



SOCIETY FOR
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Communiqué

Middle Tennessee Chapter September 2001

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2001–2002 Technical Publications Competition

By Jennifer Lambe, Technical Publications Competition Publicity Manager

Once again, the Middle Tennessee STC Chapter (MTC) is holding a Technical Publications Competition. The competition is an opportunity to share your work with your peers and to get constructive feedback. It also provides a forum for exchanging ideas and approaches to new technology. “We are working with a new exchange partner this year and we look forward to a successful competition,” says Margret Buxkamper, Technical Publications Competition Local Entries Manager.

This year the Publications Competition Committee has divided the various activities and responsibilities into categories. Each member of the committee serves as manager for one of the five categories and assists on two others. The following MTC members make up the Technical Publications Competition Committee:

- Jennifer Lambe — Competition Publicity Manager
- Margret Buxkamper — Competition Local Entries Manager
- Pam Livingston — Consensus Judging Manager
- Melissa Weber — Competition Partner Entries Manager

- Holly Quick — Competition Recognition Manager

The deadline for local MTC entries is October 12. Entries can be in one of 17 categories, as defined in the Call for Entries or on the STC web site (www.stc.org). 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. Entrants must submit three copies of each entry with the entry fee(s), which are as follows:

- For the first Entry — \$40 if STC member; \$45 if non-STC member; \$10 if student
- For the second and third Entries — \$10 if STC member; \$15 if non-STC member; \$5 if student

For additional entry forms or more information on the competition, contact one of the competition managers (see the contact info. on page 2), or see the Middle Tennessee web site at www.stcmid Tenn.org. ✍

Meeting Notice

Please join us for our next chapter meeting...

- When:** October 9
Where: HCA Conference Center
Time: 6–8 PM
Program: TBA

Look for more details on our chapter web site and in an email from Pat Cosky, Events Coordinator.

In This Issue...

Chapter Officers	2
A Year of Opportunities	3
New Exchange Partner.....	4
Editorial—September 11.....	4
Where Do You Look for Inspiration?	5
Our Web Site's Employment Page.....	6
September Meeting Report ...	7
Document Design Workshop . .	8

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A Year of Opportunities

By Rita Johnson, Chapter President



I am excited about this year. The Middle Tennessee Chapter (MTC)

started off with a great program from Ginny Redish and the opportunity to see last year's International Publication Winners. Christina Dunn, our Publicity Officer, had a great idea when she told us that Ginny was going to be in town for a conference at HCA. Ginny was very gracious to add to her duties and agree to speak to our chapter. Let's all try to remember to pass the word along if an event is scheduled at our company that offers an opportunity for MTC to benefit from one of our programs.

This is going to be a busy year. The MTC board met in August to make plans. We set a regular date for chapter meetings—the second Tuesday of each month—so mark your calendars. Unless we have a special speaker who cannot make it on that night, we will try to stick to the second Tuesday.

We also talked about our web site—have you looked at it lately? Ed Gregory is doing a great job!

Our other main topic was the *big event* for MTC this year, the 2002 STC Annual Conference that is scheduled for May 5–8 here in Nashville at the Opryland Hotel.

Earlier in August, I met with the STC Conference Advisory Committee (CAC), as they toured Opryland Hotel. As the host chapter we have certain responsibilities for the conference.

I hope that all MTC members, whether you are new to the chapter or are one of our long-term members, will step forward to help with our duties. If you haven't been active recently, this will be a good opportunity to get involved again. We want to show that a small chapter can be a great host chapter and give our fellow STC members a taste of "southern" hospitality.

The Huntsville and East Tennessee chapters have volunteered to help with the conference as we need them.

One of the specific tasks that CAC assigned was for us to meet with attendees who have limited mobility to make sure they are familiar with the elevator locations. In addition, we need people to chair the following committees:

- **Volunteers**—coordinates the schedule for volunteers for the different activities where the local chapter is involved.
- **Hospitality**—provides information at a booth staffed with local chapter members where attendees can come for suggestions about things to do, places to eat, directions, and so on.
- **Corporate Sponsors**—solicits corporate (and individual) spon-

sors to pay the entrance fee for local students. In return, those students help stuff the daily newsletter and hand it out at breakfast the next morning.

- **Networking Luncheons**—works with the networking, SIG, and regional luncheon committees to coordinate the luncheons.
- **Newsletter**—designs the format for the four daily newsletters and creates copy for each edition.
- **Program Tours**—STC contracts with a local agency for tours. However, we can suggest entertainment and industry tours we think attendees and their families may be interested in.
- **Publicity**—promotes the conference through local interest articles published prior to the conference.

If you are interested in chairing any of these committees, please contact me. Some of these activities (tour and speaker recommendations) need to happen within the next month. Do not feel that you need to do all the work—just coordinate it. It is going to take contributions from all our members. If you don't feel you can coordinate one of the activity areas, remember, we need lots of articles (for our web site, SIG and chapter newsletters, and the conference newsletter) as well as volunteers at the conference.

This is a great year for us to shine as a chapter. Together, we can do it!

✍

New Exchange Partner for the MTC 2001–2002 Technical Publications Competition

By Jennifer Lambe, Technical Publications Competition Publicity Manager

The Middle Tennessee STC Chapter (MTC) is planning to exchange competition entries with the Northeast Ohio Chapter (NEO). This is the first time we have exchanged with NEO. For the past several years we have exchanged entries with the Austin Chapter. However, due to unprofessional comments from a couple of Austin judges in last year's competition, the MTC Competition Committee decided to search for a more suitable partnership.

"I am excited about the opportunity to work with NEO," said Rita Johnson, MTC Chapter President.

"The NEO Chapter was also looking for a new exchange partner this year. I've talked with Lori Kepfler, who is in charge of the exchange process for NEO, about an exchange partnership and they seem eager to work with us."

The NEO Chapter has approximately 186 members. It includes the Greater-Cleveland, Akron, Canton, and Youngstown Ohio areas, which make up about 7 or 8 counties. According to Kris Henige, chapter president, NEO judges are *required* to have five years in technical communication or a related field with or without membership in STC. In

addition, they also look for judges with the following qualifications:

- Degree in technical communications or a related field
- Publishing background: two articles or one book
- Teaching experience in communications or a related field
- Winner of an STC, or other, competition award

NEO holds a training session for their judges to provide information on criteria, award levels, guidelines for comments, along with other competition-related information. ✍

Editorial—September 11

I woke up this morning and turned on NPR as usual. However, it soon became apparent to me that the broadcast was anything but usual. They were reporting the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in NYC and the Pentagon.

I got ready for work and headed down to the coffee shop on the corner, still in my pre-caffeine daze and still unable to grasp the severity of the situation. This despite the concern and horror expressed by the workers at the coffee shop as I ordered my usual (large coffee with cream, "to go"). They were asking me if I'd heard about it, and gave me

the most recent updates. All I could think about was that I'm supposed to go to New York in five days to visit my friends I've known since college. My denial and knowledge that none of them work in the Wall Street area kept me in a state of calm.

By the time I got to work, everyone was near panic, visibly upset, listening to the radio or gathering by the TV in the cafeteria, and talking about the morning's events. As my coffee slowly started working its magic in my bloodstream, I began to feel semi-conscious and to under-

Continued on page 7

Member News

CONGRATULATIONS 

Jennifer Lambe wrote an article that was published in the August edition of *Nashville Parent* magazine. The article is entitled "Day Tripping," and it lists destinations within 200 miles of Nashville that are both fun and educational.

We are always glad to announce any news that concerns our chapter members. If you have any news you would like to appear in Communiqué, please contact Virginia Pryor (contact info. on page 2).

Where Do You Look for Inspiration?

By Rob Houser, Region 3 Director-Sponsor

Read any good technical manuals lately? What is your favorite online help system? Who is your favorite brochure designer? Have you ever started reading a proposal and just couldn't put it down until you finished it? When is the last time a newsletter made you cry tears of joy?

No, these are not nerdy pick-up lines for technical communicators. They may, in fact, be legitimate questions that we sometimes forget to ask ourselves as technical communicators. Okay, maybe not that last one.

When I was in high school, my favorite English teacher always said: "If you want to learn to write, you have to read, read, read." Of course, she was talking about writing and reading fiction, but shouldn't we approach technical information the same way?

How can we improve our ability to write and design if we don't seek out work by our peers and analyze it critically? I don't mean critically in the sense that we point out the shortcomings of a writer under real-world constraints (most of us instinctively do that). Rather, I mean that we should read, and re-read, examples of technical communication and try to identify what makes them effective.

We should study the winners of our publications, art, and online

competitions. We should dig out the manuals that came with the products we bought recently and look at the documentation more closely to see if we can learn anything new. We should grab those brochures about different illnesses and diseases on the wall at the doctor's office; however, make sure nobody's watching you get them all or nobody will want to sit next to you.

If you can't keep the helpful manual you're using, make a photocopy of a few representative pages. Make screen shots of well-done help systems. View the source of that web-based training with the creative effects.

We need models of effective communication to study and even emulate to improve our skills and set professional standards. I recommend dedicating a box or drawer for storing these examples. Keep them close. Thumb through them when you're stuck or brainstorming to solve a new communication problem.

If you haven't read a good piece of technical information lately, let me encourage you to seek out some of those that I like so much. Here are some examples, grouped by type of publication:

User Manuals

- Getting Results with Microsoft Office 97 (<http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/9798/gresults.aspx>)

- Assembly instructions from Sauder office furniture (check out the supplemental tips at <http://www.sauder.com/Tips>)
- HP CD-Writer Plus User's Guide (delivered online with product)

Help

- Microsoft Works (for early, user-centered embedded help)
- TurboTax (for blending different levels of information/instruction)
- PowerPoint (for well-written field-level help)

Web sites

- Immunization Information on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/>)
- NASA for Kids (<http://kids.msfc.nasa.gov/>)

Training

- Epson Knoware University (<http://knoware.epson.com/>)
- Lotus SmartSuite Tutorials (on CD with product) ✍

Our Web Site's Employment Page

By Bill Smith, Chapter Employment Officer



The Employment page of our chapter web site (www.stc-midtenn.org/jobs.htm) now offers more information to help technical communicators and employers find each other. In case you haven't had a chance to check out all the new features of this section of our web site, here is an overview of what we have to offer. Follow Employment page links to these sections:

Individuals: Seeking Employment

This section continues to list technical communicators seeking jobs.

Individuals: Offering Contractual Services

This new section lists technical communicators offering contractual services.

Employers: Announcing Local Positions Available

This section continues to list job openings.

Employers: Employing Technical Communicators

This new section lists area employers that hired technical communicators in the past. This list can help you to find jobs that may not be advertised, or to learn of future hiring plans.

Employers: Announcing Positions Available (national/international)

This section links to the Jobs Database at the Society-level web site.

Employers: Agencies Placing Technical Communicators

This new section lists agencies that place technical communicators in permanent and/or temporary jobs.

Chartered as a "charity," STC cannot recommend people for jobs, recruit applicants for employers, or determine if a position offering is legitimate.

The responsibility of verifying information and judging qualifications rests with the job seeker and the employer. We can, however, make every effort to keep communication flowing between those needing and those offering technical communication services.

If you or your company would like a listing on our Employment page, you can contact me at bill.smith@gogallagher.com, or call me at 615-346-7158. ✉

Help Wanted

We need volunteers to judge the MTC Technical Publications Competition. Judges should:

- Have some experience in technical communications
- Be willing to spend a few hours evaluating assigned partner entries and provide constructive feedback
- Attend the Consensus Judging Session on December 1st

For more information, or to volunteer to be a judge, please contact Pam Livingston, Jennifer Lambe, or Melissa Weber (see the contact information on page 2).

Making Information Visual: September Meeting Report

By Virginia Pryor, Newsletter Editor

On Tuesday, September 4, the Middle Tennessee Chapter gathered at the University Club at Vanderbilt for the first meeting of the 2001–2002 year. Approximately 30 members and non-members were in attendance—a great turnout for our chapter.

We were fortunate to have Ginny Redish give a presentation on information design for the Web. Based in Maryland, Redish is a Fellow of STC and President of her usability and documentation consulting company, Redish & Associates, Inc. (www.redish.net) She is also a founder and former manager of the Usability SIG.

In her presentation, Redish provided several ways to design information on the web to best meet users' needs, which, according to many surveys, are to scan or read as reference in order to quickly locate information.

The two most common problems with information on web sites, says Redish, are:

- they use far more words than necessary to convey the message, and display these words in long paragraph format
- the content on the site does not match what users are looking for, or it is organized in such a way that users have difficulty finding what they need



Ginny Redish

Redish gave some helpful guidelines to follow when writing for the Internet. Following is a list of the most important concepts to remember when designing usable information for the Web:

- 1) Only give users the information they need, in as few words as possible.
- 2) Resist the temptation to write in “prose mode:” that is, long or even complete sentences and lengthy paragraphs.
- 3) Even in prose writing, keep sentences and paragraphs short. Use white space for a “chunking” effect.
- 4) Layer the information so that users can click a link to the appropriate page to get what they need.
- 5) Sort information by topics, and make use of visual elements such as icons, graphics, bullets and numbered lists.

Our meeting also featured the traveling exhibition of all the national winners of the 2000–2001 STC Technical Publications Competition. Attendees had a wonderful and rare opportunity to view all the winning entries, and perhaps get ideas for their own future documentation. ✍

Editorial

Continued from page 4

stand the full weight of these attacks. I started to feel scared for everyone I know in Manhattan and the surrounding boroughs. I noticed that many of my co-workers also know people who live in New York, and they were equally concerned.

We have all been frantically trying to get in touch with people all morning, with no luck as phone lines are down and few people are online. We are dependent upon the communications from the various media to keep us abreast of the unfolding events as we wait, uncertain.

We have no idea at this time what the national or global repercussions of these attacks will be, or how or when this crisis will be resolved. However, it seems most important right now to hope for the safety of those we know in New York and Washington, D.C., and for those we don't know personally who are certainly affected by this crisis, including the members of the New York Metro and Washington, D.C. STC chapters.

I have taken this space in the newsletter to express my grief for the lives lost this morning and my hope for an end to world violence and terrorism. It is my sincere hope that you will take a moment to join me in reflection on these tragedies, regardless of the outcome(s) by the time this goes to print. ✍

—Virginia Pryor, Newsletter Editor

Document Design Workshop

Sponsored by the Mid-South STC Chapter, October 6

Dr. Karen A. Schriver, an internationally renowned researcher and instructor in the field of document design, will be in Memphis the week-end of October 6 to present a workshop for STC members and the general public.

Time: TBA

Place: TBA

Cost: \$110, non-STC members
\$90, STC members
reduced rate for students

About Dr. Schriver

Dr. Schriver is the author of a highly acclaimed graduate text on graphic design, *Dynamics in Document Design*, and was previously the

director of the Communications Design Center at Carnegie Mellon University, the premier research center in technical communications in the world. She currently heads her own research and consulting firm based outside Pittsburgh. In addition, Dr. Schriver recently received a 2001 Apex international award for her editing and redesign of a physics text.

About the workshop

The workshop will focus on research-based principles of design that can be applied to any media, from books, newsletters, and reports to web pages or interactive media. To make the workshop more tailored to

your needs, attendees are encouraged to submit examples from their own workplace.

Selling this idea to your employer

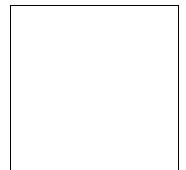
Because the workshop is being held in Memphis, it is an especially attractive cost-saving alternative to attending a company-paid conference or training far away, where costs for transportation, lodging, and meals can triple or quadruple the cost of the actual training. Plus, it is being held on a Saturday to avoid pulling employees away from their regular work schedule.

For more information, contact Margaret Carbaugh at (901) 372-7962. ✉



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