of flexibility in layout and presentation. I need your input. What do you like and what don't you like? Tell me - I do not do Tarot cards or read minds. This is your publication, allow your creativity to have a hand in how it looks.

I will try to standardize certain pages and areas for regular articles like the President's Corner, Meeting Notices and my two bits. Then you will know where they are for each issue. But everything else, except the masthead, is up for grabs. (I would like to keep advertising on the last page, if you don't mind.)

Oh, my reasoning on the masthead. I think it is distinctive and we are probably one of a few chapters of our size who have a masthead that was actually designed by a graphic artist. I think it's a nice touch. If we do base the newsletter on the website, I will go back to the full color version. I avoid it here for size issues.

Okay. That about summarizes where we stand. I'm counting on you folks to get into this thing. We have won an award at the National STC Newsletter Competition for the last four years. I think it would be nice if we could add an Award of Excellence to that tally. But if we do win that honor, it will be because you all made it happen.

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## Director Sponsor Notes

*By Mike Bates, STC Region 4 Director-Sponsor*

### Preparing for the upcoming year

I hope everyone has had a relaxing summer and had the opportunity to take at least one, well-deserved vacation. Summer is quickly winding down. It always seems that as soon as the 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnics are over, everyone starts preparing for the fall.

We have seen significant downturns in the economy which have affected almost all segments of our businesses. Companies are experiencing layoffs and realignments to adjust to poor economic conditions. Many information developers I have spoken with have been looking for new positions, either at new companies or looking for new opportunities within their own organizations. Regardless of whom I talk to, one question still arises: "With all of the layoffs and possible threats on my company and position today, how can STC help me? What should I be doing to better position myself in the organization?"

How do you measure the value of the materials you produce? Whether you are an editor responsible for reviewing all the manuals and help systems produced within your organization or an information developer who develops on-line help and integrated user assistance for a small software company, you should know exactly what value that you are providing to the customer. Value can be measured in many ways. For example, you should be able to pull the customer support call logs and compare the number of calls for a particular topic today to the numbers before you released new information in your help system. Consider this scenario.

Let's imagine that your customers have complained that "setting up a new internet account" is next to impossible to do with your product. You go down to customer support and ask Bill the support representative to pull the last months support call logs pertaining to "new account set up." You learn that the support team has spent over 300 hours answering customer questions about how they can set up a new account. You can

then calculate the amount of money the company is spending to support this feature in your product. At a \$20.00 per hour pay rate, you are spending roughly \$6000 per month helping customers set up new accounts.

Now that you understand how much money you are spending, you can work with your product team to find better ways to support this feature within the product and potentially reduce your overall support burden by \$72,000 per year. Now, you might say, how do I do that? I just write the books and compile the help?

You could simply document all of the information that your customer needs to know about account set up in the help and books. That may solve the problem. However, you can't guarantee that the customer will open the book or launch the help. Your goal should not only be to document all of the features in your product, but to also help reduce the number of times a customer has to access your help system or open a book. Many information developers today are wearing the hats of not only user assistance architects, but also user interface designers and usability architects. They are able to quickly assess the problems customers are having within their products, design new solutions to help reduce customer failure, and then measure the value the changes have had in the new version. That new solution may take the form of an "Account Setup Wizard", user assistance integrated within the dialog, or better information on the screen; whatever is best for your customers.

The majority of the information developers I know who have expanded their roles have not changed their business cards. They are still identified as information developers and user assistance architects. But, when times are tough and the company is looking for individuals who are contributing to the bottom line, they look at the writers who have demonstrated a measurable value add to the business first.

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Continued on page 8

## Director Sponsor (continued from page 7)

Whether through STC programs, internal training, conferences, etc., consider programs that will help you provide more value to your business. Look for information on user interface design and product usability to help you expand your skills beyond the traditional information developer. Learn more about how your organization measures their return on investment and the metrics used to demonstrate support burden reductions.

Not sure where to start? Turn to your fellow STC members. Many of them may have success stories to tell. Take a look at the incredible programs that your STC chapter has in store for you this year. If you don't see something you are interested in, call your chapter's program chair.

I look forward to visiting many of you this year and learning about the challenges you are facing. If you have any ideas or questions, feel free to contact me.

See you at the Region 4 conference in November!

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## Final Thoughts

As I was starting to get ready to make the final changes to this edition of *Watermark*, I made the mistake of turning on the television. It was 9:15 AM on September 11.

What I saw on the news feed was akin to having live coverage of the attack on Pearl Harbor. I quickly went from shock to a sense of profound grief for the people in and near the World Trade Center complex. Then I waited anxiously - I have a daughter who is attending school in Manhattan.

It was later in the day when I discovered how close the tragedy had come to me. The subway stop my daughter uses is (was) at the base of the south tower. Her school is three blocks north of the north tower. Her school had just been evacuated and she was approximately nine blocks north when the first tower collapsed. I am very fortunate. I cannot imagine the pain of those who were not.

For some reason America has always needed a wake up call of some kind to get our attention. Perhaps this wake up call is to let us

## In Memory



**September 11, 2001**

know that the world has changed, and we can stop pretending that we are immune to what goes on elsewhere. I thank God that it was not worse.

This is also a time for us to come together as a true nation with a common destiny and bond. Despite our petty squabbles and differences, there is far more that binds us than separates us.

We need to take another look at who we are and what we stand for, both here and in the world. As a people, I believe we are guilty of losing the control of our country that the constitution grants us. As an ex-serviceman, I know that we take far too much for granted that other people in the world are dying to have.

Perhaps we can take this tragic event and turn it into good. It will take hard work and perhaps some suffering, but we can emerge as a better nation and people.

Or, we can keep our heads in the sand and hope that we are not next.