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## Let the Whining Begin

By Amy Oldham, President STC MTC

We hereby proclaim the Whine and Cheese event as a chapter tradition! On October 3, the Middle Tennessee STC chapter met for the fourth annual Whine and Cheese meeting, which was once again held at the Old Spaghetti Factory. In addition to enjoying delicious food, attendees took part in two sessions dealing with different facets of technical communication. Many technical communicators have rewarding and interesting careers; however, many of us also have pet peeves, questions, and challenges related to what we do. The Whine and Cheese forum lets members express frustrations about these issues, and more importantly, offers an opportunity to talk with others who sympathize, empathize, and can offer tips, tricks, and possible solutions to these technical communication issues.



Amanda Gaston facilitated the first discussion, which was entitled "My Job Title Doesn't Correlate to My Skills and Job Functions." Amanda is the current co-VP/Programs Officer for the STC Middle TN chapter and is a senior member. Her hobby is gardening, planting flowers, and most yard work. For more information about Amanda, read the **About the Main Whiners** section at the end of this article.

This topic focused on the not infrequent disparity between a technical communicator's job title and job function and what affect, if any that difference can have on the technical communicator. Each attendee told the group what his or her job title was and described how that title did or did not mesh with the person's primary job function. That in and of itself sparked some interesting conversation! Additionally, this session unearthed some quirky cases of just how a title can affect a technical communicator's financial compensation, especially in companies that have salary ranges/bands/pay grades that are tied to titles. We also discussed the financial ramifications of job titles when seeking a new job, including a debate regarding the use of "technical communicator" versus "technical writer". Some participants had examples of how a title made an employer less likely to consider a qualified candidate for a job because the title on the resume was different from the title on the HR ad. Others had experience with employers who pigeon-holed employers to fit within titles, even when those titles didn't reflect job function(s) at all. Finally, many were surprised to find out just how many different technical communication roles and titles were represented by the event's attendees.



The second session, facilitated by Eileen Wollam and Joel Butts, centered on breaking into and staying in the technical communication field. Eileen has been a member of STC since the early '80s. She currently holds the Treasurer position for the STC Middle TN chapter. Joel is currently the Manager of Technical Publications, Lighting Control Business at the Schneider Electric/Square D plant in LaVergne, TN. For more information about Eileen and Joel, read the **About the Main Whiners** section at the end of this article.

This session revolved around questions such as: How does a technical communicator get the job when she or he

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## 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 2007-2008 schedule is developed, so check our website ([www.stcmidtenn.org](http://www.stcmidtenn.org)) often for the latest scoop.

**October 18:** Usability Professionals' Association hosts a panel discussion on content usability and writing for the web. (More information in the article below.)

**October 18:** American Society for Training and Development meeting. (More information on ASTD website - <http://www.astdtn.org/events>.)

**October 30:** STC MTC Lunch and Learn – AuthorIT Demonstration. (More information and RSVP on STC MTC website.)

**November TBA:** STC MTC meeting - Proposal Writing as a Career.

**November TBA:** STC MTC Lunch and Learn - How to Make a Six-Figure Income as a Technical Communicator.

**December TBA:** STC MTC meeting – Holiday party and “white Elephant” gift exchange.

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.

## Middle Tennessee UPA Panel Discussion

The Middle Tennessee chapter of the Usability Professionals' Association invites STC MTC members to attend (free of charge) a panel discussion on content usability and writing for the web Thursday, October 18.

Panelists represent three businesses and a range of experiences in content development. Each will discuss this and related topics from her unique perspective:

Stacie Baker, e-business project manager for Trane Commercial Systems of Clarksville, Tennessee, and webmaster of the Middle Tennessee STC chapter website, will discuss gaining buy-in for user-centered content from application owners, stakeholders, and subject matter experts.

Pam Livingston, Deloitte Services information designer and Middle Tennessee UPA chapter publicist, will discuss content erosion in work environments that focus on visual components of interface design.

Kathleen MacDowell, senior technical writer at Square D Lighting Control Products, will discuss how writers and developers can apply the web design concepts of Story and Persona to gain a team's acceptance of usability.

The event will take place at the East Branch of the Davidson County Library, 206 Gallatin Road, in Nashville. Parking is free in the library parking lot. The schedule includes refreshments and networking from 6:30 to 6:45 p.m., followed by the panel discussion. Please RSVP to [plivingston@deloitte.com](mailto:plivingston@deloitte.com) by Wednesday, October 17.

*Let the Whining Begin (continued from page 1)*

doesn't have the experience? How does a technical communicator get the experience when s/he can't get the job? What is the best way to make a breakthrough to a new field in technical communication? How do you get employers to take notice of your "potential" abilities? What self-help things are available to aid you in making the right jump at the right time? What elements from your current job can you use to create the bridge to that new job you want?

This portion of our evening was much more encouraging than it was whiny. It included a great deal of brainstorming where several attendees asked for advice about their current job situations as well as the best approaches for solving specific issues. Several of the seasoned chapter members shared insights into best approaches that had worked well in the past and gave advice about the best way to approach future challenges. Many participants shared tips and personal anecdotes from their years in the technical communication trenches.

If you weren't able to attend this event, you missed an evening filled with fabulous food and lively discussion with your fellow technical communication gurus. Don't worry though; it's officially become a tradition, so you can plan to attend next year!



## About the Main Whiners

**Amanda Gaston** has been in the technical communications field for roughly 13 years. She has been employed with Schneider Electric for almost nine years, with pretty much all of that time spent as a senior technical writer and then team leader in Technical Publications. She just recently moved to the marketing side of the business and is learning to love the many tight deadlines she encounters all too often. Her primary responsibilities in the Water Wastewater Competency Center include website content management, advertisement creation, public relations coordination, and handout, brochure, and newsletter writing.

Amanda has been married to a 6-foot, 9-inch, senior industrial engineer/gentle giant by the name of Ronnie for seven years. Together, they are raising their six year-old Cocker Spaniel/Collie mix, Phoenix, as well as their seven year-old gray Tabby cat, Smokey.

One surprising fact to most folks about Amanda is that she competed in the 1989 Jr. Olympics for .22 caliber rifle shooting through JROTC. At one time, she was ranked as an expert shooter at the MS state level.

**Eileen Wollam** has been a technical communicator for over 25 years, as technical editor, editing manager and, most recently, publications program manager for NonStop Learning Products at Hewlett-Packard (HP). Her experience includes positions at HP, Informix Software, Amdahl, and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. In her current position, Eileen is managing the conversion of FrameMaker content to XML and the migration of more than 1,000 publications to a new delivery mechanism.

Little-known facts about Eileen include that her first job as a technical communicator was with Encyclopedia Britannica in Chicago in 1969. She was hired as a proofreader for the first-ever rewrite of the entire encyclopedia.

**Joel Butts** has spent nearly 10 years with Schneider Electric as a Technical Writer, to Sr. Tech Writer, to Team Leader, and on to Manager. He is currently responsible for managing the Technical Publication team and for producing lighting control products and control systems literature, including hardware installation, user information data, and control software help systems and customer interface.

He is a single-sourcing evangelist and preacher of the "Gospel according to AuthorIT." His previous lives include: Graphic Designer, Art Director, Creative Director, and Professional Youth, High School, and College Soccer Coach.

Joel has been married to the same gracious, lovely, and outspoken woman (Linda) for 15 years. Together, they have two beautiful children, Emily and Ethan. Joel is an avid outdoor enthusiast, wanderlust junkie, and sometimes recovering jerk. His hobbies include drawing, tinkering, and puttering.

One least-known fact about Joel is that...well, couldn't get anything specific out of Joel. He's a guy of many oddities. So, I'll bet we could spend all day in awe of what makes him so "unique."

## Member News

Congratulations to Ralph Irwin for attaining STC senior member status this past month. The Society has several ways of acknowledging member achievements. One of those ways is by granting senior member status upon individuals who have held membership in STC for five years. We appreciate Ralph's continued membership and contribution to the Middle Tennessee Chapter of STC.

To learn more about STC's membership grades and honorary ranks, visit the *Recognition* area of The Society's website ([www.stc.org/honors.asp](http://www.stc.org/honors.asp)).



## STC MTC Meets UPA Neighbors

Because the members of these organizations have much in common and the leaders of the local chapters determined that it would benefit the members to get to know each other, the STC MTC and the local chapter of the Usability Professionals' Association held a combined meeting on September 11. After a short business session for each group, Presidents Amy Oldham of STC MTC and Shannon Thurman of UPA gave presentations about their respective organizations to the entire group. Amy's and Shannon's presentations are available on the STC MTC website.

More combined events will be held in the future. See page 2 for details on the next event.

## Going, Going, Gone . . .

Auction fans will be interested in the Birmingham STC Chapter's 5th Annual Scholarship Fundraiser Auction. This year's auction is scheduled for December 1st, with the online auction beginning a couple of weeks prior to that, give or take a day. The list of items to be auctioned includes a wide variety of goods and services, from software to lodging, books to restaurants, and other items too numerous to mention.

The Birmingham Chapter also has a fundraising arrangement with Amazon.com and certain other merchants. When a buyer accesses one of these merchants via a link on the Birmingham Chapter's website, the chapter earns a percentage of the sale.

For more information on these fundraisers, see the Birmingham Chapter's website: [www.birminghamstc.org](http://www.birminghamstc.org).

## Open Season for STC Scholarships



### SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Four awards of \$1,500 each will be granted for academic year 2008-2009.

**Application deadline is February 15, 2008.**

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office or by visiting [http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01\\_national.asp](http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_national.asp)

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## STC Dues Increased on October 1

STC announced that new dues structure had been approved by the STC Board of Directors at the August meeting and took effect as of October 1, 2007. **Complete information, including a chart for computing the new dues, is available on the National STC website: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)** Following are a few facts about the increase.

**How much are my dues increasing?** Most (about 75%) of STC members will see an increase of \$25. (Please see chart on the National STC website to compute your particular amount.)

**Why are my dues increasing?** Two reasons: The rising costs of running a non-profit organization, and the new services and benefits STC is creating for its members.

**What does STC do with member dues?** STC works to deliver the best possible services and benefits to its members. Therefore, it spends the money it receives on things that are necessary to reach this goal. Publications require editing, design, and printing. Conferences require advertising and meeting room rentals. Live Web seminars require an IT infrastructure. Just keeping a non-profit organization running requires a staff, which means salaries and office space rental.