

Middle Tennessee STC Chapter



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Get the latest scoop!

Middle Tennessee Chapter
www.stcmidtenn.org

National STC
www.stc.org



Have a Say in STC's Future - Election Now in Progress

Message from Ed Rutkowski, Publications Manager of National STC:

Dear STC member,

The 2008 STC election is now open!

To vote, please go to <https://eballot3.votenet.com/stc/login.cfm> and log in by entering your STC member number and the random password listed below. *(Note: the member number and random password are below the text of the message STC members received via email on or about March 12. If you no longer have this message, go to the website for further instructions.)*

If you requested a paper ballot, one is being mailed to you. However, please consider voting online instead. By doing so you will save time and postage, and ensure that your vote is received immediately.

Online voting closes **April 14, 2008, at noon ET (UTC-4)**. If you have any questions, please contact Publications Manager Ed Rutkowski at ed@stc.org

Have a say in STC's future: Vote today!

Many of the candidates have provided campaign messages for STC members to consider. These messages appear on pages 3 through 10.

Communiqué is published periodically by the Middle Tennessee Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

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SUBMISSIONS are welcome via email or email attachments. Send to Elainejackson19@yahoo.com

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ADVERTISING: We will publish advertisements for industry-related events free of charge. The newsletter editor, in conjunction with the chapter's governing board, reserves the right to refuse advertising submissions. Non-chapter member ads are limited in page size at the editor's discretion. We encourage advertisers to send promotional items to our chapter to be used to further promote the event. Publication of advertisement in the Communiqué does not constitute endorsement by STC or its members.

Upcoming Events

Following is a list of upcoming opportunities that may be of interest to STC MTC members. More events will be added to the calendar as the 2008 schedule is developed, so check our website (www.stcmidtenn.org) often for the latest scoop.

March 12-April 14 : STC election. Members should have received email or postal mail instructions for voting from National STC.

April 15: Deadline for Early Bird rates for 2008 Technical Communication Summit, June 1-4

April 17: Chapter meeting – Middle Tennessee Chapter reunion at Darfon's in Donelson. See website for details and RSVP.

June 1-4: Technical Communication Summit in Philadelphia.

If you have ideas for chapter events or if your company can provide meeting space for an event, please contact Amanda Gaston or Emily Parker Hughes.

2008 Technical Communication Summit, Philadelphia, June 1-4

Register online on the STC Web site or by fax or mail by April 15 for Early Bird rates.

The Early Bird rates offer significant savings:

Member early bird rate: \$695—a savings of \$300 off the on-site rate

Nonmember early bird rate: \$995—a savings of \$200 off the on-site rate

Student early bird rate: \$175—a savings of \$75 off the on-site rate

Student nonmember and retired member or retired nonmember early bird rate: \$225—a savings of \$30 off the on-site rate

Conference attendees and exhibitors are encouraged to make hotel reservations early at STC's official conference hotel, the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown. The hotel is conveniently connected to the Pennsylvania Convention Center, site of all conference activities, and many of the city's most popular tourist attractions. (The conference is June 1–4 during a peak time for visitors to enjoy Philadelphia.)

The Philadelphia Marriott Downtown is the official host hotel and offers special conference rates for rooms booked before May 5. STC members who make reservations at the host hotel will automatically be entered to win a selection of prizes, such as: complimentary room nights during the conference, restaurant certificates, or STC merchandise. Reservations may be made by calling +1 800-266-9432 or on the STC Web site. The cost for a single room is U.S. \$218 per day plus tax. The cost for a double room is U.S. \$228 per day plus tax. Additional people in the room are U.S. \$20 each.

Messages from STC Election Candidates

(PAGES 3 – 10)



Why I Seek Your Vote

by Linda King, STC Director-at-Large candidate

The past few years have been a time of significant change and challenge for our industry and for STC. At the Society level, the STC Board of Directors is driving changes that will shape our organization and our profession in the coming years. I am a staunch advocate for STC and believe passionately in the unique value that skilled technical communicators can provide. Active membership in STC has been a significant factor in my own professional success, so I want to help ensure its continuing value for technical communicators worldwide.

Careful strategic planning, professional management, and effective delegation are critical to ensure the health and growth of STC. Cost-effective avenues for continued training and skill building are essential for advancement in our careers. Initiatives to raise the visibility and stature of our profession are needed to increase employers' perceived value of technical communicators. At the same time, STC members need more and clearer communication from the Board and administrative staff to understand issues, the basis of decisions and positive steps being taken, and the expanded information and services becoming available to members.

As a 30-year technical communicator, career-long member of STC, and an STC community leader, I have followed developments at the Society level with keen interest. While serving as STC Houston president this year, I've had new opportunities to learn what is happening at the Society level and have become directly involved whenever possible. I am an LCR volunteer and a member of the STC Finance Task Force, Voice of the Communities committee, and 2007 Academic-Industry Leaders Summit. I am also a volunteer member of the proposed initiative to develop a technical communication body of knowledge. I regularly attend STC conferences, where I've led springboard sessions and made presentations. I co-hosted international judging in Houston, judged internationally in 2006, and hope to be an international judge again this year. I have also served effectively on boards of other non-profit organizations.

I am running for a position on the STC Board of Directors because I want to contribute directly to sound decision-making for the benefit of the entire organization and to expand and improve communication from the Society to our members. As an STC Director I will bring dedication, valuable listening, analytical, negotiation, and mediation skills and an unusual breadth of experience that enables me to conscientiously represent all communities in our organization: I have lived abroad; worked in a variety of technical industries for companies large and small; contributed as a lone writer, team member, and manager; and been a member of both very small and very large STC communities.

I hope you will allow me to serve you at the Society level by casting your vote for me in the STC election occurring March 12 through noon on April 14, 2008.



Looking to the Future

By Garret Romaine, Candidate, STC Board of Directors

My credentials, experience, and passion for our profession make me an excellent choice as an at-large director on the STC board. This short article reviews my background, explains some of the challenges as I see them, and explains my goals for our future.

I hope your career as a technical communicator is rewarding, whatever your expertise. Most of us make a good living, and salaries are holding up. Having thrived during the boom in the technical writing field of the late 1990s, we have expanded our expert skills and abilities. Our toolset is incredibly robust, and those of us in the technology world have core capabilities that rival software engineers. We have come a long way as a profession, and part of that is thanks to the efforts of STC members.

Significant Issues Ahead

At the same time, though, our professional organization faces serious issues. There is a continuing challenge to deliver value to individuals. We need creative solutions if we are to expand the organization. The economy is slowing, and our members will need the most current skills and abilities in order to compete.

We face this opportunity from the vantage of a Society that has many moving parts. We are more than just cutting-edge XML experts in high demand; we are also the academics who keep classes relevant and send forth graduates of interest to hiring managers. We are writers in the public sector, facing tight deadlines with dwindling resources. We are the editors who mark up text and make others look good in any media. We are the illustrators and designers who marry visuals to words. We are the managers who send employees to annual conferences as wise investments. And—finally—we are the members who show up at local meetings or log on to virtual communities and participate. Our needs are different, but our goals are the same: we want the time we spend as volunteers to directly benefit our careers.

We all rely on STC for expanded networking opportunities, cutting-edge classes, lectures, and workshops, and enhanced professional advocacy. Through STC, we have the opportunity to share ideas, learn new tools, and make ourselves more productive and efficient. New and prospective members ask me all the time, and sometimes in just these words: "What's in it for me?" It takes longer and longer to answer that question, because there are so many different STC communities to join.

Relevant Experience

My experience as an educator, active STC volunteer, and experienced technical communicator is relevant to this election. I have taught technical writing and editing at the university level for the past 12 years. My goal has been to deliver information that bolsters the careers of neophyte undergraduates as well as seasoned communicators in graduate studies. I have taken advantage of STC volunteer opportunities as chapter president, mentor, employment manager, competition manager, and workshop organizer. I have presented at conferences, written for *Tieline*, *Intercom*, and *Technical Communication*, and served as a judge for local and international competitions. In 2005, my colleagues both honored and humbled me as an Associate Fellow, and since then I have attended board meetings, worked on the Fresh Eyes team, and served on a committee. I am ready to step up to the job of director.

While teaching and volunteering, I have worked steadily as a senior writer, lone writer, author, contractor, consultant, and manager. My STC experience has been a key talking point for me, and I am sure it has on occasion led directly from the interview to the job offer.

Helping Your Career

I hope you can say that STC has made a positive difference in your career. Knowing STC members, I would expect to hear from you if that has not been the case. High expectations are good; none of us should be complacent.

I thus ask for your vote—and I also ask that each of you help move our profession forward. We are all in this pursuit together.



Pushing Buttons: Member Value & Service

By Suzanne Guess, Candidate, Director-at-Large

In December, I participated in an STC Board Director Orientation phone call after being nominated as a candidate for Director at Large. The candidates learned about face-to-face meetings, conference calls, and the time commitment we can expect (which is, incidentally, whatever you think it might be multiplied by three) if elected. As we talked about the campaign guidelines and how to craft our own individual messages, I started thinking about what about STC governance was important to me. What pushes my buttons is clear: value and service to our members.

Service delivery and member value are hot buttons with others, too. Since the beginning of the year, I've heard and read a lot of discussion about whether or not to renew membership. Many feel that they are not getting the value for the dues paid. As with many things in life, we often get out of something exactly what we put in. Do you go to meetings? Do you attend web seminars? Do you belong to listservs? If not, is it because you don't feel like your professional needs are being met? Have you told your chapter, SIG and Board leaders what you'd like to see? You have a say.

That's only part of the equation, though. STC's operations have not always reflected sound business practices. Even though many may disagree, STC is a business and it cannot survive if we continue to do things "like we've always done it." That's clear given declining membership, reduced revenue, and the resulting difficulties delivering service and providing member value in our global workplace. In order to improve service and value, we need to better align our business model with our objectives. This means we'll have to prioritize and spend strategically to get the most value and impact for our dollars.

As a business owner, I've learned how to prioritize, strategize, spend, and deliver service and value. This involves hard, unpopular choices that are often required for stability and for growth. I used these same skills during my term as president of STC-Central Iowa. During those two years, our community accomplished rechartering, revising our by-laws, implementing a strategic plan (where none existed before), implementing a new Web site using open source technology, and cutting unnecessary expenses to establish a scholarship program. I'm prepared to roll up my sleeves, look at what STC does, ask if should we stop doing it, continuing doing it, or do something else.

I'm running for Director at Large because I believe in the value of membership, the value of networking, and the value of professional development. I'm qualified for Director at Large because I have STC experience, industry experience, leadership experience, business experience, academic experience, and from my point of view, one of the most important prerequisites: a sense of humor to keep it all in perspective. One of your STC member benefits is a vote in our annual election. I ask that you use it and elect me as Director at Large.



Defining a TC Body of Knowledge

By Hillary Hart, STC Fellow, candidate for director-at-large.

Austin; Academic; and Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication Communities

As a [candidate](#) for director-at-large, I believe that one of the most important initiatives STC can undertake is to define a Body of Knowledge (BoK) for the technical-communication profession. In my role as co-chair of the STC BoK committee, I am dedicated to bringing our profession into the 21st century by actually defining it, in all its variability. Why is this effort necessary?

First of all, a profession cannot be recognized as a profession until it is defined as such. Engineers, for instance, have a body of knowledge they must master before they can practice as engineers, whether structural, electrical, or mechanical. Although technical communicators may not yet want such a highly codified and subdivided set of skills and practices, we do need an authoritative place to find answers to that eternal question: "What do technical communicators do, anyway?" New practitioners need to see their professional development pathways spelled out, along with concomitant educational/training opportunities. Veteran practitioners need a means for assessing their progress and determining what additional training they may need. Or they may simply need quick access to guidelines for new techniques and technologies (structured authoring, content management, etc.). And executives, who may never have heard of technical communication, need a place to find out what it is that TCers can do for their company. That place is the web-based set of definitions, domains, and documents that will bring together a TC BoK.

Secondly, many recent studies of technical communicators show that writing is just a part (and sometimes a small part) of what successful technical communicators actually do. In my co-authored survey (see *Technical Communication*, November 2006), only 8 out of the 75 responses listed "writer" as a unique identifier. Our data show that communicators seem to be spending about the same amount of time on communication *processes* as they are on creating end-user documents or *products*. If we want to maximize our value to the business functions of corporations and agencies, we need a body of knowledge that will make that value clear to employers.

The BoK effort is currently being led by a team of experienced industry and academic STC members. This spring, you will be invited to look at the initial outline of a hierarchy of domains, skills, and knowledge levels. This BoK is yours to develop; the start-up team is simply trying to put together a straw site to start the collaborative effort. Some of us are usability experts; some of us manage content; some of us train and teach other TCers. What are the essential skills, concepts, and knowledge bases that unite us? When we can answer that big question, we will be a true profession.

Please look for news of the BoK project, and plan to attend the 2008 STC Summit in Philadelphia to hear about progress and to participate in developing a meaningful TC Body of Knowledge.

I ask for your vote so that this important BoK project stays on track for the next three years!



STC Leadership Challenge: Reaching Out and Reaching In

By: Lisa Pappas, Candidate for Director-at-Large
Senior Member – Associate Fellow - Carolina Chapter

As a member of STC and the Carolina Chapter for nearly twenty years, I have witnessed dramatic change in our profession. While technical communicators have always worn many hats, now we seem to have exchanged classic fedoras for propeller beanies. As a candidate for the Director-at-Large position, I want to share with you my vision of STC's leadership challenge.

In response to globalization, out-sourcing, and ever-increasing rate of technology change, our profession has been diversifying. We still share attributes, but opportunities for specialization have multiplied. The effect on STC has been, I fear, to disperse group identity and shared mission. In the next few years, to evolve and thrive, I believe that Society leadership must ask its membership both to reach out and in.

We talk of "telling our powerful story," but to whom? We need to raise awareness of our organization, our profession, and the value both provide. One way to do so is to reach out to related organizations. Many STC members also belong to other professional organizations, such as Usability Professionals Association (UPA) and American Society for Training & Development (ASTD). I propose that joint members engage in cross-organization publications. For example, in April 2007, Karen Mardahl, my co-manager in the AccessAbility SIG, and I submitted an article for the UPA newsletter, *The Voice* (see "Seeking an Accessible and Usable Survey Tool" available:

http://www.usabilityprofessionals.org/upa_publications/upa_voice/volumes/2007/april/access.html). Efforts such as this can help other professionals learn about our society and recognize what we offer.

We also need to raise awareness of our value to employers of technical communicators, including organizations that contract with technical communication consultants. One way is by recognizing members' contributions and alerting employers to those. I would also like to see the Society sponsor research to provide quantitative evidence of added value. For example, could we demonstrate that technical publications written and edited with translation in mind were in fact more efficient and less costly to translate?

A third way that we should reach out is through volunteerism. Our technical communication skills can be invaluable to non-profits who might not otherwise have those skills. For instance, we could encourage Society members to contribute to standards organizations. I have, for some months now, been an invited expert of the W3C Protocols and Formats working group, as an editor on the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) Accessible Rich Internet Applications (ARIA) suite (see WAI-ARIA Introduction, available: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/intro/aria>). Through that effort, I have introduced others to Society for Technical Communication and demonstrated the value a technical communicator can contribute.

In addition to reaching out, however, I believe very strongly that the STC leadership must reach in. Our membership is diverse and for the Society to remain relevant and resilient, we must evolve to meet those disparate needs. One way diversity is served is through the virtual communities, our SIGs. We need to do a better job of supporting these virtual communities in order to retain and grow membership and to strengthen our group identity.

Drawing on my extensive experience as a technical communicator, I want to contribute actively to our Society's evolution. I ask for your vote in March. To learn more about me:

- For insight to my background and motivations for running, see <http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/candBio01.asp?candID=11>
- In this interview, learn what led me to a career in technical communication, and what prompted some interesting turns: <http://stc-carolina.org/newsletter/tiki-index.php?page=Reinventing+a+Career%3A+An+Interview+with+Lisa+Pappas>

Untitled election campaign message

By Judith Herr, candidate for STC director

It's time for the election of STC Board and Nominating Committee members. I would appreciate your vote for me as one of the Directors.

I've had joyous, challenging, and sometimes frustrating opportunities to learn from my peers and contribute to STC. I've helped new leaders grow and flourish, served in every chapter leadership position, directed STC competitions, and facilitated the evolution of the virtual communities. Every year, I look forward to the STC conference where I have the chance to hang out and share wisdom with my peers (some now old friends). As SIG Advocate for the evolving STC virtual communities, I have had the opportunity to collaborate and interact with and learn from technical communicators all year long. Having lived for more than six years in Belgium and Malaysia and traveled extensively, I believe it is crucial to honor cultural differences while striving to communicate and work together effectively in one global, professional organization. *I am ready and prepared to contribute as a Director to the work of the STC Board.*

I have the right mix of experience, energy, and enthusiasm. For example...

- As the owner of my business that provides technical and scientific communication consultative services, I frequently make difficult strategic and tactical decisions. I am prepared to offer my experience in management, business practices, high performance team problem-solving, and organizational behavior as an STC Director
- As an advocate with enthusiasm for confronting obstacles and challenges directly, I am prepared to listen to and collaborate with STC leaders and members in finding new approaches to address strategic objectives as the Society evolves. Now is the time for me to contribute to STC by serving as a Director
- In the past as a salaried volunteer coordinator and currently as a volunteer, I bring experience in representing others and encouraging volunteers to own responsibility for their organization and to share in decision-making for long-term success. As an STC Director, I am ready to recommend innovative approaches to recruiting, retaining, and recognizing effective volunteers

For more on my position on STC's future challenges and qualifications go to the STC Candidates' Page on the STC web site at <http://stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp>.

Thank you for your support,

Judith M. Herr

Candidate for STC Director

Well Chosen Words

<http://www.wellchosenwords.biz>

My Vision: STC as the Global Leader for Technical Communicators

by Rich Maggiani, STC Fellow and Director-at-Large candidate

STC needs Board members who are experienced in the field, who understand our profession and the contribution we make to the world, who recognize the role that STC plays in representing and promoting our profession, who understand the services STC must provide for our membership, and how STC must be the global leader for us. This is my vision for STC and one that I will arduously pursue as your Director-at-Large.

I care deeply about STC. I have been an STC member for more than 12 years. I have held a volunteer position in every one of those years, beginning with being a co-founder of the Vermont chapter to my current role of leader of the Public Relations committee (which has 18 international members). Last month, I was honored to become an STC Fellow in recognition of my work as a marketing and technical communicator.

My profession is technical communication. I have been practicing that profession for well over 20 years. In my work, I constantly focus on promoting technical communication as a profession, and technical communicators as professionals who create unending value.

Experienced with STC Board matters. I have been doing STC Board-related work for over three years now. Three consecutive Board Presidents have appointed me: one year as Assistant to the President for Competitions; two years as Public Relations leader (my current position) where my committee has been breaking new ground in researching and promoting technical communication and technical communicators around the world.

Experienced as a Board Director. I am experienced with Boards of Directors. I have been Board President for the Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) after sitting on that Board for four years. VBSR is a state-wide business organization. As Board President, I directed a transition from a tactical to a strategic Board. I have also been Board President for two years for a food cooperative in New York after having sat on that Board the two previous years.

Business experience. For over sixteen years, I owned and operated a full-service marketing and technical communication agency. Currently, I am running Solari Communication, a company dedicated to applying technical communication to help clients increase sales and profitability. As a business owner, I understand how STC as an organization must operate to be successful, I understand the inner workings of technical communication and how to successfully market and promote our profession.

Educational experience. I currently teach technical communication to undergraduate students at Champlain College in Vermont. Previously, I taught graduate students at Saint Michael's College business writing and communication skills. I am certified to teach secondary education through adult learners. I have also presented numerous sessions on communication topics to STC local, regional, and international conferences as well as other organizational conferences.

A humble testimonial. "The Society needs dedicated members like Rich representing it." —Dr Thomas Barker: STC Fellow and Director of Technical Communication at Texas Tech University.

Untitled election campaign message

By Mike Hughes, candidate for Second VP for the Society for Technical Communication.

In this article I tell you a little about me and my vision for our profession.

Who am I?

I am a Society Fellow currently on the editorial advisory board for Technical Communication and the Ken Rainey Excellence in Research award committee. I chaired the subcommittee on Research at the STC Academic-Industry Leaders Summit in 2007, and I was organizer and leader for the Sharing Corporate Knowledge Institute at the Summit Conference in 2007. I am also currently filling an interim director position on the board. In my day job, I am a user assistance architect for IBM. I have a master's degree in Technical Communication and a PhD in Instructional Technology, and I am a Certified Performance Technologist through the International Society for Performance Improvement.

Who are we?

Technical communication is a diversified profession, one that supports multiple career paths and roles. Whether we call ourselves technical writers, information developers, instructional designers, content managers, or whatever, we improve the user technology experience by providing information that eases and enhances that experience.

When our profession was initially emerging, we stated our value in terms of the correctness and completeness of our documents and the clarity of the language in those documents. Then, as we matured, we started defining our value in terms of how we benefited our end users. And now we are taking our value proposition to yet a higher level: how we support the missions and objectives of the organizations that employ us. This means that our value can't stop at the quality of the communications we produce; it must extend to the *effectiveness* of the *actions* they enable, and beyond that, to how the improved *effectiveness of our users benefits our sponsors*. The list is long, but these are just a few:

- Increased customer adoption (because new products and services are easier to install and use)
- Reduced support costs (because product owners can maintain their own products better)
- Lower medical costs (due to better patient compliance with medicines and procedures)
- Improved product quality and reduced production costs (because workers can comply with best practices that are easily understood)
- Increased customer loyalty (because the web sites and other communication channels we create build communities of common value and interests)

What should STC be?

If those are some of the things we are about, what should the role of STC be?

- Provide professional development programs in the core body of knowledge that defines us as a profession
- Show leadership and provide education in the emerging tools and technologies that direct our future as a profession
- Serve as our advocate within government and industry to articulate our contributions and needs as a profession

We have invested a lot of our society energy and resources over the last several years in improving the structure and governance of STC. I think we can quit reinventing ourselves now and put our new structure to work. We need to shift our focus outward again and ensure that as members we are getting full value for our dues. My main focus as an officer will be the following:

- Maintain a balanced budget that funds the programs that add the most value for members
- Ensure that our publications and conferences provide the content that helps members do their jobs
- Create a collaboration where members, vendors, employers, and academic communities help technical communicators keep up with the ever-changing demands for tools and technology knowledge
- Support a certification program through STC that helps our sponsors trust and understand our value and that creates sustainable careers for technical communicators

Please visit my website at <http://www.mindspring.com/~mikehughes/index.htm> to get more information on my background or read some of my published papers. Go to my blog at <http://user-assistance.blogspot.com> and click the STC label to read more about my positions and thoughts on specific topics related to my candidacy.