President’s Column April 2008

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

I’d like to recognize a few members that have helped shape this chapter. It is so nice, as the president of a volunteer organization, to have members that make this job a lot easier. Some folks have been at certain volunteer positions for a number of years, have been taking care of things behind the scenes, and as a result may not have gotten enough recognition.

Barb Philbrick and the rest of the newsletter committee are always on top of things when it comes to producing this newsletter. This newsletter is a great communication tool for our chapter, and they make it interesting and fun to read. From my perspective, it’s also a beautiful thing that Barb always has things under control, knows when to publish, and solicits articles and reviews. It’s not easy to fit in all the writing, gathering, and coding that goes on behind the scenes. I appreciate the fact that I can count on Barb and the newsletter committee to produce such a fine newsletter.

Jeanette Evans has helped Barb with the newsletter by interviewing our members, soliciting articles, and writing numerous book reviews. She serves as a co-editor of the newsletter. Jeanette and Sarah Burke have masterfully handled our Academic Scholarship that we will award in May. Also, Jeanette has helped us find volunteers and offered to help us with future Associate Fellow nominations. I look forward to seeing Jeanette receive her own Associate Fellow honor at the STC Annual Conference in Philadelphia.

Sarah Burke has been chapter Secretary for the last two years, and has done a marvelous job. She sends thank-you notes to all our speakers for our meetings, keeps track of our membership recognition program, and keeps minutes at our administrative board meetings. Sarah has always taken care of these tasks professionally, thoroughly, and without being asked. It’s nice to know that when you hand off certain tasks to people, you do not need to worry about it.

Brian Baddour has been our webmaster for the last several years. I don’t even know how many. It just seems he’s always been there. And he has been there, working with web hosting vendors, breaks in the Web site, and other technical issues behind the scenes. Again, this is an area that I have not had to worry about, because Brian just did what he needed to. And he always closed his e-mails “at your service,” which briefly sums up his great attitude. Sadly, Brian has moved on in his career, away from the technical communication side, so he won’t be with our chapter next year. We’ll miss him and his always positive outlook.

Jill McCauslin and Angie Dianetti have coordinated our networking lunches for the last many years. Again, it’s not even something the president has to ask about. Jill and Angie research many restaurants, and arrange the networking lunches in many geographic areas of our region. The networking lunches are quite a valuable tool for people in our chapter, as well as for other people that are interested in becoming technical communicators.

Outside of the tasks that these folks have performed for our chapter, they are all accomplished, talented professionals. I admire their skills, and appreciate that they have contributed so much to our chapter.

Monthly seminar: Career Transitions — From Technical Writer to …

(a panel discussion)

Have you wondered what it would be like to work as a technical communicator, not in the capacity of a writer, but in a related, but different position? Even if you have not, join us for a lively panel discussion with three talented members of the Northeast Ohio Society for Technical Communication.

At the May NEO STC seminar, Sherri Henkin will be previewing her topic, "Moving from Documentation Specialist to Process Improvement Analyst — or — When Opportunity Knocks, Open the Door," which she will also be presenting at the 55th Technical Communication Summit in Philadelphia. The presentation is based on her career journey from documentation specialist to process improvement analyst/business analyst, including the role STC has played in this process.

Sherri is currently a Senior Process Improvement Analyst in Mortgage Banking at AmTrust Bank. Sherri holds a BA in political science from Boston University and a Master’s in Public Administration from NYU. Her work background includes everything from office manager to business owner to administrative assistant at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Sherri is a Senior Member of STC, transferred from Los Angeles. She has been involved in the NEO STC community on the Employment committee, the Crucial Communicator Conference committee, and is currently on the Newsletter committee.
Sarah Burke, editor with Booz Allen Hamilton, will describe her transition from software technical writer to technical editor. Sarah is one of three editors serving a 1,000-person division focused on economic and business analysis. She was recently promoted from Senior Consultant to Associate. Sarah holds a Master of Technical and Scientific Communication from Miami University and a BA in History with a minor in English from the University of Dayton. Sarah has served NEO STC as Employment Committee Chair from 2004-2006 and as Secretary from 2006-present. She has been an active member of three other STC chapters.

June Muhic will describe her transition from Technical Writer to Instructional Designer. June is currently employed as an Instructional Designer at Progressive Insurance, where she develops training solutions for IT University. Previously, she was a Senior Information Designer for Radcom, Inc. She has worked for the following: Bergen Brunswig Corporation, Digital Graphics ADVantage, and Rockwell International. She holds a BSEET from DeVry Institute of Technology. June is currently Membership Chair of NEO STC.

In addition to the panel discussion, we will have our end-of-year celebration. We will be presenting the Distinguished Chapter Service Awards, recognizing many outstanding volunteers, and hearing from next year’s NEO STC President.

- Date: Thursday, May 15, 2008.
- Place: The Washington Group, located in the Tower City complex, Cleveland

Please note: The chapter is billed per registration. If you register but do not attend, you will be billed for the meeting and meal.

Upcoming events

- 4/24/08: Networking lunch: Don Pablo’s, 6476 Strip N.W., North Canton. RSVP to Jill McCauslin (jmccauslin@radcomservices.com).
- 4/30/08: Promoting Your Business or Nonprofit By Using a Press Release. Register by March 30 and receive a $26 discount. For more information or to register, contact Andrea C. Carrero by e-mail at andreawordtex.com or by phone at 1-610-494-0316
- 5/15/08: Live Web seminar: “Doing more with less: Using topic-based content development,” from 1 to 2:30 PM ET. For more information or to register for this seminar, please visit the STC Web site.
- 5/15/08: Monthly seminar: Career transitions — From technical writer to ...
- 5/20/08: Networking lunch: Bahama Breeze, 3900 Orange Place, Orange Village. RSVP to Jill McCauslin (jmccauslin@radcomservices.com).
- 6/13/08: Networking lunch: Brew Kettle, 8377 Pearl Road, Strongsville. RSVP to Jill McCauslin (jmccauslin@radcomservices.com).

Meeting review: Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when the stakes are high

By Jean Church (Jean.Church@wgint.com)

I went to the March meeting, "Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when the stakes are high" for all the wrong reasons. One, because it sounded like the name of our regional conference and two, because I wanted to talk to the speaker, Gary Miller, about ASTD certification and he just happens to be the president of the NEO ASTD chapter. Even though I went for the wrong reasons, I got a lot of right answers!

Gary talked about the Crucial Conversations Program, which helps you to learn how to speak calmly and persuasively during difficult or volatile situations. He offered many techniques, and used examples and sample situations to explain the steps of this program. Gary gave us the course details and the ten Crucial Conversations flash cards, which are available on our website. I found one of his examples, maintaining safety while encouraging dialog with the other person, to be especially helpful to me.

I have repeated the example Gary gave about one driver’s road rage being spent upon another driver to several people. Gary said we should not make up stories in our minds about situations, and that we should get the facts first and then make our decisions. It reminded me of the movie Crash, which is all about misperceptions and that peoples’ assumptions prevent them from seeing what is right in front of them.
I very much enjoyed Gary’s presentation and have reviewed the flash cards several times for the Crucial Conversations Program. I would recommend this program to anyone, especially if Gary Miller is giving the presentation.

Meeting review: April meeting covers consulting rates

By Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net)

The "Meter is running: Setting consulting rates for independence" was presented at our April meeting by Chris Juillet, a technical writer, consultant, and attorney based in southeastern Michigan.

Held at the Holiday Inn Cleveland South (in Independence), our April 15 meeting covered issues concerning the setting of consulting rates, how much to charge, and why. Chris noted at the meeting that there are many ways to establish a consulting rate and many of these neglect basic business principles. Christopher showed why some rate schemes often yield rates that are not appropriate and how to establish a consulting rate you and your clients can live with.

Some of the articles and other topics Chris has tackled in the past include:

- International issues in copyright
- Protecting your website from legal land mines
- Errors and omissions insurance: assuming the risk of professional liability
- Cyberlaw and you: what new media communicators must know
- The Digital Millennium Copyright Act

NEO STC was lucky to have Chris present, after several years of trying, and hear his take on the often challenging task of setting consulting rates. An STC Fellow, Chris has served STC in a wide variety of roles, including Assistant to the President for Special Interest Groups, founding manager of the Consulting and Independent Contracting Special Interest Group, and President of the Southeastern Michigan community. www.cjplc.com shows his impressive background including a summary of the articles he has published in STC and other publications.

NEO STC Wins STC Renewal Challenge

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

Thank you to all NEO STC members who have renewed your memberships!

Our chapter won an STC Renewal Challenge! This means that our chapter had the highest renewal percentage for our size category, so we won 4 free registrations to the 55th Technical Communication Summit. See more information here: http://www.stc.org/membership/challenge01.asp

We raffled these 4 registrations to every eligible member at our April 17 evening meeting. However, due to varied circumstances, some winners could not attend the Summit. We will have 3 of these registrations to re-RAFFLE.

We will hold a Second Chance drawing on or about Friday April 25. To be included in this drawing, you must submit your name. We will only include names of people who really want to attend the conference. You must be an NEO STC member in good standing as of March 31, 2008 to participate.

- if you have already registered for the conference, you can be reimbursed!
- one member from a company can submit multiple NEO STC members’ names (from the same company)

Send a message to tspayer@yahoo.com by midnight, April 24, 2008 to get your name in this drawing. Your chances of winning are very good!

*This free conference registration does not include extras such as SIG lunches, Honors Banquet, nor list of attendees. It also does not include travel nor lodging.

Local member quoted in Beacon Journal

Check out this article on translation, featuring quotes from NEO STC member Elena Dunne: www.ohio.com/business/16440006.html (Thanks to Kris Henige for passing this along!)
NEO STC scholarship update

By Jeanette Evans and Sarah Burke, Academic Relations Committee Co-Chairs

Our judges have been busy evaluating the applications we received for the NEO STC scholarship. As a reminder, the goals for the NEO STC scholarship reflect those of the international-level STC scholarship ... to encourage academic excellence, provide the profession with educated communicators, and promote awareness of and participation in STC.

Applicants are being evaluated on their potential to contribute to the profession. As explained in the scholarship application, applicants must have completed at least one year of post-secondary education and meet the following requirements:

- Be a graduate, undergraduate, or community college student at a degree-granting institution at the time of their application.
- Be working toward a Master’s, Bachelor’s, or Associate’s degree or a certificate in a technical or scientific communication-related field.
- Be enrolled in an Ohio school or be a permanent Ohio resident.
- Be studying a technical or scientific communication-related field.

NEO STC plans to recognize our winner at the NEO STC awards banquet in May. The applications we have received demonstrate some already impressive work in the field, challenging course loads, and true technical communication promise.

A special thank you goes to Pressco Technology Inc. for donating some of the funds for this scholarship, as well as to the students who applied and the individuals who provided such thoughtful letters of recommendation. The judges have enjoyed reading about what today’s technical communication students are learning both in the classroom and on the job.

While the final decision will not be an easy one ... we clearly have more deserving applicants than we do scholarships ... we feel that awarding a student scholarship is both rewarding and worthwhile for our community and we hope to obtain additional support to sustain (and perhaps enhance) this activity next year.

Finders, keepers — finding your message, keeping your readers

By Sarah Burke

Unfortunately, most of us learned the adage, “Finders keepers, losers weepers,” from some sort of playground confrontation when we were young. Yet, this elementary saying may deserve a second look from our off-the-playground vantage point as communicators.

Finding information is an essential part of communicating, and in today’s fast-paced world, finding information quickly is the goal. For example, when using a search engine, I want to type in my question and get an answer. Developing information that is easy to find is doubly important for your busy readers: You want them to get in and get out with the information they need.

Conversely, you run the risk of losing readers when information is not easy to find. As Hart (2007) explains, “We tend to ignore things that don’t fit our search pattern, and only reluctantly try to develop a new model of our situation. Sufficiently motivated readers will do this, but others will instead abandon their efforts and give up trying.”

Many elements contribute to a document’s retrievability — obvious ones like headings, tables of contents, and cross-references and not-so-obvious ones like icons and lists. Hargis (1998) argues that the “organization, retrievability, and visual effectiveness of information contribute most to whether users can find the information they need.”

But just what makes information retrievable? Employing the following strategies will help you develop more retrievable content to keep your readers reading. And, as communicators, isn’t that what the “finders, keepers” maxim is all about?

Break information into manageable units. Long passages of text, unbroken by visual or textual elements, can discourage and overwhelm readers. To avoid this, create entry points with headings, lists, and visual markers.

Reveal how the pieces of a document fit together. Readers can retrieve information more quickly when they can see how the parts fit into the whole. Incorporating elements like tables of contents, headings, and transitions help readers keep their bearings.

In introductory sections, preview the order of topics to come. Use introductory sections to forecast the topics discussed in that section. List the subtopics in
the same order as they are discussed to show how the chapter is organized, to orient readers, and to help them find specific information.

**Use lists to emphasize salient points.** Lists make series of items or concepts stand out from the narrative. Just remember to keep lists short, group like items, and observe parallelism.

**Use tables to make data easier to retrieve.** Well-designed tables make it easy to present large amounts of data, retrieve and compare individual values, and condense information that might normally require paragraphs to explain.

**Provide branches to additional information.** Use branching techniques like hyperlinks and cross-references to connect or redirect readers to additional information. A clickable table of contents, for example, allows readers to jump directly to a particular topic.

**Highlight key terms to make them stand out.** Key words and phrases, especially when they first appear, need to draw attention. Use a single highlighting method such as italics, bold, or color to create that emphasis.

**Use visual cues to help readers find information quickly.** Graphical elements such as icons, rules, and tabs point readers to specific pieces of information. When systematically used, these elements help readers pass efficiently through a document, skipping information that does not pertain to them.

**Establish and consistently apply visual standards.** Develop standards for treating visual elements. Using these standards uniformly enables readers to identify and scan for elements by their look. For example, applying left alignment to paragraphs and decimal alignment within tables optimizes scanning.

While these strategies are not exhaustive, they do offer some easy-to-implement techniques for developing more retrievable content. And, isn't making content retrievable for your readers half the battle? "Finders keepers, losers weepers" may be a saying that rules on the playground, but maybe, just maybe, this childhood adage has some credence in the conference room. What would happen if we as writers, editors, and designers imposed a bit more playground speak in our content? It just might make our messages easier to find, and our readers easier to keep.

**References and Recommended Reading**


**About the Author**

Sarah Burke is an associate with Booz Allen’s Economic and Business Analysis team based in Cleveland. She specializes in editing, technical writing, and information design and supports the development of client deliverables, proposals, and marketing materials. She holds a Master of Technical and Scientific Communication degree and learned, firsthand, from several playground encounters the tough lesson of “finders, keepers.”

**Member profile: Denise Kadilak**

*By Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net)*

Denise Kadilak currently serves as NEO STC treasurer, a position she took in August, 2007. In the 2006/2007 chapter year, Denise worked on the NEO STC education committee, coordinating STC Webinars. Before moving back to Cleveland in 2003, she participated in the Lowcountry chapter in Charleston, SC. She served two years as treasurer there.

Denise’s education includes a BA and MA in English from the University of Akron. She also completed one year toward a Ph.D. at Rice University in Houston. Professionally, Denise notes that her background is varied and explains, "While attending Akron, working on my BA, I worked as a respiratory technician at St. Thomas Hospital (now part of the Summa Health system). I worked full-time at this job for seven years while attending school part-time. After finally completing
my degree, I decided I wanted to teach English on the college level, so I entered the MA program at Akron, graduating in 1992. This same year I got accepted in the Ph.D. program at Rice. When I returned home from Houston in 1993 for my summer break, I landed a job as a reporter for a small newspaper in Sharon, PA and decided not to return to school. I stayed at the paper for just over 4 years, until I managed to make the switch from reporting to technical writing in 1998, when Blackbaud — headquartered in Charleston, SC — hired me (reporting was fun, but the pay was low and the hours long). I actually worked in Charleston for five years, moving back to Ohio in 2003. I am now a remote employee, working out of my home. My current position with the company is Senior Technical Writer.”

Originally from Poland, OH, Denise explains that she grew homesick living in Charleston and moved back in 2003 to be closer to family. She currently lives in Cleveland with her partner of 12 years and two cats. Her hobbies include gardening, walking, and biking.

Denise is a great asset to our community. At the NEO STC awards banquet last year, Denise made a presentation on implementing structured Framemaker. A variation of the presentation recently appeared in Intercom. As explained on the Intercom Web page, “While structured authoring encourages content reuse, improves consistency, and represents the future of the profession, making the transition from unstructured authoring can be intimidating. Kadilak addresses why you should consider the move to structured authoring and when you should consider doing so; she also suggests a practical implementation plan.”

**New social network for technical communication pros**

The Content Wrangler Community ([http://www.thecontentwrangler.com](http://www.thecontentwrangler.com)) is the new social network dedicated to people who value content as a business asset, worthy of being effectively managed. This is the place where technical communicators, medical and science writers, marketing pros, content management gurus, indexers, online community managers, document engineers, information architects, localization and translation pros, e-learning pros, taxonomists, bloggers, documentation and training managers, and content creators of all types hang out. It’s much more than a blog. It’s a place to join peers, to share, to collaborate, to contribute, to find information.

“Social networks are about connecting people and ideas,” said Scott Abel, manager of The Content Wrangler Community. “Web-based social networks are the natural evolution of the web from a passive broadcast medium to a multi-directional communication platform that more closely supports the way humans interact in the physical world. We congregate. We interact with birds of a feather. Until the advent of social networking tools, the web failed miserably to connect people in meaningful ways.”

The Content Wrangler Community, launched officially March 8, has attracted more than 600 members from all over the world. Members come from a variety of disciplines and experience levels.

“Some of our members really gravitate to the social features of the community,” Abel says. “Things like videos, music, a discussion forums are some of the most popular. And, of course, it’s a much better medium for interaction compared to old-school listservs. Members can see each other online and converse in real time. And, the addition of photos helps humanize the site. Just look at the many different types of members that have joined the community already and you’ll begin to appreciate how diverse a global social network of this type can be. It’s exciting!”

The Content Wrangler Community includes a variety of features including:

- Keyword searchable archive
- Keyword searchable member directory
- Music and video players
- Groups and discussion forums
- Customizable home pages
- Member-to-member communication
- Integration with Facebook applications

The Content Wrangler Community provides a variety of members only services, including discounts on upcoming conferences, free access to tutorials, books, webinars, and online learning courses. The community is an extension of TheContentWrangler.com ([http://www.thecontentwrangler.com](http://www.thecontentwrangler.com)), a popular blog that attracts thousands of visitors each day interested in topics related to content creation, management, and delivery.

If you need additional information about The Content Wrangler Community, just ask!
Welcome new members and congratulate new senior members!

Please welcome our new members. We hope to see you at upcoming events!

- Cynthia Edmonds
- Christian Kearney
- Julie Szanto
- Janean Voss
- Lori Woods — Student member

Congratulations to our senior members! Thank you for your continuing membership.

- Joel Lantz
- Carla Locke
- Robert Radcliffe

Handy hint: Transparent text captions in Adobe Captivate

By Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)

In Adobe Captivate 3, text in transparent captions sometimes appears as bold in the finished output when you have not marked any text as bold. Fortunately, there is an easy workaround posted in the Adobe Captivate forums. (It may not make any sense, but it works.)

Add a line with a bullet to your transparent text caption. If your text doesn’t need any bullets, then make a blank line with a bullet at the bottom, and drag the bottom edge of the caption up to hide the bullet.

Interesting articles

*Why I belong to STC*, by Clyde Parson, president of President, Suncoast STC:
http://stcforum.org/viewtopic.php?id=1249

An article on patent work as an option for technical writers, by STC member Steven Oppenheimer, M.A.:
www.oppenheimercommunications.com/Patents/PatentAgentCareers.shtml

Job news

[NOTE: As of 2014, employment resources have shifted to the chapter’s LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the current chapter website for details.]

Noticed that Pepperl+Fuchs, Inc., in Twinsburg is looking for a technical writer. If you are interested, see cleveland.careerboard.com/cgi-bin/a/highlightjob.cgi?jobid=107288

If you are looking for a position, remember to check the NEO STC job site at www.neostc.org/jobs/openings.php! Remember to update your résumés.

Employers: Job listings on the NEO STC Web site are free and reach a targeted audience! See neostc.org/jobs/

Chapter Reminders

NEO STC listserv

[NOTE: As of 2015, the chapter listserv has been supplanted by our LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the current chapter website for details.]

The NEO STC listserv is another way to stay connected with other NEO STC members. It’s easy and it does not generate huge amounts of e-mail!

For information on subscribing, see www.neostc.org/official/listserv.htm

Featured content: Premium page for members

[NOTE: As of 2016, the current NEO STC website does not have password-protected content.]

NEO STC has some Premium pages for NEO STC members only. These pages include links to our very own Wiki, an Employer Directory — a listing of business who hire technical communicators — and more.

To enter the Premium pages, you will need a user name and password — this is different from the STC International site. Please contact our Webmaster for password information.

Change of address? Remember to tell the STC office

Send new addresses to the STC office to avoid interrupted delivery of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. Some members assume that informing the post office of their new address is enough to ensure that all of their mail is forwarded. However, the United States Postal Service forwards only first-class mail, not...
publications such as Intercom and Technical Communication.

Members may also update their contact and mailing information on the STC website.

Lines & Letters information

Editors and contributors

Managing Editor:
- Barbara Philbrick (BarbPhilbrick@caslonsvcs.com)

Co-editors:
- Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)
- Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net)
- Sharon Resar (str_cdp@yahoo.com)
- Paul Holland (paul_holland@mac.com)
- Sherri Henkin (sleah47@juno.com)
- Sarah Burke
- Jan Lowry (jlowry@aol.com)
- Bob Clark (clarkre55@aol.com)

Love it? Hate it? Let us know! Contact us: newsletter@neostc.org

See something interesting? Tell us about it!

Many of our NEO STC members are also members of another STC community or SIG. If you receive a newsletter and find an interesting article, please consider passing it on to the Lines and Letters editors at newsletter@neostc.org.

You can also submit articles directly through http://www.neostc.org/lines/submit.html.