



tecolote

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Tecolote is the official newsletter of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Our mission is to advance the profession of technical communication across New Mexico by increasing networking among professionals, creating opportunities for members to improve skills, and recognizing technical communication excellence.

The 2007 SW Regional PAO Competitions a Big Success

As most of you know, our chapter again hosted the STC Southwest Regional PAO Competitions. We received 60 entries from fellow technical communications professionals who live and work in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, and California.

And how did the judging go this year? Pretty well, as evidenced by the number of awards handed out in the three competitions.

In the Technical Publications Competition, of the 27 entries submitted, we recognized 4 as being “Distinguished” (DTC). Of those, a specially formed panel of judges from Kachina Chapter selected one as “Best of Show.” That entry was LLNL and UC Making History, a book submitted by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Judges also awarded the level of “Excellence” to 6 entries and the level of “Merit” to 13 entries.

The Technical Art Competition also drew 27 entries. Three were recognized as “Distinguished.” A panel of judges also selected one of these as “Best of Show.” That entry was the Bradbury History Museum Wall display at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The competition judges also awarded the level of “Excellence” to 9 entries and the level of “Merit” to 12 entries.

Seven entries were submitted to the Online Competition. Judges awarded the level of “Excellence” to one entry and the level of “Merit” to two.

A full list of award winners has been posted on our chapter website: www.stc_kachina_nm.org.

All seven DTC-award-winning entries have been submitted to STC’s international competitions. The winners will be announced and their entries put on display at STC’s Annual Conference scheduled for June 1-4, 2008 in Philadelphia.

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Kachina Chapter Officers

President — Kathy Pallis

(505) 466-3608/4481, *palliskc@comcast.net*

Past President — Jonathan Price

(505) 254-4148, *jprice@swcp.com*

Vice President for Programs — Helen

Moody (505) 898-5474, *moodwick@protrainco.com*

**Vice President for Public Relations
— Carmelita Wasson, (505) 837-2976,**

carmelita.c.wasson@saic.com

Secretary — Sheina North, (505) 299-

5091, *snorth@sandia.gov*

Treasurer — Scott Sanders

(505) 277-6347, *ssanders@unm.edu*

Education Chair — Scott Sanders

(505) 277-0754, *ssanders@unm.edu*

Membership Chair — Maryjane Long

(505) 266-6271, *mlong@swcp.com*

Newsletter Editor — Vivian Jones

(505) 796-5030, *jones.viv@gmail.com*

Job Bank — Bob Johnson (505) 254-

4142, *bjohnson@Ktech.com*

Webmaster — Jean Gabriel

(505) 349-0565, *jean@gabe.org*

Historian — open

STC Region 5 Director — Paul Mueller

(713) 668-7199, *dir5@stc.org*

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New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the
Society for Technical Communication.

Managing Editor

Vivian Jones, *jones.viv@gmail.com*

Associate Editor

Carmelita Wasson

Contributing Editors

Bob Johnson

Leslie Beach

Submissions

We welcome submissions from Kachina
members for publication. Submit articles in
plain text format to *jones.viv@gmail.com*.

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STC New Mexico Kachina Chapter
PO Box 25291
Albuquerque, NM 87125-5291
www.stc-nm-kachina.org

Providing Value: STC Takes the Lead

By Lawrence D. “Larry” Kunz

Are you getting value for your investment in STC? Many members, as they renew their memberships for 2008, are asking what value they receive in return for the dues they pay.

I’m pretty well sold on the value of STC. Just last year I got a new job after spotting the opening on my chapter’s employment page. During the interview process, I benefited from the experience I’ve gained through STC and the contacts I’ve made in STC.

But that’s just one person’s experience. STC must offer real value, consistently and across the board, to members and prospective members. STC will need to offer even more value to remain competitive in the next few years.

(Yes, I said “STC” and “remain competitive” in the same sentence. STC is a business, and it confronts significant issues and stiff competition in today’s marketplace. It’s nice to think that STC is more than just a business and that it’ll always be here. But the reality is that, to remain viable in the short term, STC must do better at proving its value.)

Taking a longer view, however, STC has an opportunity to provide value in ways that go far beyond what’s possible today. STC is uniquely positioned to take the lead in defining the profession of technical communication. When we do that, we’ll provide significant and enduring value for our members, for practitioners who haven’t yet become members, for the people who employ us, and even for society in general.

Defining the Profession

Ever since I joined STC 25 years ago, we’ve been saying that technical communication is a profession. But we’re an immature profession, and as a result our work often isn’t taken seriously by the people who employ us and the people who buy our products.

To grow into a mature profession, we need at least two things:

- An agreed-on code of ethics. STC has its own ethical code, but it doesn’t represent the consensus of the entire profession, and it’s not enforceable.
- A unique body of knowledge, and the expectation that each practitioner has mastered that body of knowledge.

The technical communication profession is desperate for leadership – desperate for a set of ethical values, an agreed-on body of knowledge, and perhaps a credentialing system.

Today, all of the pieces are in place for us to develop technical communication into a mature profession. We have the will, we have the know-how, and we have an organization – STC – with the stature, the broad reach, and the resources to lead the way. STC can assemble the building blocks for our profession, it can forge consensus, and it can gain buy-in among the significant stakeholders in the worldwide community of technical communicators.

What Is STC Doing?

As a member of the STC board of directors I’m leading the effort to formulate a strategic plan, or roadmap that positions STC as the leader in defining the profession – especially by establishing a body of knowledge and promoting ethical standards. (We’ve already begun working on the body of knowledge.)

You might have heard the phrase *telling our powerful story*. The strategic plan focuses on raising the profile of all technical communicators – and emphasizing the value we provide to our employers and to the world in general – by marketing our people and the work we do.

The strategic plan also emphasizes establishing and expanding partnerships. By teaming with other organizations, STC will strengthen its leadership role in the profession and position itself to provide even more value to its members.

STC doesn't need to be fixed. It needs to be modernized. The board of directors, along with the executive director and her staff, understand this. We know that STC must keep providing value over the short term while setting the stage for long-term value by defining the profession. We're implementing plans to keep the business of STC strong by retaining and attracting members and by constantly reviewing its suite of programs and services to ensure that they still make sense.

I believe that we can find a way to develop technical communication as a profession and continue delivering real value to our members – all without losing the social and interpersonal aspects that have made STC so special to so many people over our history.

What It Means to You

Defining the profession will benefit every technical communicator because it'll make us more valuable to the people who sign our paychecks. Instead of simply saying "I need some manuals and online helps" (which reduces technical communication to a commodity, not a profession), our employers will realize that they need professional people who contribute value to the organization by increasing customer satisfaction and making products easier to use – thus easier to sell.

We'll prove our value on a much wider stage as well. By providing information that makes technology work for the people who use it, we contribute real value to society as a whole.

I'm running for second vice-president because nobody is better acquainted with the issues that STC will have to confront as leads the profession to where we want it to go. I can foster a climate of creativity and cooperation in which we'll plot a course for the Society and the profession. STC needs leaders who can build consensus and explain decisions to the membership at large. I hope you'll entrust me with your vote.

The next few years will be exciting. Along with my membership dues, I've chosen to invest my time and energy in being a part of this effort. I hope you'll agree that STC's future, and the value it'll bring to you, is worth investing in as well.

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Lawrence D. "Larry" Kunz, a candidate for STC second vice-president, is a member of the Society's board of directors and immediate past president of the Carolina chapter. He is employed as a Senior Technical Writer at Systems Documentation, Inc., in Durham, NC, where he manages a large software documentation project.

To learn more about Larry, check out <http://lk81924.googlepages.com/home>.

Around STC

Happy New Year! Our memberships expired December 31st. Time to renew! You can renew online by visiting the link below, which accesses the logon screen:

<https://access.stc.org/iMisPublic/AsiCommon/Controls/Shared/FormsAuthentication/Login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fJoinSTC%2fRenewal.aspx>

An STC Task Force is busy evaluating the establishment of certification for technical communications professionals. They are looking for inputs from Society members. Details and contact info on this web page:

<http://www.stc-cdx.org/taxonomy/term/92>

In just a few months, our **Annual Convention** will be underway. Usually held during the last week in May, this year it will be held during the first week in June. This is good news for most college students who in the past had to choose between attending the conference or taking their finals. Here is the link to the 2008 Conference website:

<http://www.stc.org/55thConf/index.asp>

Additional information is here:

http://www.stc.org/intercom/PDFs/2007/200712_28a.pdf

Insights on the Past, Present, and Future of Careers in Technical Writing

By Leslie Beach

No, I am not, alas, an astounding psychic seer who is going to report to STC members my latest magnificent cognitions with regard to careers in technical writing . . .

However, the twenty-two people who attended the NM STC Kachina Chapter's September 11, 2007 meeting at Garduño's Restaurant on 4th Street got something even better!

In addition to eating delicious food served graciously, networking with the others who attended, and getting the inside scoop on current job opportunities, those who attended were privy to a lively panel discussion on the *Past, Present, and Future of Careers in Technical Writing*.

Salient Points from the Panel Discussion

The panelists were Linda Gillis, MA, Scott Sanders, PhD, and Anne Van Arsdall, MA.

Linda Gillis is currently a Sandia National Laboratories Information Management Executive. Scott Sanders is a professor at UNM, where he is the Director of Internships and Professional Writing. Anne Van Arsdall is a writer and technical writer, who has written the book *Medieval Herbal Remedies: the Old English Herbarium and Anglo-Saxon Medicine*, and who is now writing histories of science programs at Sandia National Laboratories.

What did you see in the past for people entering Technical Writing?

The panel agreed that for the most part, people got into technical writing from other professional and training backgrounds.

For example, Anne had a master's degree in another field, but entered an apprentice program in technical writing at Los Alamos National Laboratories. Linda moved into the field from graphic design, primarily through working with copy writers in team projects. She eventually got a master's degree in Technical Communication. Scott Sanders got into technical writing as a college English professor through helping his fellow faculty members write grants. He entered into it even more deeply through helping his adult students write technical documents for their oil and gas industry employers. Finally, he transferred to a faculty position at New Mexico Tech, where he immersed himself in learning about technical writing from whatever sources he could find. He found that the STC instructional resources were very helpful, as were the many reference books he read.

What do you see in the present for people entering and working in Technical Writing?

The predominant experience in the present for technical writers is that as a profession it is extremely wide ranging.

All the panelists agreed that it is important to talk to people in technical writing and to technical communicators, because, as Linda Gillis expressed it, “. . . it is so differently defined everywhere.”

“A lot of them do all kinds of things. This is because the basic requirement for technical writing trains them to write well. The writing is important to shaping their company as well their own career.” (Scott Sanders)

In addition, “It is changing and morphing rapidly.” (Linda Gillis)

“There are fewer ‘Writers’ today. There are more ‘Communicators’ and ‘Information Technology’ people. The opportunities to write the way that I wrote are actually shrinking; web page writing and computer emphasis is where it is going.” (Anne Van Arsdall)

“Project Management is the best experience for everyone to get, and experience working on multidisciplinary teams. Science technology is being combined with the humanities these days, and the kids getting those degrees now are becoming their own ‘multidisciplinary team’ within themselves.” (Linda Gillis)

“The trend I see is in getting certificates, not degrees. Certificates in Project Management are especially popular. Most students are technical writers for 2-3 years, and then get certificates in project management, followed by an MBA or a technical related Master's.” (Scott Sanders)

“It’s all Project Management all the time! You must either have or be able to develop project management skills . . . or have something in your experience that shows that you can do it. This is not true in Europe, but if you want to stay here and work with a large company, it is true. You can sometimes be a private entrepreneur without it, but then you will be the project manager at all times and at all levels for yourself!” (Linda Gillis)

“I find that my humanities experiences and background shaped my approach to the science writing I do, and the science writing I have done also affects the writing I do in the humanities. Scientists think in a way that those in the humanities can profit from. They must illustrate things. They must illustrate them through writing as well as through graphics . . . Actually; my original newspaper writing was the most formative and best training I had. You have those deadlines!” (Anne Van Arsdall)

What do you see in the future for people entering Technical Writing?

“For people wanting to make a career change into technical writing now, what I would tell them to do is not to go back to school if they have more than 5-6 years experience; or to get certificates, not degrees.” (Scott Sanders)

“One trend I see is that the 22-28 year olds are saying to forget about your computers. It’s all about your phone, now! Everything is all going to be your phone. It will all be digital. They want to deliver courses on the phone. You must learn to text message! They use computer e-mail only to communicate with the ‘older people’ in their families. They are e-mailing, text messaging, and instant messaging on the phone. You think of phones as phones, but they aren’t any more!” (Scott Sanders)

“You must be flexible and stay flexible! You must realize that what you think you are going to do is probably not what you are going to do; or you are going to do that and more.” (Anne Van Arsdall)

“You will have to have some project management experience or strength along with your other skills.” (Linda Gillis)

“They want ‘Jack of all trades’ people with communication skills.” (Anne Van Arsdall)

Summary of the Evening

Everyone agreed that the evening was both a good time and informative. The panelists did a great job of entertaining us as well as enlightening us. Our thanks go to each one of them. A big “Thank you” also goes to Helen Moody for arranging it all so well for us!

Revisiting the Kachina Chapter Job Bank

Now that the Regional PAO Competitions are concluded, I will be focusing my attention on my primary job as our chapter's Job Bank Coordinator.

A simplistic view is that the contents and features of our job bank can be divided into one of four categories, namely:

1. Essential
2. So-so
3. Not useful
4. Needed (to be added)

I am asking you for inputs on any of the above categories. I have a few ideas on revisions but also want to hear from chapter members on what changes they would like to see.

Please drop me a line at bjohnson@ktech.com or a call me at 254-4142. Feedback by February 15th would be great!

Thank you,

Bob Johnson

Job Bank Coordinator

PAO, con't from page 1

At the Awards Luncheon on January 19th, Dr. Judy Prono, who served as the competition's judging manager, provided plaques to the Best of Show and DTC winners and certificates to the Excellence and Merit winners. Guest speaker was Mr. Omar Juveland, lead contributor for the Bradbury History Museum Wall display, one of our two Best of Show winners.

Our chapter would have been unable to single-handedly judge all these entries. We are grateful to our sister chapters in Phoenix, Tucson, and Oklahoma who augmented our seven teams by fielding seven additional teams. Roberta Davidson (Phoenix), Brenda Huettnner (Southern Arizona), and Sharon Garrity (Oklahoma) served as their chapter's liaison to our competition management team. Thank you once again, Roberta, Brenda and Sharon!

A big "Thank You!" also to those here in New Mexico who served as judges and to Judy Prono for her help in all aspects of this year's competitions.

Each fall, STC chapters across the country and in Canada, Europe, and Australia sponsor local and regional PAO competitions to recognize excellence in technical communication. Winning an award is peer recognition of having produced effective communication products. Congratulations to all winners in this year's Southwest Regional PAO Competitions!

Bob Johnson

New Mexico Kachina Chapter

SW Regional Competitions Manager

STC Webinars

When there is enough interest, the Kachina Chapter presents these lunchtime learning seminars free of charge to members and students, although any and all contributions towards the expense of presenting them are appreciated. Attendance is free for STC members and students; \$10 for non-members.

Please contact Helen Moody in advance at moodwick@protrainco.com if you are interested in attending a webinar. **We must have** a minimum of five members signed up to purchase these presentations in order to schedule a webinar.

Feb. 13, 2008. Converting Captivate Demonstrations into Simulations

You can view a description of other upcoming STC web seminars on the Society's website at <http://www.stc.org/seminarsList.asp>.

Upcoming Workshops

Coming This Spring: Websites for Self-employed Writers and Editors

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

For up-to-date information, visit the Kachina Chapter Meetings page on the Web: <http://www.stc.-nm-kachina.org/NewSite/Meetings/meetings.htm>.

Kachina Chapter Mugs

We now have Kachina Chapter mugs! Printed with the attractive Kachina Chapter logo, these 11-ounce mugs come in a gift box. The cost is \$16. These make great gifts for your favorite technical communicator. Or treat yourself to a chapter mug to use at home or office. See them and buy one at our next chapter meeting.

Calendar events are listed at the time of printing and cover the next few months of activities. Some events may change. Please check the STC Kachina Chapter website for updates at www.stc-nm-kachina.org. STC Kachina Chapter members will receive periodic email updates with locations and sign up information. If you would like to list an event in the next Tecolote issue, email jprice@swcp.com with event information.



New Mexico Kachina Chapter
Society for Technical Communication
PO Box 25291
Albuquerque, NM 87125-5291

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