

STC Lakeshore Connection

Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication

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Kickoff Cruise Starts New Program Year

Yes, for the second time in two years, our September kickoff cruise on the river was rained out. But thanks to some fancy footwork by our program committee manager, Rebekka Andersen, and other board members, the first meeting of the season continued as scheduled.

STC members sailed into a nearby restaurant when the weather became to inclement for the cruise boat, where we enjoyed a bountiful selection of hors d'oeuvres and companionable conversation. Program plans for the year were distributed. New friendships

were begun and long-standing relationships were renewed.

Many thanks to Mike Starr and Linda Verwey for piloting us to the restaurant from the boat dock. Plans are underway for another cruise in June, when we'll have a better chance of good weather. ♦

Letter from the President—Welcome!

By Linda Verwey, President

Greetings and welcome to an exciting new STC year.

We are fortunate to be part of a strong community of professionals who understand that involvement as a member of the STC means that we are interested in growing relationships and improving our practice by sharing what we know and listening to others. Our focus this year is on building membership, and to do that, we need great programming.

The September 12th river boat cruise, which turned into an impromptu night of cocktails and snacks, provided us with a unique opportunity to relax and enjoy getting to know one another. For future meetings, be sure to extend an invitation to someone who may be interested in exploring technical communication as a career choice. Or perhaps you know someone who can bring a new level of experience to our chapter; someone who can energize our meetings with interesting stories about best practices in the workplace; what's working and what isn't.

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October Meeting Sheds Light on Career Mobility

By Susan Archer, Secretary

"It's important to . . . only build what the customer wants."

The program for the October 11th meeting, "Career Development and Mobility: Consulting and Contracting," included brief talks and discussion from three different panelists.

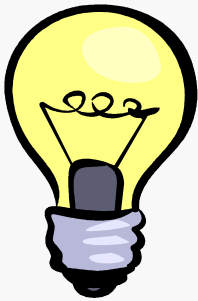
Susan Archer, Independent Contractor, explained how to develop a personal business strategy by starting at

a high level. At this high level, she encouraged listeners to identify a summary action, what deliverables receive this action, and the business value of doing the action. For example, you might "Help create and maintain technical information that makes users successful the first time."

Gary Krukar, Manager at Stratagem, focused

on the day-to-day realities of consulting and the skills necessary to succeed in this business. He noted that it's important to understand the scope of the contracting project and to only build what the customer wants.

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"Your ideas are like breath for an eager programming committee."

Your ideas are like breath for an eager programming committee. As perceptions of technical communication continue to change in the business world, it's important that we continue to examine our roles to keep pace with trends. Your suggestions ensure we plan meetings and select speakers that inspire and guide discussion that motivate and move us forward in our chosen profession.

Our success this year depends on involvement. Why not bring your smile, your suggestions, and a potential new member to every meeting?

I'm looking forward to working with you this year. Please make a practice of visiting www.stc-wi.org to RSVP for meetings. Your council is making an effort to make sure there is new information available as you visit and browse. Contact any one of us if you have information or an article to share!

Warmly,

Linda Verwey, President STC Wisconsin chapter, 2006-2007 ♦

Letter from the President, continued

Member News



Anne Nault, our chapter membership manager, reports the following membership changes:

Members transferring in:

Deirdre A. Murr

New members:

Jennifer Anderson
Julienne Wills

Congratulations!

October Meeting, continued

Soft skills of listening and understanding the needs of the customer are just as important as good technical skills.

Amy Janczy, Owner of Usable Writing, LLC, talked about the nitty-gritty, business side of independent contracting and underscored the importance of having a clear, focused plan.

When starting a business, consider whether to have a limited liability corporation (LLC), sole proprietorship, or corporation. Good contracts are crucial to provide protection from liability issues and ensure that you get paid on time. Before plunging in, she recommends 'test driving' the independent-contracting lifestyle. ♦



World Usability Day: November 14

November 14 is World Usability Day. STC is participating to help make the world a better place for product users.

Technically 36-hours long, World Usability Day promotes the values and benefits of creating usable products through user-centered design.

Awareness of good engineering, good interfaces, good methodologies, and ultimately a good user experience for the customer is the goal of the awareness that arises from this series of events.

STC initiatives include holding the World's Largest Online Card Sort and working on a Usability Competition.

Card sorting is a common analysis technique used to group objects in order to understand how users categorize information, used by information architects and usability professionals to find latent structure from a range of items. STC is looking for volunteers to help with the organization

The Usability Competition addresses the current need for a competition for usability professionals. What would such a competition look like? What criteria would be used to judge such a competition? These are issues volunteers will address.

For details, go to <http://www.stc.org/wud/> or <http://www.worldusabilityday.org/>

♦

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STC Webinars

November 22

Selling Technical Communication Services—Both Inside and Outside Your Organization

December 6

Creating Training that Sticks

January 17

The Xfactor—From HTML to XHTML

January 31

ANSI Z535.6—A New Standard for Safety Information in Product-Accompanying Literature

February 7

Creating Indexes on Web Sites and Intranets

February 21

Working in Global Teams

For details about local webinar sites, contact the program manager at programmanager@stc-wi.org.

Meet Your Board Members, Part I

Rebekka Andersen is this season's Program Manager. A Ph.D. candidate in Professional Writing at UW-M, Rebekka works part-time as a consultant for Strategem and is currently on assignment at Johnson Controls.

During the past few years, Rebekka has

worked as a proofreader, copy editor, process documentation specialist, and technical writer. She has also presented her academic research at several conferences. A member of the Technical Editing, Single Sourcing, and Information Design and Architecture SIGs,

she is especially interested in how content management is changing editor roles, practices, and relationships with technology.

If you would like to assist the program committee, contact Rebekka at programmanager@stc-wi.org. ♦

Upcoming Chapter Events

November 14

Topic: "Financing Your Future: Preparing for and Enjoying a Successful Retirement" presented by Craig Pluta and Chris Doughty of B.C. Ziegler and Company.

Time: 5:30 networking; 6 dinner; 7-8 presentation.

Location: MSOE Alumni Partnership Center, 1120 North Broadway

Cost: \$15 members; \$20 non-members; \$5 students.

RSVP: by noon on Friday, November 11 at www.stc-wi.org.

December 13

Topic: "Making Strong Business Cases" presented by Jim Romano of Prisma International.

Time: 5:30 networking; 6 dinner; 7-8 presentation.

Location: Klemmer's Williamsburg Inn, 10401 W. Oklahoma Avenue

Cost: \$15 members; \$20 non-members; \$5 students.

RSVP: by noon on Friday, December 12 at www.stc-wi.org.

Editor's Column

By Susan Duncan Park, Newsletter Editor

I recently moved from Milwaukee to Fredericksburg, Virginia. Along with several other life changes, I no longer work in an office setting with other technical writers. Instead, I'm the lone technical writer in my group, and I work from home.

It's a major shift for me, and brings some wonderful advantages—the major one being the 30-second commute to my laptop. However, it also holds an unanticipated challenge: I miss sharing ideas and problem-solving strategies with other writers who are familiar with our company's software and processes. I also miss the bustle of an office environment.

If I lived closer to Washington, D.C. or Richmond, I could fulfill my need for writing-related conversation by attending some of the lunch or dinner meetings sponsored by the D.C. or Richmond chapters of the STC.

Unfortunately, I live more than an hour away from those two cities and rely on public transportation, which would mean a trip of four or more hours.

Seeking some advice, I joined STC's Lone Writer SIG (a bargain at \$5) and signed up for its email list. I received some helpful responses from my new online community, including these tips:

- Email members of the D.C. and Richmond STC communities to schedule an impromptu "tech writer" lunch in my area.
- Sign up for Yahoo Instant Messenger and Skype to ease communication with co-workers.
- Look on the bright side of telecommuting—a recent survey found that 33% of area commuters would take a \$5,000 pay cut to reduce their commute by 30 minutes; 29% would be willing to take a pay cut of \$10,000 or more.
- Make a point of scheduling some time "out of the office" each day, whether it's lunch with a friend or attending an STC or other professional meeting.

I plan to take some of the advice offered—especially contacting local STC members to schedule brief lunch meetings once in a while. I'll also search out local non-STC writing-related organizations and meetings. Although, for practical reasons, I can't put all the tips into practice, I appreciated the feeling that I wasn't alone in my quandary. ♦

Meet Your Board Members, Part II

Anne Nault is this season's Membership Manager. She has more than 25 years of experience as a freelance graphic designer/technical illustrator/multimedia specialist. Her current clients include high-tech hardware and software companies on the East and West coasts. As a senior member of STC, she is a relative newcomer to Wisconsin; previously she belonged to the

Northern New England and Boston chapters. Anne has an interest in usability and is working on her Information Design certificate from Bentley College. Her specialty is 3D visualizations. Anne hopes to grow the STC chapter in Wisconsin and get more members from the Fox Valley where she currently resides.

Tech Tips

Word and Aut numbering

Ever wanted to tear out your hair because of Word's autonumbering "feature"?

You can use field codes to work around the issue. For step-by-step instructions on setting up field codes, see:

<http://www.knopf.com/tips/autonumber.html>



FrameMaker Timesavers

The Microtype website includes tons of helpful shortcuts, tips, and free downloads for FrameMaker and Adobe Acrobat.

<http://www.microtype.com/timesavers.html>

Tech Writers Online

If you're not already a member, check out the TechWR-L (tech whirlers) site. You'll find an active email list, articles, and job postings.

<http://www.techwr-l.com/techwhirl/index.php3>

Local Technical Writing Events

Saturday, November 18—Indexing Workshop

Carol Roberts, a freelance book indexer with more than 13 years of experience, presents an introductory workshop: "Indexers Do It Alphabetically."

Date: 11/18/06

Time: 9:00am - 4:00pm

Location: Bolton Hall Rm: 521, UW-M

Fee: \$99.00

Online registration: <https://www.sce-secure.uwm.edu/registration/add.cfm?id=17>

Wednesday, December 13—WORDS Meeting

A Panel Discussion on Web Design

Nancy Cavanaugh, Dave Clark, and Nina Roberts will discuss issues and trends in web design.

Date: 12/13/06

Time: 8:00-10:00 a.m. (continental breakfast)

Location: Assurant Health, 501 West Michigan

Fee: Free to WORDS members; \$5 for non-members

For more details, visit the WORDS Yahoo Group: http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/WI_WORDS/

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We welcome articles from members. Feature articles and articles of general interest should be about 300-400 words. Articles should be submitted as a Word file attached to an e-mail. Please include your name, title, and company.

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