Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

President's column: Celebration of professional growth and networking

By Amy Vogt (avogt11@yahoo.com)

Highlights from the 56th annual STC conference in Atlanta

There was a large representation from Northeast Ohio at the 56th annual STC conference in Atlanta from May 3 to May 6. It was an opportunity for networking with our own NEO STC community and connecting with fellow members from around the world. I always look forward to meeting new people and hearing what the vendors have to offer at the STC conferences. The conference highlights for me were the Awards Banquet; the Keynote speaker, David Pogue; and sessions with Jack Molisani and Alan Houser.

Awards Banquet

We received recognition as a chapter and celebrated with our two new Associate Fellows, Bob Dianetti and Jill McCauslin, as they were honored at the Awards Banquet on Tuesday, May 5, 2009. All members from NEO STC who attended the banquet shared the stage for the presentation of the Chapter of Distinction and Pacesetter awards. The Cleveland Cavaliers made the evening even better when they won their playoff game a few hours later. It was an exciting night for Northeast Ohio!

Keynote Speaker

I have a confession to make: I don't always attend the Keynote presentation. It's true — I have slept in or networked through some of these opening sessions at past STC conferences. I'm glad that I did not miss David Pogue on Monday morning though! David is the author of the Missing Manual series, a New York Times technology columnist, and Emmy-winning CBS news correspondent. He gave a critique of some of the common tools in our industry and presented usability issues. His presentation was not only extremely entertaining, but also applicable to the field of technical communication — I was not the only attendee who laughed until I cried. The end of his presentation was an unexpected song he composed and played on a keyboard about the iPhone. He was a brilliant speaker and energized the crowd to kick-off the conference!

Sessions with Jack Molisani and Alan Houser

I attended Jack Molisani's session, "Portfolios and Interview Strategies: How to Ace a Job Interview." Jack covered tips for job seekers to market themselves in this presentation. He stressed that the portfolio is a tool to help control an interview — its purpose is to show that you are a professional in the field and that you've really done what you said you've done. He suggested including a project plan, writing samples, results of the project plan, and a "before and after" sample. The writing samples he included in his portfolio were less about actual writing pieces and more about a proof of expertise and success in the field. This session was especially relevant and timely for job seekers.

Alan Houser presented the Adobe-sponsored session, Author, Manage, and Publish Topic-based Content with Technical Communications Suite 2. Alan discussed the new ways we'll work with content and the tools in TC2. For attendees with Adobe FrameMaker experience, this presentation was a helpful introduction to the new version.

Northeast Ohio Society for Technical Communication (STC) earns top international award

A Chapter of Distinction award, the highest honor of the Society of Technical Communication (STC), was presented to representatives of the Northeast Ohio STC chapter at the annual Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta on May 5.

The NEO Chapter was the only chapter of its size to earn STC's top international honor, which was presented by STC international president Cindy Currie. The chapter was recognized for its "innovative member services," achievement of impressive new-member growth and membership renewals, and the desire of its members to "consistently seek challenges that enhance technical communication."

"We were proud to be recognized as one of the world's most vibrant and energetic chapters," said Amy Vogt, NEO STC chapter president. "Throughout the year, in everything from professional development seminars, to member communications, to local and charity events and scholarship awards, chapter members showed great dedication and enthusiasm." While larger chapters in Chicago and Washington, DC received similar recognition, Vogt noted, "no other chapter of our size was recognized for this level of effort."

NEO STC members accepting the Chapter of Distinction award

The Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication includes 140 technical and professional writers, editors, graphic and web designers, and information developers from counties encompassing Greater Cleveland, Akron and Canton, Youngstown, and Ashtabula. Our work provides essential technical information required by global users of the industrial, technical, and information-related products developed by companies throughout Northeastern Ohio.

Upcoming events

NEO STC events

♦ 5/30/09: Waterfall hike in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Watch your e-mail for details!

♦ 6/13/09: Join us for an Indians game. Watch your e-mail for details!

♦ 6/19/09: Networking lunch at Cheesecake Factory in Westlake. See http://neostc.org/calendar/

♦ 7/15/09: Networking lunch. Claddagh Irish Pub, 25389 Cedar Rd., Legacy Village. See NEO STC website for more detail.

♦ 7/18/09: Listen to the Cleveland Orchestra under the stars at Blossom. Watch your e-mail for details!

Other events of interest

♦ 6/04/09: Visio, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 6/11/09: Fundamentals of Technical Writing, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 6/17/09: Introduction to Framemaker, Radcom, Inc. See

http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 6/24/09: NOCAnites Networking Soiree, Canal Park in Akron. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 6/24/09: Online Learning, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 6/25/09: Intermediate Framemaker, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 7/9/09: PowerPoint for Elearning, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 7/15/09: Facilitation Skills, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 7/21/09: Customizing your SharePoint Site, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 7/29/09: Intermediate Framemaker, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 8/6/09: Introduction to RoboHelp, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 8/12/09: Introduction to Captivate, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 8/19/09: Online Networking, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 8/27/09: MS Word for Tech Writers, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

♦ 9/10/09: Intermediate RoboHelp, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

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- 9/16/09: Intermediate Captivate, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

- 9/23/09: Instructional Design, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

Events reminder

Watch your e-mail for summer events, including networking lunches and social events. You can also check the calendar at http://www.neostc.org/calendar/.

Have a lovely summer!

Professional Development Workshops in April and May

Thanks to Geoff Hart and Patrick Hofmann!

On April 17th and 18th, we welcomed Geoff Hart to Northeast Ohio and shared dinner with him at La Dolce Vita in Little Italy. Attendees had lots of positive feedback about his presentation on Information Design at Kent State University. Thanks to Denise Kadilak for organizing this workshop.

Patrick Hofmann traveled to Cleveland on May 16 to present the workshop, Intuitive images: creating and evaluating usable graphics for international audiences. This entertaining presentation was not just for graphic designers, but was applicable to all technical communicators. Thanks to Tricia Spayer for organizing this workshop.

Conference review: WritersUA, Seattle Washington

By Paulette Mitchell Henning (pmhenning@ra.rockwell.com)

At the end of March, I attended the WritersUA conference in Seattle, Washington. Although the attendance was down (from close to 1,000 attendees in previous years to just over 300 this year), the conference was packed with three days of sessions and activities for all who attended.

There were sessions on a variety of disciples, such as eLearning, the web, eService, or ISO standards. There were also sessions on a range of development tools, such as Captivate, PhotoShop, the Adobe Technical Communication Suite, Flare or Blaze, and XMetal.

A variety of methodologies were discussed as well at this year's conference. There were sessions that focused on structured authoring and reuse, XML design and development, or agile development. Added to these sessions were general user assistance topics, such as Tony Self's presentation about "What if the Reader Can't Read?" Most of you realize that Tony's article with the same title appeared in the February 2009 edition of Intercom. There was also an open session (the only session offered during a time slot so that all are free to attend) about what the user assistance community can expect from Microsoft in the post-Gates Era.

So, although the conference was not as well attended as Joe Welinske — the conference's founder and president — would have preferred it to be, he promised that as long as people still wanted to attend, he would still be open for service.

Workshop review: Information design

By Kim Lindsey (ke.lindsey@windstream.net)

On a sunny Saturday in mid-April, members of NEO STC gathered in the Business Administration building on the Kent State campus. Our purpose: to learn all we could from STC's reigning Infomation Design (ID) guru, Geoff Hart.

The workshop was titled, "Designing documents that people really read and use*, (* a whirwind tour of 'information design')." This holistic review of basic ID principles functioned well both as an introduction for the many KSU students in attendance and as a refresher for current practitioners. Exercises and brainstorming sessions gave us the opportunity to work as teams to put each major point in practice.

Geoff suggested that audience pain points often show up on blogs — especially for websites and commercially available software and hardware — and that a little searching can yield valuable insights while we're in the planning stages of a project.

He also described research suggesting that "Readers tend to blame themselves for their failures," indicating that one of our goals must be to build their confidence.

Geoff ended with a summary heuristic for document design that distilled all the information into 12 brief steps, beginning with audience analysis and ending with usability testing in the field.

When we're in the midst of a project, many things — deadlines, scope creep, reluctant SMEs, and changing style guides, to name a few — can cause us to lose focus on the basics. Geoff reminded us that jumping ahead to write a document without taking time (and it

doesn't take much!) to apply ID principles will always cost more in the long run for us and for our clients.

2009 NEO STC Scholarship winner announced

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

The Academic Relations Committee is delighted to announce that Corwin Briscoe is the winner of our second NEO STC student scholarship. Corwin is a sophomore in the technical and professional communication (TPC) program at Cedarville University and is an active member of the Cedarville student chapter of STC. Corwin Briscoe, NEO STC scholarship winner

His letter of recommendation from Professor Sandi Harner described Corwin as the "kind of student scholarships were meant for." His classroom performance exemplifies both a diligence and passion for his studies. Professor Harner called him a "delight to have in class" and a "mature student who takes responsibility for his own learning." Corwin has served as team leader for several classroom group projects.

Corwin's academic credentials demonstrate well this diligence and passion for study. Corwin is on the dean's honor list, participates in the honors program, and maintains a 3.86 GPA — all while completing the requirements for one major, TPC, and three minors, Bible, creative writing, and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). Within his major, he has completed courses in style, grammar, editing, technical marketing, and manual design, all of which he feels have improved his writing skills. He also admitted that, "I understood grammar and style before, but now I know why grammar and style matter and how they work together to increase usability."

In his scholarship application letter, Corwin mentioned his special interest in cultures and language, as well as his desire to become a translator or travel writer. His minor in TESOL supports this interest, as does his international experience.

He studied abroad in Germany last summer and is planning additional overseas study: a semester at Oxford next year and the following summer in Greece. He also participated in a Rotary International short-term exchange program to Japan.

Corwin also brings related practical experience in the field. He currently writes press releases for the public relations department at Cedarville and will be writing procedural manuals this summer for the Flint Township Fire Department (Michigan). He notes that his technical communication classes have no doubt helped to prepare him for this work.

Professor Harner concluded that, "Corwin has been committed to the field of technical communication since he enrolled in Cedarville University as a freshman." She continues, "It is obvious from his accomplishments as a student that he has the potential to make a significant contribution to the profession of technical communication." That kind of commitment is exactly what we look for in our scholarship winners. And, an understanding of the value of STC doesn't hurt either. As Corwin wrote, "I know that STC will help me get further than I could on my own."

We wish Corwin continued success in his future studies, both stateside and internationally, and hope that his travels and his future career will someday bring him to Northeast Ohio. Congratulations, Corwin, on your accomplishments!

Job search support groups

Compiled by Rebecca R. Martin (rrminhud@windstream.net) and Jean Church (jchurch5566@att.net)

Career Connection
1st & 3rd Wednesdays at 7:00 PM
The Chapel
136 Fir Hill, Akron
www.the-chapel.org/support

CGI/Cuyahoga County
Reemployment Service Center
11699 Brookpark Road, Cleveland
www.employmentconnection.us/

Chagrin Valley Job Seekers
2nd & 4th Mondays at 7:30 PM
Pioneer Memorial Presbyterian Church
35100 Solon Road, Solon
Greg Reynolds (440) 248-2181 or Jim Grant (440) 248-6042

Hudson Job Search
1st & 3rd Mondays at 7:15 PM
Christ Church Episcopal
21 Aurora Street, Hudson
Joseph Rusnak (330) 653-3522

www.hudsonjs.org

Job Search Club/The Career Center
Thursdays 9:30 AM
Maple Heights Library
5225 Library Lane, Maple Heights
ALSO Thursdays at 1:30PM
Fairview Park Library
21255 Lorain Rd, Cleveland
Jim Hansen
(216) 475-2225

Job Shop
2nd & 4th Mondays at 9AM
Lakeland Community College
Kirtland
Jim Shelley (440) 525-7447

Key Career Place
Cuyahoga Community College
www.keycareerplace.info

Lake County Job Seekers
1st & 3rd Mondays at 7:30PM
Learning Loft beside St. Gabriel Church
9925 Johnnycake Ridge Road (Rt. 84), Mentor
Dan Moon (440) 352-6509

St. Paul Job Seekers
Fridays at 7:30 - 9:30 AM
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
2747 Fairmont Boulevard, Cleveland Heights
Bonnie Dick (216) 898-8338 or Dennis Kelly (216) 382-2236

Strongsville Summer Job Club
1st & 3rd Mondays at 1:30 - 3:00 PM
May through September
Strongsville Library
18700 Westwood Dr
Cleveland, OH 44136
(440) 238-5530
Career Counselor, Beth Wilson

Transitions
2nd & 4th Mondays at 7PM
Lorain Community College
College Center Building, Room 228, Lorain
Cyndi McCabe (440) 366-7699

A case study in networking

How one STC member followed the rules of networking … and got a job

By Rebecca R. Martin (rrminhud@windstream.net)

Recently, I attended several networking how-to seminars with Northeast Ohio consultant Wendy Schwarz. More than once at these seminars, Wendy dropped the name of fellow STC member, Sherri Henkin, citing her as an exemplary networker. Aware that Sherri had recently landed a new job, I was curious how networking had helped her with this. I found out that not only had Sherri networked her way to her current position, she had used those same techniques to land her two previous jobs. I asked her to share with NEOSTC her insights on networking.

According to Wendy Schwarz, the rules of networking are (my paraphrase):

1. Network anytime, anywhere, with anyone.

2. Follow up, follow up, follow up.

Here's how Sherri made the first rule work for her:

- She notified everyone she could think of that she was job hunting.

- Instead of sitting at home in front of her computer day after day, she devoted four hours of her day to her job hunt, and then she got out of the house. She kept busy with activities such as taking a free class at the library. The benefit to this was two-fold. It not only built job skills, it helped her meet people who were potential job contacts.

- She worked with a job search coach. This was invaluable to her, Sherri says. If you don't have a job search coach as part of a severance package, Sherri suggests joining a job search group such as Chagrin Valley Job Seekers and signing up for the job search mentor. (See list of job search support groups above in this issue.)

- She signed up for Yahoo groups relevant to her career goals.

- She kept a positive outlook. Being part of a faith-based community helped her to stay positive. "This is the time to make sure you're doing your yoga," advises Sherri.

- She looked for potential opportunities everywhere, including things that might otherwise have slipped under her radar.

The last tactic was what ultimately led to a job offer. It began with a community newsletter posted online — the type of bulletin that usually announces births and community events. But, on this occasion, Sherri saw an

ad from someone who wanted to form a job search support group. She replied to the ad and volunteered to share what she knew.

The fellow who had posted the ad — we'll call him Support Group Stan — asked Sherri what kind of job she was looking for, and in reply, she sent her résumé. He forwarded an e-mail to her from a contact who was looking to fill a position. In the e-mail, Sherri saw the name of The XYZ Company, whose work she was familiar with. She then asked Support Group Stan to introduce her to his contact at XYZ. After being introduced via e-mail, Sherri sent a direct e-mail to the XYZ contact. In the Subject line of her e-mail, she wrote, "Informational Interview Request — referred by Support Group Stan."

"It's important to include the name of your mutual contact in the subject line," says Sherri. "Your contact is much more likely to open an e-mail from someone they've never heard of if they see the name of someone they know attached."

This initial contact got Sherri an interview with the company's CEO! A quick count tells me that it took about eight steps from zero connections to an interview with the CEO. Nice! Wendy Schwarz is right. Networking really does work.

During her first interview with XYZ's CEO, it became evident that the interview was more than an informational interview, although a specific position was not mentioned. (It wasn't until her third interview at this company that Sherri was told what job the company was looking to fill.)

Meantime, after each interview, Sherri obeyed the second rule of networking: follow up. She sent a formal thank you to the person who interviewed her. She also sent a thank you to each person in her chain of contacts, including Support Group Stan. Sherri says this can be as simple as a quick e-mail to everyone saying, "Hi, I had the interview today. I'll keep you posted on what happens. Thanks for your introduction to this contact."

I asked Sherri what kind of persistence it took to keep this job contact alive from first contact through an offer of employment. "Significant!" was her emphatic response. She counted 65 e-mails with this employer during four months of interviewing.

Sherri cautions that doing everything right does not guarantee a job at the end. Often you have to follow

this process with multiple companies until one of these connections ends in a job offer.

Thanks for sharing your networking tips, Sherri, and congratulations on your new job!

You can see additional career search tips from Sherri in the article So you've been laid off? See the article below for some tips to help you thrive.

For more information on networking and job search, see Wendy Schwarz' site at http://www.lyman-group.com/.

So you've been laid off? Here are some tips to help you thrive

By Sherri L. Henkin (sleah47@juno.com)

♦ Stay positive — especially when speaking with other people, even in a supermarket check-out line!

♦ Tell everyone you're looking and what you're looking for.

♦ Find events that are related to your career goals and attend.

♦ Keep your resume current. Corollary: keep your hard copy and electronic portfolios current and have electronic copies of your documents available. Caveat: if the documentation you produced for former employers is proprietary, obtain permission to use it. If you cannot use the documentation, describe it in detail in your resume or during an interview (for example, help system with 800 files, X # of flow charts and/or graphics).

♦ Work with your job search coach.

♦ Follow suggestions. If someone suggests you attend a meeting, class or similar and you really don't want to go, that's an inner cue to go!

♦ Make a list of 50 ways you can earn money. Write this as a free-form list and include everything from technical writing to … baby-sit for your niece and nephew! Why make this list? It may show you some option you hadn't thought of OR you may remember a job you did some time ago that you really liked. And this exercise could lead to...(read next point)

♦ Consider new options: independent contractor, self-employment, and so on.

♦ Take classes. There are lots of freebie computer classes out there sponsored by local libraries and other sources. Even if you know the computer program, take a class. The benefits are: getting out

of the house, learning something new, and possibly meeting someone to network with. AND you'll have something to add to the resume.

♦ A corollary to taking work-related classes: take something that may not be work-related, such as CPR or ceramics. While you can't add this to your resume, it will help get you out of the house and may even be relaxing!

♦ One suggestion that someone gave me four years ago when I arrived in Ohio, having been laid off (yes, this last one was the second time in four years I'd been laid off), was to volunteer at an organization. I worked through Business Volunteers Unlimited (**http://www.businessvolunteers.org/**). BVU matches prospective volunteers with organizations. BVU placed at the Great Lakes Science Center — cool gig. What does volunteering do? Gets you out, gets you with people, and you can add this gig to your resume. Additionally, in an interview when you're asked, "What have you done since your layoff" (or similar question), you can respond with a constructive — and creative — answer.

♦ Remember to send thank you notes (e-mails worked for me) to anyone who connects you to someone. Even if the link was a "dead end." And if the connection wasn't a dead end and you're in the interview process, keep that first individual informed.

♦ In a few instances, some interviewers tried to draw me in to speaking negatively about my former employer and about being laid off. Be wary of these comments. No matter how you feel about your former employer or being laid off, STAY POSITIVE.

♦ Have a daily schedule. For example, I'm a morning person, so I tried to have the 8 am to 12-noon time as my e-mailing, active search time or interviews. I tried not to answer personal e-mails or personal calls during the "job search" time.

♦ Consider your personal needs when scheduling interviews. I tried to get interviews in the morning (that didn't always work). One place scheduled a noon interview and I requested a different time (noon is my worst time; gotta eat!). There was no other option. So, I arrived early, parked a distance from the entrance, and ate my lunch in the car so that I wouldn't pass out during the interview.

♦ File your unemployment documents/questionnaires on time. If you have questions or unusual situations, call Unemployment to discuss these. They are responsive.

♦ If you have a spiritual side, stay connected. From my experience, this spiritual connection helped to center me.

♦ Read uplifting, inspirational literature. One of my favorites is The Wealthy Spirit by Chellie Campbell (**http://www.chellie.com/**).

♦ Find some ways to enjoy yourself: take a day trip, go to the museum on a free day, attend one of the Metropark activities, or, now that the weather is nice, enjoy a walk in a park. Have fun, which brings you right back to the first point … Stay Positive.

Book review: *The Secret Life of Words*

By Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net), Associate Fellow

Book information: *The Secret Life of Words: How English Became English.* By Henry Hitchings. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 440 pages; $27. Published September 2008. ISBN: 978-0-374-25410-0

This book provides an account of the history of the English language and its vocabulary. The book also describes how words show history and social change, as various words come in and out of current usage. The author explains how English has throughout time absorbed words from other cultures. The book covers a time period from the Norman conquest to today's time.

When checking on amazon.com, I noticed 11 reviews with an average slightly above 4 of 5 stars. Eight of the 11 reviewers gave the book the highest rating. I would have to go with 5 stars as the book's content and style make for an enjoyable and enlightening read.

Each chapter of the book has a one-word title. Each of the titles is a word that reflects the content of the chapter. Some of the words are ensemble, invade, saffron, volume, bravado, genius, powwow, bonsai, onslaught, connoisseur, teapot, blizzard, ethos, voodoo, angst, and shabash. The title word appears with its definition, which is an effective way to remind us of its meaning. This helps to tie to the content of the chapter.

Two of the chapters that have interesting content are Voodoo and Angst. The chapter called Voodoo traces the history of words that have come into English from Africa. In this chapter, the author does a good job of capturing

thinking about the derivation of OK, which many attribute to coming from Africa, but that is still not the definitive thinking. In the chapter called angst the author traces the influence on English of culture and important thinkers, such as Freud. He has many examples of how cultures bring bring new words into English, including the cultures of business, music, sociology, technology, as well as pop culture. He argues persuasively that in the last decade or so, English has brought in fewer new words from other countries. Instead, many of the new words in English, for example e-mail, come from technology.

An example of an explanation of word derivation that I found especially interesting is the one the author gives for the word vodka, taken of course from the Russian. Hitchings points out that vodka is the diminutive of voda, which means water. He comments on how the words for water and alcohol in many languages are related.

Hitchings is a writer, reviewer, and critic, specializing in non-fiction with an emphasis on language. He has won several literary awards, including the Modern Language Association's prize for the best work by an independent scholar and the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, the first work of non-fiction to do so for six years. In 2005, Hitchings published *Dr. Johnson's Dictionary: The Extraordinary Story of the Book that Defined the World*. In October, 2008, he published H*ow to Really Talk About Books You Haven't Read*.

Meeting review: Virtual team issues addressed at April meeting

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

About 40 people attended our Member-Bring-A-Guest-Special meeting on April 16 at Rockwell Automation. Speakers Namrata Malik and Karen Vaugh Culton addressed the topic of virtual teams. Information developers in the software group at Rockwell Automation have worked together on a virtual campus for many years. This experience has become an important asset as supporting off-site development teams becomes more commonplace. Nams and Karen shared what they've learned (the good and the bad) about working on a virtual team.

As explained by attendee Paulette Henning, Nams and Karen basically "gave a countdown of the 10 things that you should avoid or be aware of when working on virtual teams. Some examples include not taking into account time zone differences, not including the required details

for the meeting in the meeting invitation, such as the the call-in number for the meeting, failing to introduce all participants in the different locations, and having side conversations that participants in other locations are not a part of. They included real examples all the way through, which made the presentation somewhat humorous. Then, they ended by talking about the upside of working on virtual teams, such as expanding your experiences and opportunities. You're not bound by four walls when you're working on virtual teams. It gives people the opportunity to increase and improve their communication and management skills. And, your network opens up vastly as you get to interact with people from other projects, countries, and cities."

Namrata Malik is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University's Master of Arts in Professional Writing program. She has over 6 years of experience in Software User Assistance and is currently with the Control and Visualization Business at Rockwell Automation. She is a Senior Member of STC.

Karen Vaughn Culton is a graduate of Bowling Green State University with a Bachelors of Science degree in Journalism. She has 20 years of technical writing experience starting with Reliance Electric and is currently with the Control & Visualization Business at Rockwell Automation. She is a Senior Member of STC.

Thanks to Advanced Language Translation Inc. for sponsoring our April meeting. For more information on Advanced Language Translation Inc., see http://www.advancedlanguage.com/

Cedarville Conference review: STC and my alma mater

By Stephanie Webster (swebster@tmwsystems.com)

It started almost a year ago: reconnection to the technical communication undergraduate program I finished almost ten years ago. The Cedarville University student chapter was hosting a conference at the college campus in southern Ohio, in November, 2008. Right off the bat, I knew I should support the student efforts in some way — but I was torn on how.

There's no way I could possibly go, I thought at first. It's a three and a half hour drive, it's our anniversary weekend, and I would be seven months pregnant! But, it had been so long since I had any communication with

my professor and the school, that I had to try. After my generous husband forgave my absence for the weekend, I made the decision that I would make the trip.

As the date approached, I found out that several other people from NEO STC were also attending. Amy Vogt and I were able to carpool, and share a hotel room to lessen the travel expense. The chapter donated door prizes, carried and set up the International Awards display, and generally supported the conference with our physical presence.

While mulling over how I could support the student chapter, I thought it was going to be one of those days that I'm "just going for the purpose of going." Little did I know how much I'd learn! The students did a diligent job of creating a varied program along with bringing in the STC 2008 president, Mark Clifford. The lunch keynote speaker was renowned book author Dr. Carolyn Rude. Every session I attended seemed to speak directly to the tasks I was currently working on in my job. It was also great to catch up with the professor who directed me in my "career formative years," while supporting the student chapter.

In the same line of thought of reconnecting with the college program …

While I was in the student chapter at Cedarville, we had monthly meetings — the same as most other STC chapters. One of the annual meetings was to have former students, who were now in the midst of their careers, speak about their technical communication path. As I listened to the panelists, I was amazed at the professionalism and confidence of their r"eal world experiences."

For years, I would never entertain the idea of being a presenter. My work was not overly engaging, again — it's a bit of a drive from Cleveland, and the student meetings were held on a weeknight. While at the aforementioned conference, I found out the graduate session was scheduled for February, 2009. The timing was perfect: being on maternity leave, I would not have to take off work to travel, I now have almost ten years of career experience to share, and I would get to visit the campus again!

As I mulled over what to say to the students, I held up a mirror to my career and STC experience. I realized that I too am now that confident professional that I'd seen speak so many years ago.

In reaching out to the student body of the Cedarville University student chapter, they in turn gave me great opportunities for which I am grateful. I was able to learn from others in the industry, reconnect with the location and people who got me started, reflect on what I have accomplished in my career, and challenge myself for the future.

I encourage all members to reach out to your alma maters, or to any local student body. The NEO STC Academic Relations committee has many opportunities in which you can participate. You could potentially learn more from the students than they may gain from you!

Meeting review: The last castle

By Bob Clark (ClarkRE55@aol.com)

Have you ever worked on a project characterized by:

♦ Confusing objectives or direction

♦ Individualism instead of teamwork

♦ Format and style ambiguities

♦ Unresolved conflicts

These characteristics are symptomatic of leadership and communication problems, which can severely impact the success of any project. How your team works together and manages inevitable conflicts can determine its fate. For example, during NEOSTC's Regional Conference in 2007, the team encountered many challenges. It used expert leadership and great teamwork to meet those challenges. As result, STC awarded our chapter the Public Relations Competition Award.

Successful teams have clear, concise user-focused objectives. Those teams have a project leader who ensures that each team member clearly understands their role and complies with each of these objectives. Each member accepts their assignment and is an active contributor to the final product. The project leader solicits status and project information and disseminates it to the appropriate team members to ensure that the client's expectations are fully satisfied.

Unsuccessful teams have critical breakdowns in one or more of those areas.

On March 26, 2009, Amy Vogt and Tricia Spayer presented "Building Cardboard Castles, a Communication and Teamwork Workshop" to Fritz Awig, Vice President, Pressco Technologies; Toastmasters members; and NEOSTC members.

Amy and Tricia divided the group into teams and assumed the role of the client. They gave each team a cardboard box, other art/craft supplies and directed

them to build a castle. However, each team was not allowed to use any verbal or written communication. Each team had approximately 30 minutes to build their castle and their final products were vastly different.

Some observations included:

- The most successful teams are autonomous and self directed. A strong leader can impact the team (in other words, get in the way) and suppress innovative ideas.

- The team communicated non-verbally (gestures, facial expressions, hand signals) and it was more effective over time.

- This workshop is analogous to a brainstorming session and is a good opening (getting to know you) exercise.

- Since each team could not talk, no leader emerged and this fostered a high level of cooperation. The teams agreed that they would not have been as successful if they were allowed to talk.

Handy hint: Add placeholders to slide masters in PowerPoint 2007

By Lisa Mileusnich (lmileusnich@parker.com)

In Microsoft PowerPoint 2007, you can add your own placeholders and pre-filled text to the slide master.

1. Open your presentation or template.
2. Click the **View** tab on the Ribbon.
3. To open the Slide Master view, click **Slide Master** in the Presentation Views group.
4. On the left side of the screen, select the slide layout that you want to update.
5. Click **Insert Placeholder** (in the Master Layout group) and select the type of placeholder, such as Text.
6. Click and drag on the master slide to create the placeholder.
7. If you chose Text, you can type text in the placeholder. The text will appear automatically on each slide that uses this slide master layout. (You can change the text on the presentation slides.)
8. Click **Close Master View** to exit the slide master and return to the presentation view.

NEO STC represented at CTSC event

The Cleveland Technical Societies Council (CTSC) held a scholarship and achievement awards event at Landerhaven Party Center on Monday, May 11.

NEO STC participated in the event with a table showing NEO STC activities and presentation by Amy Vogt. Amy is the current and soon-to-be Immediate Past NEO STC President.

Ginny Haas, incoming NEO STC vice-president and Jeanette Evans, NEO STC academic relations co-chair, assisted at the table and allowed students to be eligible to attend upcoming NEO STC events.

Sponsors of the 63rd Annual Scholarship and Achievement Awards include Cuyahoga Community College, Lorain Community College, Parker Hannifin, Medical Mutual of Ohio, and PPI Technical Communications.

The purpose of CTSC (http://www.ctsc.org) is to bring together members of the professional scientific, engineering, technical, and educational societies in northeastern Ohio. See the website for additional information, including details on the mentors needed for the Engineers Without Boarders initiative. A call for volunteers is also in place for a project called "A World in Motion."

Interested in reviewing for *Technical Communication?*

If you have ever thought of reviewing books for *Technical Communication*, the STC journal, what follows are some guidelines adapted from the list provide by Avon Murphy, the current journal Book Review Editor. If you want to review books for the journal, the first step in the process is to send the Book Review Editor an e-mail message expressing your interest. The editor will then send you the book reviewer's profile form to fill out and return. You will then work with the editor on the reviewing process.

The editors of *Lines and Letters* also like to get book reviews and encourage that you follow these guidelines, as adapted from Avon Murphy's list, when submitting your reviews.

Help readers decide whether they should read the book:

- Convey the book's major points and overall structure.

- Evaluate the book's merits.

- Include details and analysis to transmit the information and support your conclusions.

- Remain fair-minded, praising where praise is due while pointing out weaknesses.

Write with an effective style:

- Write in a clear and informal style with the understanding that the purpose of your review is to inform, not impress.

- Avoid language that might be construed as sexist.

- Use the first person and active voice.

- Where possible address readers as "you" rather than the reader or user.

- Inject personality into your review.

- Don't try to be outrageous or or clever, but do write like an individual eager to share informed insights with readers.

Chapter reminders

Are you following STC on [Twitter](#) yet?

Amazon.com helps fund STC

Reaching Amazon.com through the portal on the home page of STC's website (www.stc.org) contributes to funding programs that have no direct revenue stream, such as committee work. STC receives a small percentage from every purchase made through the portal.

Join NEO STC on LinkedIn

Our chapter now has a group on LinkedIn named Northeast Ohio STC Community.

Join our LinkedIn Group on http://www.LinkedIn.com (you must be a member of LinkedIn, which is free for a basic membership). FYI : There will be waiting period while your membership is approved.

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.

Lines & Letters information

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

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

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.