

Presidential moments: Notes to Santa

By Amy Vogt (avogt@ppipubs.com)

This time of year is a special time of nostalgia and traditions. All of us celebrate the holidays a little differently. My family celebrates Christmas, and I want to share with you one of our Christmas traditions.

Every Christmas Eve there is a fire blazing in the fireplace; we are surrounded by relatives and friends. It smells like a holiday with a delicious mix of oyster stew, perfumed kisses from aunts, and homemade iced cookies.

After all of the children are wired on chocolate and peppermints, we interrupt them from running around the house with the dog and pass out tissue paper squares and pens to each of them. Our definition of "children" is generous, of course. We include anyone who still believes in Santa or needs a less-than-subtle way to hint to their spouse or boyfriend about their most cherished gift.

Parents help the littlest ones to write their notes to Santa and pray that there is still a toy store open if their child decides that the only thing they want is a Thomas the Tank Engine—something that they haven't heard of until that moment. Older children have much larger gifts on their lists: cars, vacations, houses, jobs, health for themselves or others, food for the hungry, and peace in the world.

After the notes are finished, someone grabs a bell. All of the children pile over each other to get outside to see if they can spot the man in red or his sleigh. Each child rings the bell and soon someone yells that they've spotted or — even better, heard — a reindeer or Santa himself. The excitement is almost tangible. Santa ... on the roof ... right then.

Everyone rushes back inside. Each child waits their turn to carefully put the tissue paper on the end of the long, metal stoker. The stoker is held precariously just over the top of the fire. The older folks believe that the heat of the fire carries the tissue paper note off the metal and up the chimney. Everyone else believes that Santa's elves climb down the chimney to take their note to Santa's sleigh on the roof.

However you celebrate, I wish all of you can experience the magic and excitement of this holiday season. This can be as simple as sharing time with family and friends, or it can mean sharing your talents to help someone else's holiday wishes come true. Whether or not you get what is on your note to Santa, I wish you a Happy

Holiday and peaceful new year — spent with STC friends, of course!

Don't forget that if you encourage a new member to join STC before the end of the year, you and our chapter can achieve recognition and have the opportunity to win prizes. See stc.org for more information.

January meeting reminder: Current needs and trends in the northeast Ohio marketplace for technical communicators

- ◆ Date: Thursday, January 8, 2009.
- ◆ Place: Mavis Winkle's in Independence

January's meeting will feature an up-to-date assessment of Northeast Ohio's technical communication needs over the past 12 months and some of the issues and opportunities the current economic downturn has presented. Much has changed over the past year, and the astute technical communicator can use the information in this session to modify and enhance their marketing position to not only survive, but to thrive.

Presenter: Bob Dianetti is founder and President of Radcom, a training and technical communication consulting company located in Hudson, Ohio. Radcom's sales have increased 60% over the past 12 months during the current recession. For more information, visit the Radcom web site.

Watch the NEO STC web site for further details! Hope to see you there!

December meeting reminder: Holiday Social and Competitions Awards

- ◆ Date: Thursday, December 11, 2008
- ◆ Place: Great Lakes Brewing Company, Cleveland

Upcoming events

- ◆ 12/11/08: December meeting: Holiday Social and Competitions Awards. See the NEO STC web site for more detail.
- ◆ 12/17/08: NEO STC Social: Wine Tasting at 2182 Bistro and Wine Bar. See the NEO STC web site for more detail.
- ◆ 12/17/08: Last day to renew your STC membership and be entered in a drawing to win one of five iPod Shuffles! You must renew online at STC website.

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- ◆ 12/19/08: Networking lunch: Pad Thai, 3545 Brookwall, Fairlawn.
- ◆ 1/11/09: NEO STC Social: Beginning Yoga Class at Namaste Yoga Studio. See the NEO STC web site for more detail.
- ◆ 1/8/2009: January meeting: Current needs and trends in the northeast Ohio marketplace for technical communicators.
- ◆ 1/10/09: Professional Development Workshop: Adobe Technical Communication Suite — Integration, presented by Alan Houser. See Professional Development Workshop for more information.
- ◆ 2/7/09: NEO STC Social: Skiing at Boston Mills in Peninsula. See the NEO STC web site for more detail.
- ◆ 5/3 — 5/6/09: STC's 2009 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA.

NEO STC membership campaign

The new STC Reach for the Stars Member-Get-a-Member campaign is now up and running!

STC chapters, SIGs and individual members can recruit new members and become eligible to win fabulous prizes. For details about this campaign, just click the gold star at the top of the stc.org home page.

NEO STC has set a goal of recruiting 15 new members by December 31, and we need your help. Did you know that a large percentage of new members join STC simply because someone asked them?

Professional Development Workshop: Adobe Technical Communication Suite — Integration

You can now register for Alan Houser's Professional Development Workshop. This workshop will be held on Saturday, January 10, 2009 at Kent State University.

The Adobe Technical Communication Suite provides new possibilities for single-source publishing and integrated workflows for producing print, PDF, and online information deliverables. During this workshop, you will learn to improve your productivity and create interactive content using the new integration features in Adobe FrameMaker, RoboHelp, and Adobe Captivate.

This workshop will provide an introduction to using the components of the Adobe Technical Communication

Suite for single-source and multi-channel publishing. Students will learn:

- ◆ How to plan FrameMaker documents for single-source publishing.
- ◆ Basics of RoboHelp for creating online user assistance.
- ◆ Importing FrameMaker documents by reference into RoboHelp projects.
- ◆ Mapping styles and importing FrameMaker TOCs.
- ◆ Using FrameMaker conditional text and RoboHelp conditional build tags to customize published content.
- ◆ Using user-defined variables in FrameMaker and RoboHelp to represent commonly-used names and phrases.
- ◆ Embedding 3D (from Adobe Acrobat 3D) and multimedia content (from Adobe Captivate) into FrameMaker and RoboHelp projects.
- ◆ Publishing RoboHelp projects.

Presenter Bio:

Alan Houser is president of Group Wellesley, Inc., a Pittsburgh-based firm that provides consulting, training, and application development services to support single-source publishing, electronic publishing, and XML-based publishing. Houser is an Associate Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and a member of the OASIS Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) Technical Committee. He is a popular conference presenter, and has delivered seminars in structured authoring, XML, and DITA around the globe.

Throw your hat into the ring!

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

Have you ever wanted to:

- ◆ Gain leadership skills
- ◆ Be a part of making important decisions
- ◆ Work with genuinely dedicated professionals
- ◆ Enhance your skill set on your résumé?

If so, the NEO STC Executive Board is the place to gain all that, and much more.

As Immediate Past President, it is my responsibility to seek qualified candidates for: Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary for the 2009-2010 year, when Amy Vogt

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and Denise Kadilak advance to the positions of Immediate Past President and President, respectively, as written in our bylaws. Our bylaws also describe the Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary positions — read more about them.

As a board member in any of these positions, you will receive mentoring, training, and support. If you are interested, or have any questions, send me a message by the end of January 2009.

Remember, also, there are many other opportunities to help on committees. Check out our list of committees. Don't worry about being shy or inexperienced — we've been there, and we'll help you — you can do it!

Cleveland Orchestra social networking event review

By Amy Vogt

It had been several years since my husband and I had been to Severance Hall. This time we were lucky enough to be with our own NEO STC orchestra-expert, Kim Lindsey. As a former usher and member of the chorus, Kim gave us an insider's view of Severance Hall. Tricia Spayer and her husband, Jim, joined us to celebrate their fifth wedding anniversary at the event!

We shared dinner together at the restaurant at Severance Hall before the concert. The restaurant is run by Sammy's; the food was incredible. I chose the flourless chocolate cake for dessert. This was a decadent start to the season of holiday eating.

Franz Welser-Möst had the night off, but we were honored to hear Herbert Blomstedt conduct The Cleveland Orchestra in Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 at Severance Hall. The lecture beforehand gave more information about the piece and the conductor. It was a powerful performance and an exciting night out for NEO STC!

Congratulations to Sarah Burke on the recent addition to her family!

Fiona Margaret Burke was born on November 12, 2008 at 9:59 a.m.

She weighed in at 8 lb, 10 oz and was 19.5 inches long.

Member profile: Heidi Emhoff

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

Heidi Emhoff is currently a judge in NEO STC competitions. In the past she was on the Competition Committee and was chapter treasurer for two years: 2005 and 2006.

Her educational background includes a Bachelor of Arts degree in English (with a Creative Writing Emphasis) obtained from Hiram College in 1997. Currently, she is employed as a documentation specialist for Software Answers, Inc., a company that provides school districts with ProgressBook, an online grade book package. Her past employment includes working as a project writer for Radcom. She has also worked at GED and Intuit — with positions ranging from technical writer to support rep and QA analyst. As she puts it, "you could say I have been 'around the block' in the technical industry."

Currently living in Stow, where she bought a house in 2005, Heidi has two cats — Nicki and Cleo — whom she says she spoils regularly. She add about her background, "Though I grew up in Ohio, my heart belongs to Colorado where I lived for a year and a half until I got homesick for my family and friends. However, I don't think my time there is through: I dream of someday owning a second home somewhere in the mountains so that I can retreat there from November until May every year (which is the best time to be in Colorado and the worst time to be in Ohio). Maybe in my retirement?"

Concerning her other interests, Heidi notes, "I'm an avid cyclist in the summer, having completed 3,161 miles so far this year (still a month left). I spend most of my free time touring all over the state on organized rides or just riding with the Akron Bicycle Club, of which I'm an active member. I am what you would call a touring cyclist (as opposed to someone who races). I just enjoy taking 60 – 70 mile rides out in the country and especially up challenging hills. Sometimes I do 100 mile rides (called centuries) for an extra challenge. In the winter, I trade my bike in for skis and try to hit Seven Springs or Holiday Valley as often as possible. I like to take one trip out west each year where the skiing is absolutely the best. (Another reason why I would love to live in Colorado from November through May!) Somehow amidst all that activity, I still find time to enjoy a good book, creative writing, fine wine, and amateur astronomy."

Heidi was recently trained to volunteer with the Robinson Memorial Hospital's Visiting Nurse and

Hospice, but has not been put on any assignments yet. She intends to work with the bereavement group as a volunteer. She explains, "The reason why I am volunteering at the hospice with the bereavement group is because I am a widow — my husband, Michael, died in 2001 at the age of 32 (I was 26). I feel that by offering my services as a compassionate listener, I can help give back to the community a service that I felt was sorely needed when I was going through the grieving process myself. People who are grieving don't always have someone to talk to who can empathize with their pain, or even those who are willing to listen without trying to 'fix' the problem. Therefore, understanding the grieving process — and having survived it fully — I feel the calling to give this gift of compassion to provide others an easier time than I had. I can't say that I'll be any better than those who tried to help me, but I'm willing to give it a try!" Heidi says that her desire to help others heal from something she experienced is core to her being and an urgent passion. She can be reached at emhoffh@Software-Answers.com.

The 2008 WritersUA Skills and Technologies Survey is in progress.

<http://www.writersua.com/>

Please contribute your experiences to help improve the value of the results. No login is required. You can answer as much or as little of the survey as you choose. The results will be freely available to all on the WritersUA web site next month.

What STC means to me: Observations from our members

From Paul Hanrahan, STC member:

In a difficult job market, the Society for Technical Communications is a source of mutual support for some of us practicing the same craft in northeast Ohio. Mutual support is more than the networking lunches, where we can commiserate about challenges at home or on the job. Mutual support is the good advice Kevin Halaburda provided over a cup of coffee recently, the job lead Lori Woods provided me with that turned into a real opportunity and Renee Murray's willingness to accept me as a member of the employment committee. Support from Tricia Spayer when I was evaluating Author-It allowed me to offer something of real value to a client: the benefit of an objective opinion on a product substantiated by real world experience.

The support from STC members, both general words of encouragement and specific acts like assisting me with my résumé, that I received during the last year has made my decision to renew my membership with the STC an easy one. In a tough market where I am always planning ahead for a period of down time between assignments, STC membership is a good investment for practical reasons. Kevin's good advice to me when I chatted with him about the market here in northeast Ohio was that I provide "added value" for the next client I worked for. Added value for a writer can be a difficult to identify. As a writer, how do I convince a client that their hiring me will somehow improve their bottom line? Kevin shared his experiences with me on how he recently demonstrated to a client how they would be better off financially, in our struggling local economy, if they implemented the ideas he'd promoted with them through his writing. The specific support Kevin gave me, in combination with the productive job lead Lori Woods provided me with, were the opportunity and preparation I needed to secure my most recent assignment.

My recent success at finding an assignment is the result of how supportive NEO STC has been — not simply a matter of luck. Those sharing a profession often band together to support and protect each other, but the result is not always as fruitful as my experience at STC. STC has provided me with the right combination of community involvement, professional development, practical services and networking. The success of the STC can be credited to a pursuit of excellence that is respected not just by its members but employers as well.

From Sherri Henkin, STC Senior Member:

In a nutshell, NEO STC is a

- Network ... of people with lots of
- Energy and
- Originality. It is part of a larger
- Synergistic group of expertly
- Trained and
- Creative professionals.

Thanks, NEO STC, for your warm welcome and continued camaraderie!

From Jeanette Evans, STC Associate Fellow:

STC has helped me throughout the years with my work and my career.

One example that comes to mind is that I saw some excellent applications for the Web with STC competitions entries. These were ideas I could bring back to my own projects.

As another example, at STC conferences I have been introduced to new ideas that have been of value. Many years ago, I remember seeing for the first time at a conference a projection on a wall of a computer screen. This early exposure gave me a chance to bring this idea back to my employer as something we could use in meetings.

STC also exposed me for the first time to the idea of HTML-based online help many years ago when it was first being used. I probably otherwise would not have known about this option so early or used it successfully, especially as an early adopter.

Due to involvement in NEO STC and STC, I have also successfully found work several times. As an example, several individuals found my resume on neostc.org and contacted me about projects. In addition, the jobs postings on neostc.org are truly invaluable, possibly the most valuable service NEO STC provides.

In addition, many NEO STC and STC members have been a source of inspiration to me as I feel I have seen very hard workers bring energy and ideas to the organization and the field, helping me bring new energy and ideas to my own work. It is hard to know where to start with examples of this. It feels like the examples of people who have inspired me throughout the years are truly numerous.

Finally, STC provides an opportunity to share information through papers and articles. Publishing in a newsletter, *Intercom*, or paper can be a broadening and valuable experience that many employers appreciate. Further, STC provides a professional presentation for these published papers and articles, as well as valuable vehicles to archive and search for them. In the biggest picture, STC lets us share information and try to make contributions in our field.

What STC means to the President of Pittsburgh's STC Chapter

By Bryce Walat

This article is taken with permission from the President's Column as published in the October 2008 version of Pittsburgh STC's newsletter, Blue Pencil, Vol. 45, No. 2 - Oct 2008.

Recently, I've heard other STC members talking about the economy, especially the rising cost of fuel, food, health care, and other necessities, and the falling value of their homes and investments. For some STC members, their membership in STC is a prime candidate for an extra item to cut from their personal or professional budgets. You may be thinking about not renewing your membership in STC when it expires, or if you aren't a current member, you may be having second thoughts about joining STC. If you still plan to renew or join STC, you may also be thinking about cutting back on meetings or events.

Before you decide not to renew or join STC, or skip a meeting you would like to attend, I would like to ask you this question: Over your lifetime, what is your most valuable and biggest asset?

- ◆ Your home
- ◆ Your education
- ◆ Your career
- ◆ Your retirement plan

Answer: Your career is your biggest and most important asset. Your career gives you the income to get the necessities of life, such as food, clothing, and shelter, and also to get an education, real estate, a retirement plan, and other investments and assets. When you think about how much of your time every day you spend working and how much of your lifetime is spent working, you can see why your career is so important. That's why it is important to manage your career well.

STC helps you manage your career by helping you to:

- ◆ Launch your technical communication career or transition into a technical communication career
- ◆ Learn new skills and enhance existing ones
- ◆ Find opportunities to network with fellow technical communication professionals
- ◆ Find a new or better job

- ◆ Launch an independent technical communication career
- ◆ Find help when you need it
- ◆ Improve your soft skills, such as public speaking or team-building

The cost of STC membership is chump change compared to the value it adds to your career. For example, STC's free or low-cost articles, seminars, and conferences give you knowledge and skills to not only keep up with changes in the fast-paced technical communication field, but also get ready for the technical communication jobs of the future.

On a personal note, I've now been through four career transitions in my eight years as a technical communicator. In some cases, they occurred because of circumstances beyond my control, such as economic conditions; in others, there were things that I could have done or not done that might have led to a different outcome. In every case, I found STC to be a helpful resource to manage these transitions. STC proved valuable as a go-to for technical communication job leads, a source for ways to improve my technical and interpersonal skills, and a place to know that I wasn't alone in my career transition. STC Pittsburgh's WorkQuest was, as the MasterCard slogan goes, priceless. Also, in every case, employers and potential employers noticed my membership in STC on my résumé, and some even knew of me from STC.

As President of STC Pittsburgh, part of my job is promoting the chapter and the Society, and I wrote this column as a way to promote STC and to make a case that STC is more important to your career in times like these. But I also wrote it to explain how STC helped me and why I joined STC.

The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest

"It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness." — Edward George Bulwer-Lytton, *Paul Clifford* (1830)

In 1982, Prof. Scott Rice in the English Dept. at San Jose State University started the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest. The challenge: **write an opening sentence** to rival Edward George Bulwer-Lytton's infamous

opening sentence to his novel, *Paul Clifford*, which is reproduced here.

We want YOU, dear reader, to take up this challenge, write your own opening sentence, and bring it to our March 12th meeting. Read your entry aloud during dinner at the meeting and be in the running for a new Webster's Thesaurus from your peers at the NEO STC. You'll still have plenty of time to submit your entries yourself to the official contest by April 15th, a very ominous date indeed!

For examples and more information, visit the website at <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>

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.]

To subscribe or change your settings for the Northeast Ohio STC listserv, see

<http://mailman.stc.org/mailman/listinfo/stcneohio-l>.

Please let Kris Henige, the NEO STC Listserv Administrator, know if you have any questions.

Premium pages 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 businesses that 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.

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Love it? Hate it? Let us know! Contact us:
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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>.