



## Once again, around the block

Kind of an odd title for a newsletter article - but this is the summer issue and the rules are loose and free for this issue.

Summer typically signifies the actual end of the old chapter year and the beginning of the new. This passage is marked by the annual Chapter Officers' Meeting. This year, the meeting took place on June 26th.

This meeting has been a tradition for as long as I have been a chapter member. The meeting serves as the planning session for the meetings and events of the new chapter year. Not too many years ago it also signified a change in leadership as the past president stepped down and the president-elect took over the reigns. If an election proceeds the meeting, new officers accept their posts and the retiring officers pass on any administrative work to the incoming officers.

Speaking of meetings, elsewhere in this issue you will find a preliminary list of meeting topics for the 2004-2005 chapter year.

Every year brings changes and this year is no different. There has been a much larger number of new members in the chapter than in recent years. This is, of course, a normal thing as some of us retire or move on to other careers and new members join the ranks. The new member directory will be published with the next newsletter (late August), look it over and see if you don't agree.

One of the items that came to the fore at this year's meeting was the meeting venue. The officers agreed that hosting all the meetings in the South Bend area has been less produc-

tive than we had originally hoped. So, one or two meetings will be hosted from the St. Joseph area, allowing members from the northern end of the chapter area greater access. This takes us full circle as this is how the chapter operated for many years.

The officers also discussed the possibility of bringing in larger events to the chapter and the local area. This is in part due to the success of the presentation made by Jan White in the Fall 2003 which drew a fairly large crowd for this area. There are cost factors that need to be evaluated and discussed, but if there is any way to make it happen, we will do our best.

The officers have also agreed to meet an additional time or two this year. One meeting just does not provide sufficient time to get all the plans for the years' meetings locked down. We will have another meeting in August to firm up the preliminary arrangements we made at this meeting. From there, a decision will be made about a possible third

**Continued on page 5**

### Contents

Once again, around the block .....	1
President's Column .....	2
Editor's Column .....	3
April Meeting Notes .....	4
'04 - '05 Meeting Schedule (Preliminary) .....	4
September Meeting Announcement .....	4
Transformation Update .....	6
Summer reading list: Noteworthy books from the STC conference in Baltimore .....	8

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

## President's Column

Getting ready to embark on a week long vacation, I was telling my 7-year-old daughter why I was so excited.

"I don't have to think about my work – health insurance – for a week. It clears the cobwebs from my head," I said.

"What does that mean?" she asked.

"When you have time away from something and you don't have to think about it, you come back refreshed. You look at it with new eyes, and you get new ideas how to approach old problems."

And, I'm delighted to report, that is indeed what happened – this time. It doesn't always happen, unfortunately. Sometimes the old problems just grow more unsightly in the short time we're gone. But this time, my biggest problem – a report I was writing – finally became manageable on my first day back from my vacation.

It's easy to convince ourselves that slogging our way through a project will lead to a conclusion, but sometimes, we just need to clear our heads.

I hope you can find some time this summer to get away from the pressures of your work and enjoy what life has to offer. And, that when you return, the challenges at work are cast in a new light.

— *Kirsten Klassen*

## CONGRATULATIONS!

Kirsten's first novel, *Katelyn's Affection*, was recently published. You can look it up on the web or drop Kirsten a line to find out more.

## 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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## Editor's Column

Another year again, already? I will NEVER get used to this! Well, nothing for it but to scratch that one off my "Reasons Getting Older is Good" list.

But it's true, once again we are closing out another year for the St. Joseph Valley Chapter and getting ready to start another (our 38th actually). That means planning and organizing the different meetings for the year, lining up presenters, hosts, selecting meeting locations and the like.

As you read on page one, the annual officers' meeting took place on June 26. We discussed a number of meeting options and arrangements. It should be an interesting year.

Normally, we also discuss things we would like to see implemented (or hope we can implement.) This year a favorite topic surfaced again, member introductions (remember those?)

While we are not a large chapter we do have an amazing resource in our members. Quite a number of different writing disciplines are represented among our members as well as a ton of experience. Sadly, because of the area our chapter covers, we do not all manage to get to meetings on a regular basis, or at all.

The idea of a member introduction is to allow each member to create a small autobiography about themselves as a way to introduce them to the rest of the chapter. Kind of the same thing you would do during the social hour at a regular meeting.

We've tried this several times before with mixed results. But there has been a fair amount of turnover in the last two years, and it might be a good idea if we could all reintroduce ourselves. That way, if someone needs another opinion, or advice or help, they might have a better idea of who to contact.

This is all voluntary, of course, but we are going to try a little harder this year. Members we do not hear from will be contacted and interviewed by a chapter officer.

Of course, choice is a relative thing when you are one of the chapter officers. So, in the spirit of kicking this thing off, here goes.

### Member Introduction

**Name:** Ralph F. Rumpf

**Member since:** 1993

**Member Status:** Active, Senior Member

**Background:** I entered the Technical Writing field through the "back door." I joined Zenith Data Systems in 1980 after I left the service as an Engineering Technician and made a lateral move through Software Consultation to end up in the Technical Writing Group. After being laid off in 1993, I started my own business and became independent.

**Experience:** During my 18 years as a Technical Writer, I have acquired a broad range of skills. I am experienced with MS Word, Visio, PageMaker, FrameMaker, Adobe Acrobat, Adobe Illustrator and Corel Draw to name a few applications. I have become skilled in digital photography and the use of a number of image manipulation programs.

**Goals:** As an independent, I have always sought to give the best value to my clients. I enjoy a challenge and do not mind learning new applications or processes. I favor the technical side, but can perform a wide range of writing assignments. Aside from that, I would like to find time to pursue a paying career in book writing. I have several projects in process; I would like to finish some and submit them to a publisher someday.

If you would like to introduce yourself, and I hope you will, simply put something together in a format similar to the one shown here and send it by e-mail or snail mail to one of my addresses as listed on page 2. I will publish them as space permits in future newsletter issues.

Make sure you read the rest of this issue to get an idea of what is coming this year. We hope to have the meeting schedule locked down by the next issue so you can mark the dates on your calendar.

Hoping to run into you at a meeting sometime.

## April Meeting Notes

While the tour of Studio A was great (lots of high-tech equipment and state-of-the-art systems) the April meeting really seemed to take off with the photography critiques over dinner at Doc Pierce's.

Kathy Mull gave a number of good tips on how to improve shots, including discussing how to angle the lines of a photo so it draws your eye in and how to take group shots that are more interesting than just clusters of people standing in rows.

Clearly, critiquing photographs is a popular topic. We'll try to get this on the meeting schedule again soon.

Check the meeting schedule for possibilities.

## 2004 - 2005 Meeting Schedule (Preliminary)

As usual, the officer's meeting served as the planning session for the meetings for next year. All dates are preliminary at this point and should only be used for planning purposes. We will try to have a finalized listing in the next newsletter.

With that said, here they are:

- Sept. 23** Project Management in the Real World
- Oct.** Presentation at Perry Ballard - TBD
- Feb.** Best of the Best - View the traveling STC Publication competition winners exhibit
- Apr.** So You Want to be Independent - a look at the pros and cons of the independent tech writer
- May** TBD.

As usual, check the preceding newsletter for final details about the meeting time and location. Once the topic is settled, it usually stays the same.

## September Meeting Announcement

**Topic:** Project management in the real world

Barbara Ridley, training specialist for Zimmer, will share her experiences and wisdom gained from 13 years in project management. Barbara has developed her own strategies for managing projects over the years. While she has also taken a course and attended seminars on project management, she finds that no cookie-cutter approach adequately addresses the issues she's faced.

Come and learn how Barbara's experience may help you refine and adapt your project management skills to better meet your objectives.

**When:** Sept. 23, 2004, (a Thursday), at 5:30 P.M., IN time

**Where:** Matterhorn, in Elkhart

**For reservations:** Kirsten Klassen at (800) 348-7468, Ext. 432 or [kirsten.klassen@mma-online.org](mailto:kirsten.klassen@mma-online.org)

## Remote Seminars

The upcoming schedule of STC remote seminars is partially listed below:

August 4, 2004

### **Practical Strategies for Developing Online Courses**

Presenter(s): Ann-Marie Grissino

August 18, 2004

### **Chapter 1: Writing Effective Introductions and Overviews**

Presenter(s): Leah Guren

September 15, 2004

### **Cascading Style Sheets: Learning the Basics (Part I)**

Presenter(s): Char James-Tanny

September 29, 2004

### **Cascading Style Sheets: Creating Layouts without Tables (Part II)**

Presenter(s): Char James-Tanny

For more information and additional courses visit: <http://stc.webex.com/>

## A Farewell

*This past April, several chapter members received word that a senior and long time chapter member lost her battle with lung disease.*

*Julie Lafollette was an engaging member; fun to be with and easy to talk to prior to her retirement. She served as our Public Relations person while she was able.*

*Kirsten Klassen, chapter President, wanted to say a few words in Memoriam. For those of you who knew Julie, I am certain you will miss her as we will.*

## Memories of Julie Lafollette

I met Julie Lafollette around 15 years ago when I began attending meetings of the St. Joseph Valley Chapter of STC. She worked at Techron (and later Crown International), along with a number of other chapter members – Ben Dorsey, Dave Menges, J.C. Utter, and Jim Bontrager. In my first few years in STC, I saw Julie quite frequently and enjoyed her.

Julie was an outgoing, energetic woman who helped balance the many introverted members of our chapter. If you sat next to her, you knew you would not be bored. She would take an interest in you, as well as entertain you.

One year, Julie held two offices for our chapter: president and newsletter editor. It was an ambitious undertaking.

When Julie left Crown and took a job at Notre Dame, we saw her less frequently. I had called her last summer to invite her to come hear Jan White speak. She was a fan of his and had always hoped Jan would come to do a presentation for us. She told me then, in measured breaths, that she was struggling with a lung disease and needing to conserve her strength. She thanked me for calling her, and said she was hopeful that her health would improve after she received a lung transplant.

But the transplant never happened, and Julie passed away on April 25, 2004, at the age of 59. She left behind three adult sons: Bryan, Benjamin, and Bradley.

We'll miss her.

## Around the Block from page 1

meeting for planning purposes. At the very least, the officers will have a better chance to share information for the upcoming meetings.

You should also take a gander at the article from the STC President, Andrea Ames, regarding the STC Transformation Initiative. Whether you knew it or not, the world of the Technical Writer is one of transition. (Surprise!) It now appears that the STC has accepted this as a fact and is trying to get a handle on where things are going.

Those of you who have been a member for a while have often heard me harp about being involved and having a hand in the direction of your profession. Well, this is another one of those times. It sounds as if the STC would like to get a larger grass roots participation in this process of evolution in which we now find ourselves. If you are up for it, there could be some real opportunities here.

Check out the article and visit the websites, then see what you think. Voice your opinion; what could the STC do that would make your membership more valuable to you, your career, your employer, etc.? (Or, what can they do that will make you want to renew your membership each year?)

You know how committees operate. They can develop a group mentality that sometimes blinds them to things that are obvious to nonmembers. (No, we won't discuss the government here.) This is one of those rare opportunities when a seemingly insignificant contribution can shake up everything, all the way to the top.

The times we live in are uncertain as are our careers, as much as we might wish otherwise. Personally, I do not relish the idea of spending time with the want ads every five years or so. Believe me, it's even worse when you are looking at the want ads when you had a solid job (or thought you did), just the day before.

This is a great time to make a contribution that can help mold the direction of your own future, not to mention the future of many other STC members. So, think about it. You might be surprised at the outcome.

## Transformation Update...or Introduction?

*By Andrea Ames, STC President*

Are you a chapter or SIG leader? If so, chances are you've heard of the STC transformation. If not, there's a good chance you haven't heard of the transformation. The following few paragraphs will provide a very brief introduction to the transformation work, and the following resources will provide you with more details, updates, etc.:

- \* [transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org) -- Get answers to questions or provide suggestions, comments, etc., and you will get an answer or a response within 2 business days
- \* Transformation News listserv ([transform@lists.stc.org](mailto:transform@lists.stc.org)) -- Opt in and receive updates and news about the transformation, status/progress updates, notifications of Web site updates, etc. (sign up via the transformation Web page, below, beginning Thursday, July 15)
- \* [www.stc.org/transformation](http://www.stc.org/transformation) -- Visit often to see the main repository of transformation information, and sign up for the Transformation News listserv (above) for update information

What started all this? And what's it really all about? Frankly, the economy started all this. In short, STC income -- both membership dues income and conference income that underwrites the cost of memberships (you might not realize that your dues don't cover the actual costs of your membership) -- began to drop a few years ago, and the STC Board of Directors' efforts to cut costs did not solve our problem. When we dug into the cause of our drop in income, we found that many former members, for example, were unwilling to renew, because it meant paying for memberships that their companies had formerly covered. In short, although the economy moved the Board to act, what we found was that finances were merely a symptom of a greater problem -- perceived member value. That's what the transformation is really about: Providing value that members want and need to develop professionally.

During our research, we confirmed some-

thing we already knew: Our industry and our members are incredibly diverse, with interests ranging from usability to editing, with skills and experience ranging from entry-level to senior, working in industries from financial to scientific, etc.

We asked ourselves, "Can one Society really meet the needs and provide significant professional-development value in all of these areas and industries, to this entire range of people?" In answering this question, we confirmed something else we already knew: Our strength is in our "communities" -- what we currently call "chapters" and "SIGs." The Society does not provide direct value to members in any or all of these areas; instead, the Society provides infrastructure, mentoring, financial and administrative support, policy, etc., for those communities exist and flourish, providing member value indirectly through those communities.

Unfortunately, the Society support for and representation of communities today -- and the members' experience across communities -- is inconsistent.

### The bottom line

Members want value, and value means something different to each of us. For the Society to rebuild -- and increase -- its membership ranks, we need to provide (among other things):

- \* Consistent, equitably supported and represented communities from which members will derive their personalized professional development value (through the Communities, Finance, and Governance initiatives)
- \* A flexible membership model (through the Membership initiative), enabling members to opt in and out of various services and community memberships to customize their professional development experience
- \* Rich content -- education (through the Education initiative), knowledge base, research, intellectual property of all types -- that provides depth of practice in member-identified practice areas (through the Communities initiative by supporting practice-based communities) and is

readily accessed (through the Technology initiative)

- \* Richer opportunities to network, within and beyond geographies (through the Communities initiative by supporting geographic communities and brand new kinds of communities)

And we need to communicate information (through the Communication initiative) about the transformation, its initiatives, the changes and status of those, as well as solicit feedback from members and leaders around the Society, to ensure that we all understand our options, make informed choices and decisions, and implement the appropriate changes during the transformation process.

## What we're doing about it: The transformation

Some of these needs are met through today's community success stories -- of which there are many! In our efforts to improve consistency and equality of support and experiences across communities, we're not losing sight of those that are working; instead, we're building on the foundation of their successes...and planning to go a step further to provide even more to those communities to enhance their successes. For communities that are struggling, the support we will provide is designed to help, not hinder, their progress toward providing as much member value as possible.

The work to meet all of these needs is complex... As we change our community support model to be more consistent, many changes are required -- in the financial, governance, and technology (infrastructure) areas, as well as the expected community policy changes.

We have a high-level roadmap that we're following, outlining what we need to do at a very high level similar to the bulleted items, above. We don't have all the answers. We still need your input and your help. Contact us at [transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org) to contribute to the transformation.

## Myths and misinformation abound!

If you have heard of the transformation, you might be concerned about some misinformation circulating. Here are a few of the most tenacious myths...debunked. For answers to frequently asked questions and more corrections to misinformation, sign up for the Transformation News listserv (via the Transformation Web page, starting Thursday, July 15) to get notification when we add the FAQs to the Web site!

- \* STC is not a chapter-based organization; it is a member-based organization, according to our Bylaws.
- \* The transformation is not about finances; it's about member value. Although the economic environment and STC's financial situation in that environment was a symptom that alerted us to the problem, the real issue was members' perception of the value of STC membership.
- \* The transformation is not about marginalizing, de-emphasizing, or eliminating chapters -- large or small. Chapters are communities, just as SIGs are. The goal of the transformation is to equally support and represent all communities -- chapters, SIGs, and new, currently undefined communities.
- \* We are not taking away any chapters' money. At a Transformation Q&A session on Leadership Day at the STC conference in May, John Nardone, our Transformation Consultant, mentioned the well-known fact that STC's chapters have a greater net worth than the Society, and he suggested that chapters with large reserves might want to volunteer to donate some of those reserves to the transformation effort. (Interesting tidbit: Some chapters have contacted me to volunteer to support the transformation financially.)
- \* The transformation was not instigated by STC's Washington, D.C.-based organization. STC's decision-making, policy-setting body is the Board of Directors, your elected representatives, who are volunteers and live and work around the world. STC's implementation and operations body is the paid staff at the STC Office, located in northern Virginia. Your elected

## Continued from page 7

Board of Directors voted to engage the transformation consultant (in May 2003) and to adopt the transformation roadmap (in January 2004) that the consultant and the initial transformation team proposed. The STC Office in northern VA does not determine how money is spent; they implement dispersals based on STC Board decisions.

- \* The current dues rebates that fund chapters are not part of the transformed financial model. The new financial model has not yet been developed. Until it is, the Board of Directors will continue with the chapter dues rebate process: According to STC Bylaws, each year the Board analyzes the current financial situation -- including the budget, membership renewals, conference income, etc. -- and determines an amount to rebate to chapters.

## Summer reading list:

### Noteworthy books from the STC conference in Baltimore

*By Heidi Hansen, Education Committee member and Membership Chair, PSC*

Did you miss the STC Conference this past May in Baltimore? If so, the Education Committee is offering you a reading list of some books that were either mentioned in a presentation at the conference or were being sold at the STC Bookstore. The STC Bookstore is a booth of technical communication books that people can purchase when they aren't in technical sessions.

This year's list includes the following:

*Leonardo's Laptop: Human Needs and the New Computing Technologies* by Ben Shneiderman.

This book is the latest from noted usability guru Ben Shneiderman, who was also this year's keynote speaker.

*Managing Enterprise Content: A Unified Content Strategy* by Ann Rockley.

*Hot Text: Web Writing that Works* by Jonathan Price.

*About Face 2.0: The Essentials of Interaction Design* by Alan Cooper.

*Content Management for Dynamic Web Delivery* by JoAnn T. Hackos.

*Information Architecture for Designers: Structuring Websites for Business Success* by Peter Van Dijck.

*Why Can't We Get Anything Done Around Here?: The Smart Manager's Guide to Executing the Work That Delivers Results* by R. E. Lefton.

*Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability* by Steve Krug.

*Usability for the Web: Designing Web Sites that Work* by Tom Brinck.

*BUGS in Writing: A Guide to Debugging Your Prose* (2nd Edition) by Lyn Dupre.

*Technical Editing* (3rd Edition) by Carolyn Rude.

*Developing Proofreading and Editing Skills* by Sue C. Camp.

We hope you enjoy this book list. Mixing some of these books with your other summer reading can provide benefits for years to come. Thanks to Kathy Henry for help with this article.

*The above article is reprinted with permission from the Puget Sound STC Chapter Newsletter, Sound Off!*

## Think About It

"We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount . . . The world has achieved brilliance without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants."

— General Omar Bradley, in his address on Armistice Day, 1948