STC
SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Communiqué

Middle Tennessee Chapter July 2001 Volume 5 Number 3

Introducing the New Chapter Officers

In May, our chapter selected its officers for the 2001–2002 year. Some are returning officers, and some are fairly new to the region and/or STC. This edition of the newsletter concentrates on introducing these officers to you. It also includes information about other local concerns, such as the current job market, as well as national Society activities, such as the 2002 International Conference that will be held here in Nashville next May.

Please take this opportunity to get to know a little about our new officers, and look for announcements soon about our first meeting of the year in September. We hope to see you there!

From left to right: Melissa Weber, Jennifer Lambe, Pat Cosky, Holly Quick, Pam Livingston, Rita Johnson, Laura Vaughn, Ed Gregory, Christina Dunn, Bill Smith, Virginia Pryor. Not pictured: Margret Buxkamper

President–Rita Johnson

Rita moved to Nashville almost three years ago and joined Tanner Corporate Services as a project manager. At Tanner, Rita works with multiple clients on projects that include help systems, hardware documentation, and marketing materials.

Prior to moving to Nashville, Rita lived in Knoxville and was active in the East Tennessee chapter. While in Knoxville, she first worked as a consultant doing software documentation, magazine articles, book contributions, and indexing. As a full-time employee she worked for a manufacturer where she was responsible for hardware and software documentation for end users and service personnel.

Rita started doing technical documentation when she and her husband owned a computer business.

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Getting the Most from Your Chapter Newsletter

by Debbie Wood, Alamo Chapter

Who benefits from a chapter newsletter?

Everyone: chapter members, in addition to learning of important meeting and chapter information, can find out what others in the chapter are doing. They can write articles of local interest, thus adding to their portfolios.

Chapter leaders can disseminate important chapter and STC news to members, including chapter meeting dates. Leaders have the opportunity to write regular columns about issues they consider important to the chapter.

The STC Board of Directors also benefits from chapter newsletters because they provide an important component for determining a chapter's status.

What can I gain from volunteering to work on the chapter newsletter?

Volunteering to work on your chapter newsletter is an excellent opportunity to expand your skill set. When you think about volunteering for the chapter newsletter, think about the skills you want to learn or improve upon. For example, if you need to practice interviewing subject matter experts, volunteer to write a profile of a local technical communicator. If you want to learn a new technology, write an article about that technology.

You can use the work you do for the newsletter in your portfolio and on your résumé. Articles you write for your chapter newsletter definitely belong in your portfolio because you are learning and improving on skills that help you become a better technical writer. You can use a sample newsletter to demonstrate to an employer skills that you may not necessarily have learned on the job. Working on a chapter newsletter also demonstrates to employers that you are serious about improving your skills.

If I volunteer for my chapter newsletter, how much time will be required of me?

The amount of time you'll need to devote to the newsletter depends on the role you want to play in the newsletter's production.

Newsletter Editors in larger chapters tend to have more people helping with the newsletter. Larger chapters may have a managing editor, and two or three other supporting editors.

Smaller chapters tend to have fewer volunteers, so those Newsletter Editors may be the only people working on the newsletter.

Writing for a chapter newsletter can take as much or as little time as you want it to. When you volunteer to write an article, you get to decide how much time you want to spend researching and writing that article. When deciding what you want to do for your chapter newsletter, it is a good idea to talk to the current Newsletter Editor to find out what the newsletter needs most. ✍

This is an abbreviated and edited version of an article that first appeared in "Getting the Most From Your STC Membership" at the 48th Annual Conference in May.

Editorial

A new STC year is upon us, and that means several more issues of **Communiqué** must be planned, coordinated, written, laid out, and printed. I am committed to producing the best newsletter possible for our chapter of approximately 75 members, and I am proud to announce that my hard work last year paid off: Our newsletter won an award of Merit in STC's Chapter Newsletter Competition!

This year, I hope to make our newsletter even better, and welcome any ideas and contributions (especially articles) from our members. Please contact me if you have any interest in working for our award-winning chapter newsletter in any capacity (see my contact info. on page 2). Thanks!

—*Virginia Pryor, Newsletter Editor*

Introducing the New Chapter Officers

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They designed and manufactured computer systems for medical research laboratories. At that time she did not realize there was a field of "technical documentation"—only that they needed documentation and she was the person responsible for it.

When not at work, Rita enjoys cooking, reading, and gardening. Since moving to Nashville Rita has completed her Master Gardener certification and is active with the Wilson County Master Gardener Association.

Events Coordinator—Pat Cosky

Pat is a Nashville native. She has previous technical communication experience as a long-term employee with the information services division of a local health care company, and with Tanner as a contract writer, Project Manager, and (currently) Creative Team Lead.

Her background is in marketing materials and communications, software procedures documentation, business analysis, and client relations.

Her plans for 2001-2002 chapter programs include continuing to promote professional development with on-target program content; increasing chapter membership and meeting attendance by planning programs to meet members' needs and interests; and recruiting interested members to work with her on program planning and coordination.

Treasurer—Laura Vaughn

Laura Vaughn is a technical writer with Deloitte & Touche and has been a member of the Middle Tennessee chapter of STC for about a year. Before moving to the Nashville area, Laura was president of the Southwest Missouri State University chapter of STC. She holds a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri-Columbia and is currently writing her thesis to complete her master's degree in technical communication from SMSU.

In her spare time, Laura enjoys boating, camping, and other outdoor activities with her husband, Matt, and their water-loving dog, Roxie.

Membership/Web Site Manager—Ed Gregory

Ed's plans as Web Site Manager this year include: recruiting volunteers to recommend, create, and manage content that pertains to the 2002 STC conference for our chapter web site (www.stcmidtenn.org); and working with chapter volunteers to create a web template for the conference that will contain links back to our chapter site.

Currently, Ed is also creating some other web sites which he will link to and from our chapter site. One of them, www.notcountry.com, is dedicated to providing information about live music in Nashville that is not country music.

Publicity Officer—Christina Dunn

Christina works for HCA as a Senior Communication Coordinator. She determines communication needs for HCA's software and develops the communication. Communication deliverables include online manuals for the intranet library, online help, articles for HCA's online newsletter, brochures, e-mails, and so on. Her job is to develop whatever it takes to get the word out about her company's systems.

She is a Senior Member of STC, and has been part of the organization since 1994. Before she moved to Nashville two years ago, she was a member of the Northeast Ohio chapter.

Christina enjoys exercising and spending time with her husband David and their out-of-town relatives who live in cities across the country.

She is soon to be immediate past president of the first Toastmasters club at HCA. (Toastmasters is a public speaker and leadership organization.) It was so successful that they are starting two new clubs at HCA in July, and there are volunteers to fill all of the club offices!

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As Publicity Officer, she plans to publicize our chapter in new ways. In addition, she plans to help with the chapter's roles in the International Conference.

Employment Officer—Bill Smith

Many years as a Human Resource Manager sensitized Bill to the plight of the unemployed. He specifically sought the job Employment Officer to take a constructive role in each technical communicator's journey to the next job. Topping his project list this year is a better inventory of current and potential technical communication employers. In the process, he intends to educate potential employers about the need for professional technical communication, and discover among current employers professionals unknown to our chapter. The end product will be a resource list to serve our profession.

Bill was a Mass Communication major who many years ago forsook the starving-writer life for the paycheck of a human resource career. Three years ago, Beth Tanner helped him discover there really is a way to make a living doing what he likes (if only he repents of passive voice). He now serves with a terrific team of technical writers at Gallagher Financial Systems and has some great friends in Middle Tennessee STC.

Newsletter Editor—Virginia Pryor

This is Virginia's second year as Newsletter Editor for the Middle Tennessee chapter. She hopes to continually improve the quality of the newsletter, and provide interesting, timely information to the chapter members. She is always on the lookout for contributions from other members. Her main goal this year is to produce another award winner for our chapter.

Virginia has a BA in Literature Specializing in Gender and Cultural Studies from Oberlin College in Northeast Ohio. She moved to Nashville in 1998, when she began her career in technical communications with Tanner Corporate Services. She is currently a Technical Writer at Square D.

Publications Competition Managers

Margret Buxkamper

A senior technical analyst at HCA Inc., Margret begins her second year as a publications competition manager. Buxkamper is a senior STC member and former Publicity Officer for the Middle Tennessee Chapter. She has more than 11 years experience in the field of technical-communications. Her expertise includes hardware and software documentation, manufacturing documentation, and help file development.

She hopes to use the experience she gained from managing last year's competition to raise awareness about the benefits of participating in the competition among members and non members, and to improve the efficiency of the overall competition process.

Jennifer Lambe

Jennifer works for Tanner Corporate Services as a Senior Technical Writer, where she's been for 5 1/2 years. She has been a technical writer for about 10 years. Prior to Tanner, she worked for a subsidiary of Rand McNally. She is also a freelance creative writer, currently working on a juvenile novel.

Jennifer thinks the Publications Competition allows chapter members valuable opportunities for learning, both as entrants and as judges. She hopes that by being one of the Publications Competition Managers, that she can help the competition to grow and become a more important activity in our chapter.

Pam Livingston

Pam Livingston, a technical writer at Deloitte & Touche LLP and a senior member of STC, is serving her second term as an officer for the STC technical publications competition. Pam previously served as a competition officer in 1997–98, when the Middle Tennessee chapter exchanged competition entries with the Austin, Texas, chapter. In 1999–2000, she also served as co-editor of **Communiqué**.

Pam has a bachelor's degree in Communications, with emphasis in Journalism, from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida. She has 15 years of experience as a writer and editor in a variety of settings, including newspapers, academia, and industry.

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Chapter Meeting Report

On June 26, 21 chapter members and 7 non-members gathered at Tanner Corporate Services for the first chapter meeting in the summer that anyone can remember.

On the agenda: networking with snacks and drinks; hearing reports from the few chapter members who were able to attend the conference in Chicago; and starting to plan/brainstorm for ideas concerning our (somewhat limited) involvement with the conference next year, which will be held in Nashville.

Rita Johnson, Holly Quick, and Laura Liles all gave presentations and shared information gleaned from their favorite sessions at the conference.

Holly Quick gave an overview of two sessions she enjoyed most: "William Horton: Say It in Pictures: Visual Literacy for Business and Technical Communication," which focused on the visual aspects of technical literature; and the opening session speech by DeWitt Jones, a photographer. She found his speech inspiring—he communicated the message that vision and passion are the key elements one needs to be successful. With these, commitment and discipline become non-issues.

Laura Liles covered the main points of sessions that were more technical in nature: "When Users Hate Help—What to Do," which addressed the difficulties of producing help that users want, and offered some solutions for success. Laura also enjoyed the session, "Strategies for Condensing Online Text."

To obtain detailed notes from these presentations, go to our chapter web site at www.stcmidtenn.org, and click on "Meeting Notes."

After the presentations, Rita conducted a discussion regarding ways in which we can begin to prepare for our roles in next year's conference. She explained that our limited role, which will still require planning and volunteers, primarily involves responsibility in the area of hospitality, and the production of a daily newsletter for the duration of the conference.

Our chapter will have a hospitality booth at the Opryland Hotel, which will be central headquarters for the conference. Those attending the meeting brainstormed ways to inform the attendees of some Nashville attractions they might be interested in. To jump-start this process, there is a survey on our web site we encourage all members to complete. We hope to get a fairly comprehensive list of places to dine, hear music, view the arts, and so on. There is also a form on our web site for you to submit any ideas you have regarding next year's conference.

Overall, the meeting in June was a great success, with a record attendance, that should have us all geared up for the new year. ✍

Chapter President Rita Johnson attends the Public Relations Leadership seminar at the 48th Annual Conference in Chicago in May.

Employment Concerns

By Bill Smith, Employment Officer

In my first official act as Employment Officer, I mandate new jobs for all members, sooner or later.

Whether this comes as a shock to those comfortably ensconced in upscale cubicles or as a welcome ray of hope to those with noses now pressed against the opposite side of that glass wall, a new job can be avoided only by death or retirement.

It then behooves us all to keep that next job in our sights and to keep those currently unemployed on our minds.

Things have changed of late. A year ago many members were concerned about employment from the employer side of the equation: How can we find people to fill jobs? Here at not-so-large Gallagher Financial Services we hired six technical writers in the past year.

Now the wind blows the other way. We heard recently of large-scale layoffs/downsizings at several local companies employing technical communicators. The growing concern among members is now for personal job security.

May our focus by this time next year return to the employer side of the equation. In the meantime, let us take the current state of the job market seriously not only for ourselves, but for fellow STC members. If you hear of potential jobs, contact me (see my info. on page 2) and/or those in job transition.

Our chapter web site (www.stc-midtenn.org) currently has postings of downloadable résumés of several members who are seeking employment. If you become aware of technical communication positions, please keep this resource and your fellow chapter members in mind. ✍

Announcements

Next Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held in September, time and location TBA. Look for an e-mail next month from Pat Cosky, Events Coordinator.

International Awards!

Congratulations to our chapter for winning an award of Merit for **Communiqué** in the Chapter Newsletter Competition.

Congratulations to Ron Kidd, Holly Quick, and Linsey Sieger for winning an award of Excellence in the Technical Publications Competition. Their entry, *The Guide: A Marketing and Public Relations Resource 2000*, won both a Distinguished and Best of Show award at the chapter competition level.

Officers

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Holly Quick

Holly Quick has been a technical writer and editor for 15 years. For the past three years she has worked for Tanner Corporate Services, the last two as a staff writer. A member of STC for two years, Holly is looking forward to managing the publication competition with the other Managers, and will do her best to ensure that the competition process goes smoothly and is fun and rewarding for everyone.

Melissa Weber

Melissa has been a technical writer and in the STC since May 1999. She currently works for Gallagher Financial Systems, Inc. in Brentwood with a Communications team that maintains system documentation, user manuals, and training guides. Her interest in technology and English led her to explore the communications industry, which she thoroughly enjoys. She is excited about being on the Publications Competition Committee and looks forward to being a contributing member this year.

Aside from keeping current in technological trends, she enjoys reading non-fiction, taking weekend hikes in the mountains, attending performing art productions, and playing classical piano music. ✍

Call for Proposals: 49th Annual Conference

Proposal Deadline is August 1!

In his book, "Leading the Revolution," Gary Hamel chronicles the issues companies around the world face as they struggle to remain competitive in the new economy. Hamel argues that a strategy of radical innovation is essential to survival. As technical communicators, we too are faced with the possible need for radical innovation in our personal and professional lives.

- Which tools should I learn in order to compete with other writers in my field?
- Which strategy for online documentation is best aligned with my company's vision and mission?
- What information products can we develop that will give us the competitive advantage?
- What will the next generation of software manuals, online help, or Web pages look like?

STC's 49th Annual Conference can help provide the answers to these questions. As a conference presenter, you can share your insights and experiences with fellow technical communicators. The conference will take place May 5–8, 2002, in Nashville at the Opryland Hotel.

If you're interested in submitting a proposal to speak at next year's STC conference, you must submit a completed 49th Annual Conference *Call for Proposals* application form **by August 1**. These forms are available for download at the STC web site (www.stc.org).

If you are selected to speak at the conference, there is a significant discount on the rate for attending either the full conference or just one day. The speaker registration rates apply whether you are a member or nonmember. ✍

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