Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio Chapter   *Jan/Feb 02*

In This Issue

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Designing the future of technical communication

STC

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Setting Rates as an Independent Contractor

By Barb Philbrick, NEOSTC member and CIC SIG manager

If you are or are thinking about becoming an independent contractor, you need to think about a number of issues, including:

- What you're getting into: Can you (or do you want to) handle all the different hats you'll have to wear?
- Setting up your finances
- Filing with the state and the IRS
- Should you be a sole proprietor or corporation?
- What kind of insurance you need: disability, general liability, business, health?
- Setting up an office
- Putting together a contract
- Setting rates
- Getting clients

This article will deal with setting rates. As a contractor, you need to set a fair rate for your services. It needs to cover your basic salary needs, plus the financial needs of your business. By calculating the rate, you will be able to present it more confidently during sales calls.

The information that follows assumes that you are working primarily at your own location using your own equipment and getting your own work (in other words, not working through an agency).

Let's assume you want to make at least as much as you're making as a full-time employee, and probably a little more because you are exposing yourself to higher risk as a contractor. In the 44xxx ZIP code, the median salary is $43,500 (per the 2001 STC Salary Survey). That's $21.75 per hour.

The rule of thumb for calculating rates is to double it, which would put you at $43.50/hour. However, it's worthwhile to examine rates more closely to make sure you will be covering your costs. Table I (page 11) provides some basic business costs and the amount per hour you need to charge to compensate for them.

The dollar amounts in Table I (page 11) are rounded up to the nearest whole dollar. The basic assumptions are that there are:

- 2,000 total working hours in the year
- 750 hours spent doing non-billable work (sales and marketing, computer upkeep, bookkeeping, purchasing computer and office supplies, etc.)
- 1,250 hours billable to a client

Therefore, $29 is the amount per hour you need to make just to maintain your business at a sustainable rate. Now you need to add your salary ($21.75), which brings the total to $50.75. That gives you a total gross income of around $63,500.

That's a rough estimate of what you need to make to be

Chapter Calendar

February 6: Networking Lunch
Ground Round, 6652 Macedonia Commons Blvd., Macedonia.

February 21: User Assistance in Microsoft Windows XP and Office XP
Presented by Mike Bates, Region 4 Director-Sponsor. Cleveland East/Beachwood Hilton, 3663 Park East Dr.

March 8: Networking Lunch
Cecil B's, 4754 Ridge Rd., Brooklyn.

March 16: Meeting of the Minds
Sponsored by Cuyahoga Community College in conjunction with NEOSTC. Featuring JoAnn Hackos, Gloria Gery, and Judy Glick-Smith.

April 10: Networking Lunch
BW3 Grill and Pub, 8000 Plaza Dr., Mentor.

April 18: Leslie Yerkes, Catalyst Consulting Group

May 17: Awards Banquet
Hudson Holiday Inn.

May 21: Networking Lunch
Fox & Hound, 1479 SOM Center Rd., Mayfield Hts.

Membership News

New NEOSTC members, membership status changes, and more.

As 2001 came to an end in December, NEOSTC membership included 201 technical communicators. This number has increased since 2000 and 1999. In 2000 we had 186 members, and in 1999 we had 184 members.

Let's welcome our new members:

- Ken Rogers
- Joy Sheets
- Frank Daloisio
- Jessica Hendricks
- Holly Wells

And congratulate our new senior member:

- Sabrina Kropp

On the Front Lines

Current events and announcements for NEOSTC.

Local Student Competition Winners Announced

By Bege Bowers, Student Competition Manager

NEOSTC volunteers Jeanette Evans, Beth Williams, and Karla Caldwell had a difficult challenge ahead of them in judging the entries from the 2001 Northeast Ohio/Manitoba, Canada branch of the STC student technical communication competition, but emerged with the following three exceptional papers:

1st Place:
"A Brief Look into Dark Matter: The Missing Mass"
Mikael Vincent Tien Doe Chan
Grade 11, Westgate Mennonite Collegiate
Sponsoring Teacher: Janis Thiessen

2nd Place:
"A Growing Epidemic: Ritalin Yields Harm"
Sarah Winchell
Grade 11, Perry High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Robert Glavan

3rd Place:
"Is There a Direct Correlation Between Students' Grades and the Amount of Sleep They Receive?"
Kyle Seibenick
Grade 12, Perry High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Robert Glavan

The three winners will represent Northeast Ohio and Manitoba, Canada in the 2001-2002 international student competition. Congratulations to all of the student participants and special thanks to the judges. ❧

Students Needed!

The Professional Development Institute (PDI) at Cuyahoga Community College needs students for its technical communication program. The classes will be held Mondays and Wednesdays from 6-10 p.m. at the Eastern Campus in Highland Hills.

Spring 2002 classes:

- Technical Communication I (Feb. 11 - Feb. 20)
- Introduction to Technical Communication Tools (Feb. 25 - March 6)
- Editing (April 1 - April 10)

Other classes in the program:

- Technical Communication II
- Communicating Online

For more information, contact Dr. Janet Schriver at 214-674-4089 or jschrive@excel.com. ❧

January Board Meeting Notes

The mid-year board meeting had a great turnout with members representing all of the committees.

Dennis Verbiar opened the committee reports with a brief discussion of the current budget. To date, all of the committees are within budget with the exception of Programs.

Earlier in the year, the executive board and Programs committee opted to spend more of the chapter funds in order to cut chapter members' meeting costs; so, the extra expense was not unexpected.

Programs commitee chair Stephanie Webster also requested suggestions for upcoming meetings. You can contact her via e-mail at swebster@ppipubs.com.

Beth Williams (in place of Angie Diannetti) announced that the networking lunch schedule through July 2002 has been set. However, the committee is still looking for interesting new venues for the rest of the year. To recommend a restaurant (please make sure it can accomodate groups of 10 or more) contact Angie Diannetti via e-mail at adianetti@radcominc.net.

Overall, the NEOSTC is having a great year, and all of the committee reports underlined that fact. To get detailed minutes from the board meeting, you can contact secretary Kim Lindsey via e-mail at ke.lindsey@att.net ❧

2001 Salary Survey Points To Financially Rewarding Career Field

By STC International

Are you looking for a challenging career field that is financially rewarding? According to a recent survey, the technical writing and editing field may fit the bill.

The average salary and benefits for technical writers and editors in the U.S. and Canada continues to increase, according to the 2001 salary survey conducted by the Society for Technical Communication. The average salary is $55,360 in the U.S., up 6.8 percent from $51,850 shown in the 2000 survey, and $54,140 in Canada (in Canadian dollars), up 8.5 percent from $49,910 in 2000.

STC conducts the salary survey each summer. This year, questionnaires were sent to more than 3,500 people in technical communication jobs. "The survey results show a career field with increasing financial compensation," said Judith Glick-Smith, STC president. "Good technical writing is a skill employers are willing to pay for."

The survey covers the responses of more than 1,200 technical writers and editors working in entry through senior-level/supervisory jobs across the U.S. and Canada. Notably, the survey shows a narrowing gap in salaries between men and women. The average salary for U.S. men is $56,310 while that for women is $54,860. In Canada, the average salary of men is $56,580 and that of women is $52,730 (Canadian dollars).

"The survey results show that female technical writers/editors in the U.S. earn 97 percent of what their male counterparts earn," Glick-Smith pointed out. "In Canada, females earn 93 percent of their male counterparts. This smaller 'gender gap' points to financial opportunities for women in the growing field of technical communication."

The U.S. Department of Labor statistics for 2000 show that among full-time employees in all professions, women earn 76 percent of men's salaries (Labor Force Statistics from Current Population Survey, Table 37; http://www.bls.gov/cpsaatab.htm). In Canada, 1998 figures for full time workers show women earning 72 percent of men's salaries (Canadian Statistics, Average Earnings by Sex and Work Pattern"; http://www.statcan.ca/English/pgdb/people/labor/labor01b.htm).

The complete 2001 Technical Communicator Salary Survey is available on the STC Web site at http://www.stc.org/salary/html. ○3

Miami University Student Chapter Develops Listserv

By Katherine Durack, Advisor, Miami University STC; Owner, STC-PUBS listserv

The Miami University Student Chapter has begun a pilot project for a new listserv, TC-PUBS. The purpose of the listserv is to distribute information about what's newly published in the main technical communication journals to subscribers, including professional technical communicators and academic users. Listserv messages will include full bibliographic citations and abstracts for articles, plus links to any available online resources when new issues are published.

So far, three journals (Technical Communication, IEEE Transactions, and Journal of Technical Writing and Communication) have agreed to provide this information; we hope eventually to provide this service for all of the main tech-comm journals.

STC-PUBS Listserv Offers Access to Latest Information

Currently, we are recruiting subscribers to the listserv during the pilot period (Jan-June 2002). Subscribers will receive all messages about new publications that are posted to the list. Additionally, during the pilot period we will be requesting your comments on content, structure, and value of the listserv, as well as information on the tools you use to access the service. At the end of the pilot period, we will evaluate the listserv to determine if the service should be continued.

Those interested in subscribing should e-mail Katherine Durack at durackk@muohio.edu, or send a message to the list (TC-PUBS@listserv.muohio.edu). The list is moderated, and subscribers will be added to the list as requests are received. Announcements to the list will begin in January, after the spring semester begins. ○3

Regional Opportunities

Workshops, conferences, and events in and around Ohio.

PhotoShop 6.0 Software Saturday

The Central Ohio STC Scholarship Committee will be holding a hands-on PhotoShop 6.0 Software Saturday seminar.

When

Saturday, March 9, 2002
Registration: 8:00 - 8:30
Seminar: 8:30 - 12:00

Where

Compuware Corporation Training Facility
1103 Schrock Road
Columbus, Ohio 43229

Presenter

Lisa Kovincheck from Compuware

Refreshments

Coffee and donuts

Cost

$20 at the door or in advance via the Web site

Deadline to register

Thursday, March 7, 2002

To register

Call Brenda McGuire at 614-424-5505

Seating is limited; only the first 12 people will get seats at the seminar. ❧

STC Offers Six New Telephone Seminars

By STC International

Beginning January 16, two telephone seminars will be offered each month through March 2002. Telephone seminars have been very successful in bringing cost-effective training to STC members and others seeking to improve their skills and knowledge. This year, STC is offering online registration at http://www.stc.org/seminars.html.

January's seminars were held on the 16th and the 30th.

Other seminars scheduled for 2002 are:

February 6, "From World-Weary to World-Ready: Usability for International Users." Hans Fenstermacher will lead the presentation.

February 20, "Creating Effective Documentation Plans." John Hedtke is the presenter.

March 6, "Communicating Clarity: Make Your Technical Marketing Matter." The seminar leader is Pamela Selker Rak.

March 20, "Creating Usability Goals: Understanding What Usability Means to Your Users." Whitney Quesenbery will lead the presentation.

The cost for each seminar is $125 U.S. and $140 Canadian. Overseas participants should contact the STC office. An additional $10 will be charged for registration received less than five days before the seminar.

As cost-effective and time-efficient ways of improving your skills and knowledge, telephone seminars are much like a large conference call, but in a more controlled environment. Simply dial the 800 number from your telephone, enter the provided personal identification number, and you're connected. Then sit back and listen to the presentation and join in the discussions.

For one registration, many employees at a company may benefit from the seminar presentation and develop their own interactive discussions.

You may get more information and register online at http://www.stc.org/seminars.html or contact Buffy Bennett (buffy@stc.org or 703. 522.4114 ext. 251). You also may complete the registration form in the December 2001 Intercom. ❧

Valued NEOSTC Member Remembered

Introduction By Kris Henige, NEOSTC President

Charles W. Bottoms Jr., a member of the Northeast Ohio Chapter since 1994, died of liver cancer on December 18, 2001. He began working for Allen-Bradley (now Rockwell Automation) in 1985 and eventually supervised workers in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Ann Arbor.

Along with many coworkers and colleagues, he is survived by his wife Lisa, son Charles W. III, daughter Lauren Ashley, mother Edith, and sisters Charlotte, Nona, and Sr. Mary Kendra S.N.D. Charles was preceded in death by his father, Charles Sr., and is buried at Lake View Cemetery in Cleveland.

Charles Bottoms, Valued NEOSTC Member

Charles was on the advisory board of the technical communication program at Cuyahoga Community College, and volunteered at Miles Standish Elementary School in Cleveland as a mentor and counselor. In his memory, the chapter executive officers decided to donate $100 from the chapter treasury to the Miles Standish computer lab so that Charles will continue to be a positive influence to others.

Charles was a friend and mentor to many NEOSTC members, and on this page we include a few of their tributes.

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My first substantial contract technical writing assignment was with Charles Bottoms, four or five years ago. He was always cheerful and kind and went out of his way to get me the help I needed on a project, all the while running his own department. I remember his friendship, his killer smile, and his gentle ways. He was a mentor to me and my introduction to the wonderful people at Rockwell Automation and the exciting field of industrial technical writing.

—Mary Womble

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This past December, Charles Bottoms succumbed to liver cancer. The news inspired a swirl of emotions. In one small respect, there was relief that this strong, loving, gentle man no longer had to suffer. Mostly, though, a deep sense of tragedy finally overflowed after months of holding it behind a wall of prayer, hope and faith. This world was forever changed because Charles was no longer in it.

Charles Bottoms made a difference. A real difference. He lived his life so that others, after meeting him, saw things differently and often reexamined their own behavior. He taught his children right from wrong, loved his wife fiercely, and led a group of writers into becoming a terrific source of professionalism, integrity and award-winning technical documentation. There are too many accomplishments from Charles' writing career to list them here. Any listing of specific achievements would pale when compared to the professional legacy of a department still covered with his fingerprints months after his departure.

Charles was not perfect and would laugh at such a suggestion. Yet, his loss cannot be measured. He was a devout husband, tireless father and dear friend. Losing him is a difficulty from which we will never fully recover. However, our hollowed hearts will laugh and sing and dance again. There is still much good in the world. The world that was forever changed with his death had already been forever changed by his life.

—Jonathan Vasko

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A little more than a year ago, I started a letter to my boss's boss. It was performance review time, and I wanted him to know that I'd just come through what I felt to be the best year in my professional life, due, in large part, to the influence of my manager. For whatever reason, I never finished that letter. Maybe I thought I'd get to it later. Maybe I was rushing around to finish my Christmas shopping. Mostly, it was because I could never find the words to put on paper what I knew in my heart—that Charles Bottoms was a boss without equal. Today, as I sit here contemplating the loss of this remarkable man, I wonder what I'd say if I finished that letter now, if only as a tribute to his legacy.

I was only blessed to work for Charles for less than two years, but I knew him for nearly 11. In that time, I knew him to be a devoted father and husband, a respected member of his community (both at work and at large), a talented athlete, a man of quick wit and subtle humor, and an utterly kind and decent human being who looked for the good in everyone who crossed his path.

As a manager, Charles gave new meaning to the word "Superior." If you worked for him, no matter how hard you'd worked before, you worked even harder for Charles simply because you wanted to make him proud. To be worthy of his belief in you. He was a natural manager. He

knew when to provide guidance, and he knew when to let you find your own way. He knew when to teach you what he knew, and he knew how to say he didn't have all the answers. He knew how to motivate and inspire, and he never forgot to say thank you for a job well done, whether it was with a quick visit to say it personally, or a personalized card in your mailbox. He earned respect by giving respect. And he was the only manager I've ever known who really understood that the true measure of the job *he* was doing could only be found in the performance of those he led. But most importantly, he knew how to manage the *person*, not just their position. He showed a genuine concern for each of us as people—as individuals—not just as "direct reports." And he's the reason so many of us told him that if he ever left the company, we'd follow him to wherever he went.

I've come across other people in my life who, based on either their relative positions or ages, considered themselves to be my mentor. But Charles was the first one I ever gave that title to myself. I always felt there was so much I could learn from him—both personally and professionally. He was the epitome of who I wanted to be, not only as a professional, but as a human being. I was proud to work for him. Even more so, I was proud to call him a friend. And his absence from this department—but more importantly, from this earth—is a monumental loss. Eventually, I know that someone else will take over Charles' responsibilities here. But I know in my heart that no one can ever replace him. We miss you, Chaz.

And now, if you'll excuse me, I have a letter I need to finish.

—Gigi Kolt

STC Web Site Offers Access to Society Authors

By STC International

The STC office Web site has a new section (http://www.stc.org/ member_pubs.html) devoted to books about technical communication written by STC members. The site will accept listings for any such books that have an ISBN number and are available for sale on an online bookstore (for example, Amazon.com and BarnesandNoble.com).

To post a listing for your book, visit (http://www.stc.org/ member_pub_form.html).

Then, provide the following information:

- Your name
- Your e-mail address
- The title of your book
- An abstract of your book no longer than 50 words
- Your book's ISBN number

Note: STC reserves the right to review all the information that is submitted. STC will only post information for books that are about technical communication and that are sold in an online bookstore. ❧

We've Thrown our Hat into the Ring!

Karla and I entered *Lines & Letters* into the 2001-2002 STC Newsletter Competition. We entered the May/June, Sept/Oct, and the Nov/Dec 2001 issues. Go to www.neostc.org and click on the *Lines & Letters* link to check out these issues. The competition judges will evaluate these issues based on several essential criteria, such as:

- Does the newsletter have the Society contact information?
- Does the newsletter include its publication and reprint polices?

Lines & Letters will also be judged based on recommended criteria, like:

- Does the newsletter have a chapter meeting notice?
- Does the newsletter include a Director-Sponsor report?

We'll find out on April 10 how *Lines & Letters* did. We'll let you know!

Book Review – Smart Start: Your Ohio Business

By Karla Caldwell, Co-Editor

Did you know that if your small business name is not registered with the Ohio Secretary of State, you must report your business's name as a ficticious name? Do you know the difference between a Limited Liability Company (LLC) and a Limited Liability Partnership (LLP)? Do you know what forms are required to prove an employee's citizenship?

If you're starting a small business in Ohio, you should.

Smart Start: Your Ohio Business combines all of this information and more in an easy-to-read resource. The book's primary audience includes individuals and small groups who want to start a business in Ohio, but are not sure where to begin. The types of topics covered include:

- The types of small business structures available (such as an LLC).
- The legal documents required to get your business started (such as a vendor's license and trademark application).
- What you need to know if you intend to have employees.
- Places where you can get financial assistance for your small business.
- Tips on successfully marketing your product or service.
- Writing a small business plan.
- Basic small business accounting.
- Human resources management.
- Setting up your office.

The book also includes many checklists and examples of the types of documents you'll need to run your business on a day-to-day basis. For example, the first chapter features a "Planning Primer for New Entrepreneurs" that asks you to consider if you'll have sufficuent buyers who will be attracted to your price, quality and convenience. It also asks you to consider the demographic of your potential customers and if the area you plan to start up in will have a large enough customer base.

The last page of most chapters includes a wrap-up where you can review the contents in brief as well as lists of other resources where you can find more information on the topic. Some chapters also feature checklists that describe each of the steps you must complete to, for example, register your business.

While there is no substitute for good legal counsel, Smart Start offers a good background for the person who knows little about running a small business in the state of Ohio. And, at $19.95, it's a handy reference the established small business may not want to do without.

Smart Start: Your Ohio Business
From the Oasis Press
300 North Valley Drive
Grants Pass, Oregon 97526

info@psi-research.com
http://www.psi-research.com ∞

President's Notes

We've reached "halftime" of the 2001-2002 chapter year. Some highlights:

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Member communication has improved through our new listserv. There are over 45 subscribers, and recent topics included hardware manuals, white papers, and translation. To join, go to http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcneohio-l.

Also, the 90+ percent of members with an e-mail address on file now receive reminders about chapter events.

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Our December 13 Holiday Happy Hour and Food Drive at Becky's pub in downtown Cleveland was a big success. Eighteen members and guests attended, and we collected $25 and 38 food items for the Cleveland Foodbank (see thank-you letter on page 10). The money was mailed to the Foodbank's headquarters, and the food was delivered to the Harvard Community Center in Cleveland near the Warrensville Heights border. Thanks to NEOSTCer Barb Payne, who coordinated the event for us.

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We've had great attendance at our evening meetings. Our best turnout so far was the November meeting in Kent, which had nearly 40 attendees. Our chapter's solid financial situation allows us to keep meeting fees under $20, which is important in a weak economy. Our networking lunches have also had steady attendance.

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We're now distributing evaluation cards at our evening meetings this year. These allow attendees to provide feedback on the meeting topic, location, etc. They can also use the cards to volunteer for a committee, and we've recruited several this way.

Thank you to all who helped make these accomplishments possible. ∞

Looking around the Region

By Mike Bates, Region 4 Director-Sponsor

Happy New Year!

I hope everyone had a wonderful and relaxing holiday. The holidays are an important time to slow down and relax with families and friends. It goes without saying that 2001 was an interesting year. This year was a challenge for all of us. STC has become more important to some of us and maybe less for others. As I read the Board reports from your chapter presidents, I notice that many of you have done an incredible job keeping your chapters alive. You have worked with others in your area to ensure that the meeting topics are interesting and that you were there to answer questions and share your ideas. Thank you.

Many of you have done an incredible job keeping your chapters alive.

In case you didn't know, every four months, your chapter president sends me a summary of what you have been up to as a chapter. The report include information about your chapter's recent successes. Here's a sample of activities around the region.

Successes

- Holding professional/student chapter meetings has given students an opportunity to meet with professionals and ask questions.
- Idea Watch has proven to be a very successful means of sharing information among chapter members.
- Establishing and maintaining an active chapter listserv

- Holding art, online, and publications competitions
- Increasing member attendance at local meetings since May 2001
- Holding consistent administrative council meetings every month
- Moving a paper-based newsletter online
  - Completing successful student-chapter membership drives
  - Holding teleconferences in place of face-to-face meetings has proven very beneficial to our members.

Challenges

- Finding a chapter newsletter editor. Getting a newsletter out using limited resources.
- Locating a meeting location. Due to recent company downsizing, we are losing our meeting space and need to find a new place to hold our monthly meetings.
- Managing a chapter on a small budget
- Finding and retaining volunteers
- Getting a newsletter article from our director-sponsor! <grin>

If there is something here that is interesting to you, let me know. One of my goals as your director-sponsor is to better facilitate communication across the region. It starts by sharing ideas with STC members outside the boundaries of your chapter.

If you are interested in learning about one of the items mentioned above, let me know. You don't have to be an officer to take action.

I look forward to hearing from you. ◌

Read about STC Candidates

Several candidates running for Society offices have sent us articles explaining why they want to serve STC. We've posted them on our Web site. Go to www.neostc.org and click on the "Elections" link. Be sure to read them, so you can make an educated vote in March. ◌

Out with the Old, In with the New – Welcome 2002!

An Editorial by Elizabeth Simeral, STC Senior Member and NEOSTC Employment Co-Manager

Goodbye 2001, and good riddance! For many of us, the beginning of a new year filled with hope for a better economic future couldn't have come soon enough. Let's welcome the year 2002 with a newly found optimism that the political and business leaders in Northeast Ohio are finally committed to pushing forward the long-overdue economic changes needed to return our region to world-class prominence.

With this New Year comes refreshing change as Cleveland welcomes its new mayor and Akron's business community comes together to focus on a new renaissance for the city's business and academic communities.

The next few years will be important to NEOSTC members as the region's leaders look for ways to increase technology-based companies. As a community, I believe that Northeast Ohioans are ready to embrace fundamental economic changes to redefine our region as a center of technology, manufacturing, and innovation. On that note, we have reason to look forward to a better future for the technical communication industry. ◌

The Esoteric Editor

By Sharon Ambro, Esoteric Co-Editor

For this issue, Karla and I thought we would try using a theme; a theme that would both review and supplement January's meeting about consulting and independent contracting. Can you guess the theme?

The meeting wrap-up on the back page summarizes the January meeting for those who were unable to make it. On the cover, the feature article by Barb Philbrick expands on the ideas discussed in the January meeting. And on page 8, Karla reviews a book that deals with consulting and independent contracting in the Ohio area.

We're also going to use a theme for the March/April online issue: Technical Communications and the World Wide Web. Be sure to check out this issue in the beginning of April.

We're taking suggestions for a theme for the May/June issue. What topic do you want to see covered in depth? Let us know, and we'll do the leg work to get you the information you want.

Email us with suggestions for themes at lleditors@hotmail.com. ∽

NEOSTC Receives Big Thank You

Dear Ms. Henige,

Thank you for the generous gift of $25 to the Cleveland Foodbank in December 2001 on behalf of the Society for Technical Communication! We are also grateful to know that you collected food for a hunger center as well. Your donation will help fill the stomachs and warm the hearts of hungry children and adults throughout Northeast Ohio.

At this time of year, most of us are filled with thoughts about recent holiday celebrations, delicious meals and warm moments spent with family and friends. Thank you for helping to ensure that thousands of needy families in our area also had something to celebrate. Every dollar of your donation allows us to distribute enough food to prepare four meals for hungry men, women and children in our community.

Thank you again for your support. I wish all of you and your families a happy and healthy new year.

Sincerely,

Anne C. Goodman
Executive Director – Cleveland Foodbank ∽

Employment News

By Elizabeth Simeral and Myron Shawala III, Employment Co-Managers

Check out the changes that we have made to the Employment site on our NEOSTC Web site at www.neostc.org. We've updated the look and feel of the site to match the *Lines and Letters* newsletter site. We've also expanded information to include a list of recruiting firms, consulting firms, and other employment-related sites.

If you are in the process of making a career change, check out the career information at sites, such as www.monster.com. You'll find many useful articles to help you focus your job search, hone your interview skills, and give your resume new polish. For current Northeast Ohio business information, check out the NE Ohio site at www.craintech.com. Many of the recruiting firms have job-searching information as well.

The Employment site will continue to evolve as we add new information, remove old information, and update the site based on your feedback. We want to know what links you find valuable, and if you have employment information that you want to share with other members. Send it to us so we can add it to the site. ∽
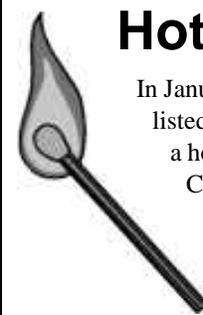
Hot Career!

In January, www.msn.com listed technical writing as a hot career for 2002. Check out the article at http://editorial. careers.msn.com/ articles/writing. It discusses the varied backgrounds of technical writers, the salary, and the outlook for 2002. ∽

Remember to Renew Your Membership

Remember to renew your STC membership by February 28, 2002. You should have gotten a form in the mail, or you can renew online at www.stc.org/Renewal01.asp. To renew online you need your membership identification number and your ZIP/postal code. Also, if you renew online you need to use either American Express, VISA, or MasterCard to make your payment. ∽

Setting Rates cont., from cover

comfortable and cover basic costs. There are other factors, including:

- You don't want to be too far out of the averages for your area, unless you have a sought-after skill that allows you to command higher rates. (You don't want to be on the low end because you'll have difficulty maintaining your business.) Check out the national CIC-SIG Web site (http://www.stcsig.org/cic/index.html) for the salary survey of contractors.
- If you know a client is a slow pay (longer than 30 days), charge more. The phone company doesn't give you a break because your client pays at 45 days — they still want your money at 30 days. Add an extra $1 or 2 per hour for slow pays. This helps cover the impact on cash flow and the interest on the late funds.
- If you need equipment or software that is high-end, you need to make sure you charge enough to cover purchase cost and service agreements. The rates in Table I assume average

cost software ($300 to $600 per license), such as Word, RoboHelp, and FrameMaker.

If you decide to work through an agency instead of being independent:

- Increase the number of billable hours and reduce the number of non-billables. The agency will be providing marketing, sales, and bookkeeping services.
- Adjust insurance costs based on what they provide (some agencies offer health coverage; most should provide business coverage).
- Remove the employer social security contribution. They will (in most cases) cover this.

I hope this provides you with stronger sense of your worth as a contractor!

For more information on starting a small business, contact Barb Philbrick at caslonsvcs@attglobal.net or go to www.neostc.org for the booklet that was handed out at the January meeting (PDF format).

Barb Philbrick has been a technical writer for the last 16 years. For the last 10 years, she has contracted as a technical writer through her company, Caslon Services Inc. ଔ

Table I. Basic Business Costs

Cost	$/Hour
Overhead (office space, computers, software, phones, accountant fees, office supplies, etc.): $4,800 per year	4
Business insurance: $250 a year	1
Health insurance: $3,000/year with a high deductible ($2,000/$4,000)	3
Pension: 10% of annual income ($4,350)	4
Compensation for non-billables. For example, if you want to make $22/hour for these, so that's $16,500/year.	13
7.5% employer Social Security contribution	4
Total:	**29**

January Meeting Wrap-Up: What it Takes to Become a Consultant/Independent Contractor

By Sharon Ambro, Newsletter Co-Editor

On January 17, NEOSTC members met at the Holiday Inn in Independence to find out what it takes to become a consultant or independent contractor. The evening's panel of experts, NEOSTC senior members Rick Elliot, Linda DeLonais, and Barb Philbrick, successfully broke out on their own. And they had a lot of valuable tips and information to share with us.

The three experts pooled their resources and compiled a handbook entitled, "Nine Steps to Independence." Go to the NEOSTC Web site to find this handbook as well as other useful resources for independent contracting, or you can contact Barb Philbrick at caslonsvcs@attglobal.net.

Linda began the discussion with letting us know what it takes to be an independent contractor. All three experts agreed that the toughest part is finding clients, and they've had the greatest success through word-of-mouth and networking.

Another point Linda stressed was that all of a your projects are for hire. As a contractor, you don't own any of your work. So, you must get permission from your client to use your work in a portfolio.

Rick then spoke about how to choose a lawyer and an accountant. Next, with their guidance, decide what type of business you want to be (sole proprietor, partner, LLC, S corp). There are advantages and disadvantages to each. Be sure to choose what's best for you.

Rick also went into detail about filing with the state and IRS. Work with your lawyer and accountant to do this. And always remember to save all your receipts!

Next, Barb shared her wisdom about what types of insurance you'll need. It's important to get disability insurance because you don't get paid personal days.

To conclude, Barb spoke about the dreaded task of finding clients. Always keep a skills-based resume on hand. Employers are used to resumes and might not want to read a brochure. Press releases to local newspapers often gets results too.

Our fellow NEOSTC members are great resources for finding out about moving into different areas of tech comm. Be sure to use them! ∝