Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's corner: Happy holidays!

As the end of the year approaches, we all start to ponder what the next year will be like, and we start thinking about what we want to see happen. Our goals begin to take shape as we begin realizing what needs to be taken care of. One of my goals this year is to get a new dishwasher – her name is Ariel and she is just about to turn 10 years old in May. I think she'd be a great addition to the dishwashing team! The other goal I have is to continue to help you as members find and keep the value in STC. I've said it before – STC is a fantastic organization that I am so proud to be a part of, and I want you to feel the same! I will continue to reach out to the member community and do my part as president to help each and every one of you find more value.

Another point of interest is that the NEO STC budget has been approved by International. If you are interested in taking a look at next year's numbers, please contact our treasurer, Lisa Mileusnich.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone that it is time to renew your membership! Please remember to keep Northeast Ohio as your chapter, we love having you!

Sharon Jendrisak, NEO STC President

Holiday raffle items

NEO STC Holiday Raffle: Raffle items needed — there's still time to donate!

There's still time to donate items for the NEO STC raffle! Although you do not have to register donated gifts in advance — please feel free to bring anything you want to the Holiday Banquet at the Hilton Cleveland East-Beachwood on December 8th — advanced notice of gifts is greatly appreciated. If you know now what you would like to donate, please contact Janean Voss.

Money raised from this year's raffle will be used to fund free or discounted admissions to upcoming NEO STC workshops. The number of free or discounted seats available depends on how much money we raise in December.

Some examples of items donated in previous years include gift certificates, themed gift baskets (for example, wine baskets), books, autographed sports memorabilia, and an iPod.

Everyone attending the Holiday Banquet will receive one free raffle ticket. Additional tickets for the raffle items will be sold during the Holiday Banquet. The raffle will take place at the end of the banquet.

Book review

The Language Wars: A History of Proper English by Henry Hitchings (2011)

Reviewed by Jeanette Evans

Note to readers: A version of this book review is planned to appear in *Technical Communication*.

If you are interested in learning more about the history of the English language and its use – or just want to refresh your memory on the subject, this book could be a good reference for you. In addition to finding a summary of the history of the development of English and its use from its earliest roots, you will also find Hitchings' comments on current usage and development, including references to contemporaries such as John MacWhorter, a linguist who argues the idea that "writing is just a method for engraving on paper what comes out of our mouths" (p. 215).

Why is there a market for what Hitchings calls grammatical law-making? It is a result of increased social mobility? In part, yes. In addition, the upper-class also wanted rules and guides. Hitchings explains that "An upper class revulsion at the thought of being contaminated with middle-class vulgarity was a strong motive for the eighteenth-center codification of grammar. There was an intricate relationship between linguistic intolerance and the twin energies of aspiration and insecurity. This remains" (p. 87).

The suppression of certain words in the English language is the topic of one chapter of the book. Hitchings notes examples that come from books such as Hugh Lofting's Doctor Dolittle, Ray Bradbury's Fahrenheit 451, and of course Huckleberry Finn. He explains how Thomas Bowdler's The Family Shakespeare is another example of censorship. This version of Shakespeare omitted words that had to do with anything sexual. Thus, we have the term to bowdlerize in our vocabulary today.

Discussion about the proper use of English can be as Hitchings puts it "cantankerous or petulant... but thinking and talking about what makes good English good and bad English bad can be, and should be, a pleasure" (p. 336).

NEO STC listserv and LinkedIn community group

Changes are coming to the NEO STC listserv and LinkedIn Northeast Ohio STC Community Group.

In early November, the NEO STC officials phased out the NEO STC listserv. We also sent information about how to join LinkedIn to all of our listserv subscribers who were not already members of our LinkedIn Northeast Ohio STC Community group. Our LinkedIn group was established in January 2009, and has over 100 members. The LinkedIn group will continue the role of the listserv as a means for you to communicate and network with each other.

If you are not currently a member of our LinkedIn group, and would like information about how to join it, information is available on our community's website.

All membership requests to the LinkedIn group are approved by an administrator, but messages themselves are not moderated. Membership is open to STC members and those in a technical communication field.

Competitions update

A big thank you goes out to all in NEO STC involved in judging this year and especially Nicole Derr who headed the effort.

The following is a summary, as a reference, of information about judging in the STC publications competition adapted from the *2012 Handbook for Judges*. This handbook is available from STC.

What are the levels of awards?

There are three levels of awards. In descending order, they are:

♦ Distinguished

♦ Excellence

♦ Merit

These awards do not represent first, second, or third places, but are levels of accomplishment with reference to a standard. It's true that the words do not necessarily indicate level. However, an argument against using numbers is that people are more likely to hang a certificate in their office that says "Merit" than if it says "Third Place." The words are better for the certificates and the image conveyed. The following lists the award levels and gives a description of each. You may want to use this chart as a reference as you discuss awards for each entry.

Distinguished

Clearly superior in all areas. The entry contains no major flaws and few, if any, minor flaws. It applies the principles of technical communication in an outstanding way, particularly in the way that it anticipates and fulfills the needs of its audience.

Excellence

Consistently meets high standards in all areas. The entry might contain a single major flaw or a few minor flaws. The entry clearly (if slightly imperfectly) demonstrates an exceptional understanding of technical communication principles.

Merit

Consistently meets high standards in most areas. The entry might contain a small number of major or minor flaws, but it still applies technical communication principles in a highly proficient manner.

What are major and minor flaws

Major and minor flaws are considered as follows:

Major flaw substantially confuses or hinders the user.

Examples:

♦ illogical organization

♦ incomplete or missing content

♦ consistently unclear style

♦ no table of contents, headers, page numbers, or index

♦ inaccurate page numbers in table of contents or index

♦ procedural steps buried in text

♦ a consistent pattern of spelling and grammatical errors

♦ confusing terminology

♦ difficult navigation

♦ poor visual quality

Minor flaw might cause a momentary stumble, but doesn't slow down the user much.

Examples:

♦ a few instances of spelling and grammatical errors

♦ misplaced graphics

♦ inconsistent capitalization

♦ confusing terminology

Any entry that receives an award must be thorough, accurate, useful, appropriate, and well executed. Note that the entry size might determine whether a flaw is major or minor.

For example, misspelling a client's name in a short marketing brochure would be considered a major flaw; a 500-page document with one instance of a misspelled name that was spelled correctly dozens of other times would be considered a minor flaw.

Talk of the town

NEO STC has quite a collection of speakers presenting at the STC 2012 Technical Communication Summit, which will be held 20 to 23 May 2012 in Rosemont-Chicago, Illinois. They are:

♦ **Lisa Adair** of Rockwell Automation, presenting "An Editing Evaluation Workshop."

♦ **Jennifer Beaujon** and **Sharon Jendrisak** of Radcom, presenting "Instructional Design meets Technical Writing."

♦ **Kathleen Ruggeri** and **Liz Gardipee** of Rockwell Automation, presenting "Project Tracking and Metrics Using SharePoint."

♦ **Sarah Burke** will be presenting as part of the panel discussion "Why Technical Editors are Still Relevant."

Best of luck to all of you!

NEO STC member **Paul Holland** is collecting used eyeglasses to take on his mission trip to El Salvador. If you have any eyeglasses that you would like to donate, please bring them to the January meeting.

What is an STC Associate Fellow?

According to stc.org an "STC Associate Fellow is a Senior Member who has been formally recognized by the Society for having attained distinction in the field of technical communication."

NEO STC has now nurtured several STC Associate Fellows. Bob Young recently joined the fellowship that includes Bege Bowers, Angie Dianetti, Bob Dianetti, Jill McCauslin, Barb Philbrick, and Jeanette Evans. The stc.org site goes on to note the following general information about the STC Associate Fellow definition.

"STC members who have been active in the field of technical communication for at least 15 years and have been Senior Members for at least five years, as of the recommendation submission deadline, are eligible to be considered for advancement to the rank of Associate Fellow.

In addition, Associate Fellow candidates must have accomplished one or more of the following:

♦ Been responsible for important work in the field of technical communication.

♦ Done notable original work that has contributed to the advancement of technical communication.

♦ Made significant contributions to the Society and helped to tell STC's powerful story.

Associate Fellows are among the stars of our profession. They usually have held multiple leadership positions, published papers, or written articles or books; they've given dozens of presentations and mentored those who are new to our field.

Senior Members may not apply for the rank of Associate Fellow; they must be nominated by a committee composed of Fellows and Associate Fellows.

Any voting STC member can submit a completed Recommendation for Associate Fellow to the Associate Fellows Nominating Committee.

The committee reviews the completed forms and nominates to the STC Board of Directors the candidates it believes have met all requirements.

The Board considers each nominated candidate and may, by a two-thirds vote of all members, elect him or her an Associate Fellow."