



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Com•mu•ni•qué

Middle Tennessee Chapter

October 2002

Vol. 6, No. 4

Competition Entries Due October 11

By Jennifer Lambe—MTC Technical Publications Competition Manager



Would you like to be recognized for the hard work you've done? Would you like to show off your best work and impress your peers? Or maybe you would just

like to get some constructive feedback on a special documentation project. Whatever your motivation, the Middle Tennessee Chapter's (MTC) Technical Publications Competition is your opportunity to do all that and more.

The Technical Publications Competition also provides a forum for exchanging ideas and approaches to new technology. Competition entries are judged on four factors — writing, editing, design and graphics, and integration — all judged in the context of the purpose, content, and organization of the document. Entrants do not have to be STC members — anyone can enter. However, entrants are required to submit three copies of each entry with the entry fee(s) by the entry deadline.

The deadline for competition entries is **October 11, 2002**, so beware that preparation time is short if you are thinking of entering. To enter the competition, choose one of the 18 predefined categories that best describes your documentation project and complete the entry information form. Submit your copies, entry form, and fees to the MTC chapter (more on the entry form and where to send entries, below). The MTC entries

will be sent to our exchange partner, the Northeast Ohio Chapter, who will judge the entries and return them to our chapter with evaluation comments. Entrants will be notified of the judges' determination after the first of the year, and winners will be presented with their awards at an Awards Ceremony in April, 2003.

Competition entry fees are as follows:

- For the first Entrant — \$40 if STC member; \$45 if nonSTC member; \$10 if student
- For the second and third Entrants — \$10 if STC member; \$15 if nonSTC member; \$5 if student

Submit your entries to the following address:

Jennifer Lambe
1468 Woodfield Drive
Nashville, TN 37211

For additional entry forms or more information on the competition, contact one of the competition managers, *Jennifer Lambe* (615) 833-6140, *Melissa Weber* (615) 773-2385, or *Holly Quick* (615) 385-0651, or see the Middle Tennessee website at www.stcmidtenn.org.

Judges Needed

By Melissa Weber—MTC Technical Publications Competition Manager

If you have ever wondered how you could become more involved in the Middle Tennessee chapter of the STC,

consider volunteering to critique a few publications in the 2002 Technical Publications Competition. All we need are volunteers willing to commit some personal time (at your leisure) in the

Editorial

Just a quick note from your new Newsletter Editor. I look forward to serving the MTC Chapter. Please feel free to forward ideas and suggestions to me. I will need all the help I can get to follow in the footsteps of my illustrious predecessor, Virginia Pryor, who received an award of Excellence in last year's Newsletter Competition. Thanks, Virginia, for two years of great newsletters!

George

Also In This Issue...

Thinking Big	3
Are You Still Investing?	4
Future Technical Communicators?	4
New Employment Listing Fee for Non-Members	4

COMMUNIQUE is published six times a year by the Middle Tennessee Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

PERMISSION to reprint any part of this publication for non-commercial purposes is granted with proper credit given to Communiqué, the author, and the Middle Tennessee Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

SUBMISSIONS are welcome in hard copy, on diskette, or as e-mail attachments. Send to: George Cassidy, c/o Tanner Corporate Services, 2323 21st Ave. South, Suite 301, Nashville, TN 37212

The deadline for the next issue is October 15, 2002.

COPYRIGHT: This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

CONTACT the STC office:
901 N. Stuart St., Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
Phone: (703) 522-4114
Fax: (703) 522-2075
Website: www.stc.org

month of November to critique the entries that we receive from them.

Below are some questions you may have about judging, followed by answers that might help you determine whether you want to participate.

How many entries will I be judging? This really depends on the number of entries we receive from the Northeast Ohio chapter. Last year, most teams had about two or three publications to judge.

What criteria do I use to judge the entries? Each entry will have an attached form that contains evaluation categories like content organization, copy editing, and visual design. Within each category is more specific criteria that you address using a simple ranking system to evaluate the document against the criteria. We also suggest that you explain the reasons for your decisions in the available space or by using a separate attachment.

Will judging take a lot of time? This depends on how much you survey each publication using the evaluation criteria delivered with the entries. We suggest that you give a thorough analysis of the documents with helpful feedback to the writers/developers, but not so in depth that you are giving a line-by-line analysis.

Will I be the only person judging several entries? No. You will be placed on a team with at least one other person who will be judging the same material. Each of you will be judging the material independently. On the day of consensus judging, you will meet with the other judges on your team and agree upon the award that each entry should receive, based on all on your collective evaluations.

When is consensus judging, and how long will it take? Consensus judging will start around 9:00 a.m. on Saturday, December 7, 2002. Normally, this takes about two to three hours. Of course, this depends largely on how much time you devote to judging the entries

and how quickly your team of judges come to a consensus on the evaluations.

Last year was my first time judging, and I absolutely loved it! The benefits were as follows:

- Observing different writing styles and design elements of other society members' entries gave me the opportunity to provide my comments on how those styles and designs could be improved, or even used in my work
- Reading different manuals and brochures increased my knowledge about products available in the technical industry
- Free bagels, coffee, and orange juice kept me alert throughout the judging (which was only two hours, by the way)
- Meeting new people at consensus judging helped me become acquainted with some of the chapter members
- An invitation to the publications awards banquet gave me a relaxing evening to enjoy hearing a credible speaker and eating a delicious meal

As you can see, being a judge is not too demanding, and has many benefits, including the chance to use your technical skills, meet new people, and even enjoy yourself. Plus, you are making a huge contribution to the local chapter by sacrificing a few hours of your time to help other STC members be more aware and satisfied with the contributions they make to the technical communications industry.

If you are interested in being a judge, contact me (Melissa Weber) through email at jamweber@tds.net, or by telephone at 615-773-2385. Please let me know as soon as possible of your interest, and I will promptly send you other materials to get you familiar with the judging process.

For more information on the competition, contact one of the competition managers, *Jennifer Lambe* (615) 833-6140, *Melissa Weber* (615) 773-2385, or *Holly Quick* (615) 385-0651, or see the MTC website at www.stcmid Tenn.org.

Thinking Big

By Bill Smith, VP, Employment



Let's think big. Big tent, big world, big profession. Big deck of cards. We sometimes have a mindset about the technical communication community that limits the scope of related jobs to only the particular hand we were recently dealt.

We widen our career path considerably when we recognize and can convince others that our skills are much broader than our most recent experience. Here is a personal example.

I was employed day-in and day-out documenting software systems. Then it was time to move on. I tried what many attempt in this situation: offering my services as an independent contractor. My hat's off to those who make that work. It demonstrates a skill and determination that eluded me in my most recent attempt.

I can now say that I had, early on, an ace up my sleeve, although at the time it looked more like a joker. My mother-in-law, a famed fundraiser in Houston, said I really should consider her field. What, I thought, is a three of hearts to a queen of clubs (or a software documenter to a fundraiser)?

Yet I plotted and schemed, while still employed, by joining the Association of Fundraising Professionals, attending their meetings, and reading their literature. Even at this point, I must admit, it was difficult to see how all this could lead to my next career move.

Once out on my own, I got some related training and included fundraising on the list of things I claimed I could do for people as an independent. Still I had serious doubts. How could a documenter become a fundraiser? I don't even like fundraisers. Why would someone pay me to do what I don't like and never tried?

Fortunately, the world does not always march to my logic (some who know me grin and agree). Well, one day a mother-in-law of a friend who volunteers for a nonprofit organization uniquely possessed two critical bits of information. The nonprofit organization needed a writer, and I am the person who just might fill the need.

I shuffled through three interviews and, when they drew the winning card, it was mine. I was the nonprofit's new grants writer. Oh, the official title is Corporate and Foundation Relations Manager, but when you get right down to it, 75% of the job is technical communication.

Lessons learned? The following apply whether you carefully plan your career or just wait for the urge to move on; whether you are new to the field or your long-time employer shuffles the deck one day and you land in the discard pile.

Keep your eyes open to the entire scope of possibilities. Carefully scan all jobs, not just those that turn up in a technical communicator search.

Read beyond job titles. One of those odd-titled jobs may be just the one for you. I would have never responded to an advertisement for a Corporate and Foundation Relations Manager.

Look into other professional associations, even those not populated by people doing the same job to which you've become accustomed. Technical communicators are needed everywhere.

Don't dismiss all illogical ideas. My brother-in-law's suggestion I sell beach towels in the Aleutians? THAT was crazy. But not all job-search trails are dead ends. As technical communicators, we expect, even demand, that every action have a logical and definable conclusion. Job searches defy logic. Brace yourself for the likelihood that a job search will offend your well-ordered mind.

Officers

President

Rita Johnson

Secretary

Jonathan Meadows

Treasurer

Laura Vaughn

VP for Membership/ VP for Online Services/Webmaster

Ed Gregory

VP for Publicity

Pat Cosky

VP for Employment

Bill Smith

VP for Periodicals/Newsletter Editor

George Cassidy

Competition Officers

Jennifer Lambe

Holly Quick

Melissa Weber

Whether you are a jack-of-all-trades or ace of just one, **know every skill card in your hand, and consider how each might play into a broad range of potential jobs.** And keep in mind more than just your raw skills. Long-term success, satisfaction, and performance may have as much to do with job environment, benefits, co-workers, or company mission as with the tasks you perform. Applying the same skills in a totally different situation could be your best future.

Recognize and respect wise counsel. In my case, it took two mother-in-laws. For you, maybe just one.

Now, I hope I've not inspired anyone to leave a perfectly good job for the dubious thrill of a job search. But, if job change is in the cards, expect the unexpected lest you miss a great future.

Are You Still Investing?

by Rob Houser, Region 3 Director-Sponsor

With the economy still uncertain, many of us have become leery of investing. Some people are pulling up stakes and retreating. Others are sitting on what they have while they wait to see what happens. And others are still investing for long-term rewards.

Do you think I'm talking about money? I'm not. I'm talking about investing in your career.

Even though times are tough this is not the time to stop investing in your career. Do you know the tools and technology that are in demand? Are you improving your skills and abilities? Did you get at least two weeks of training this year? Are you renewing your STC and other professional society memberships? Have you created a personal training plan?

I hear a lot of people saying that they didn't get any training this year because

their companies cut back on the training budget. Your companies should be investing in on-going professional training, but if they don't it's your responsibility to pick up the slack. If you identify a need for a particular class or conference and you can't get your company to pay for it try the following:

- Offer to pay half
- Ask for paid time off and offer to pay your own way
- Agree to pay for your own expenses and reduce them by sharing a room and eating sandwiches instead of fancier meals
- Find a distance-learning outlet offering similar training
- Look for local trainers or mentors to give you the information you need
- Buy a self-paced book and commit to spending X number of hours per day completing the tutorials

My point is not just that you can find alternatives for your training but that you bear the ultimate burden of ensuring that you receive training, even if you have to pay for it yourself.

Contractors fall into a similar trap. They say: "I don't get paid to go to training." Many contractors make the mistake of living off their weekly check instead of putting some of that money aside for other expenses such as vacation/sick time, retirement, and training. Contractors get paid because they're supposed to have the latest skills and abilities. If you've been contracting for 3-5 years and haven't been getting additional training, you may be setting yourself up for some unexpected time off because you're not keeping up.

Here's a little bonus: Paying for your own training expenses counts as non-reimbursed business expenses if you itemize on your taxes, so you'll get some of that money back.

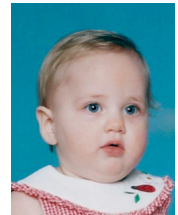
Here's a big bonus: In a tight job market, the people with the most up-to-date and in-demand skills are the ones most likely to find re-employment quickly.

Investing in your career is the best job security you can have. It won't stop layoffs from happening, but it will give you a competitive edge in the job market.

Future Technical Communicators?

In April, 2002, Tim and **Jennifer Lambe** adopted a baby girl, **Sydney Karina Lambe.**

Sydney was born May 27, 2001 in Novokuznetsk, in the Kemerovo Region of Russia. Jennifer is an active Middle Tennessee STC member and is a former contract writer with Tanner Corporate Services, Inc.



Steven Fisher Vaughn was born June 23, 2002, at 10:43 a.m. Stevie weighed 6 pounds, 3 ounces at birth (and is currently over 14!) and was 19 inches long. Mom

Laura Vaughn is a technical writer for Deloitte & Touche and treasurer of the Middle Tennessee STC chapter.

New Employment Listing Fee for Non-Members

Effective **October 15, 2002**, non-members must pay a \$35 fee to list their name on our Web site employment page. While these job-seeker listings have been free to all over the past year, we now come to terms with the fact that STC members already pay for this privilege through member dues. We believe that charging non-members for Web site listings eliminates any inequities in the current setup. See details on the Web site.