Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

On the Front Lines

President's Notes

by Beth Williams, NEOSTC President

By the time this issue of Lines and Letters is published, we will have had our first monthly meeting of the STC year. Traditionally, we structure the September meeting as a networking opportunity for everyone rather than having a formal speaker. What we decided to do this year instead of having each table discussing a "hot topic" was organize the meeting around "Getting to Know Your NEOSTC Chapter."

Tables discussed the revamped Web site, the online newsletter, employment, membership, public relations, monthly programs, the Technicom conference, competitions, and academic relations.

The purpose of this meeting was to reinforce one of the main goals we are aiming at this STC year – getting people involved. STC gives you the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities without investing a lot of time or money. Here is a list of some of the things NEOSTC has planned for the year that we want you to be involved with:

Competitions – Judging competitions is a great way to meet people and see what other technical communicators are doing. We are conducting a print competition that is being headed by Jeanette Evans, and a student competition being run by Bege Bowers.

Academic Relations – We want to be more active with local colleges and universities, and the Academic Relations committee's goal is to provide a liaison to each school that would be responsible for promoting STC through information distribution. If you are an alumnus, or have other connections at a school, check with me to see how you can contribute.

Technicom – Maria Hlas and Jill McCauslin are reviving Technicom this year. This conference was actually the Region 4 conference in 2000, and as with any conference, there are always various tasks to be completed to help things run well.

Newsletter – Karla Caldwell and Sharon Ambro are entering their third year as newsletter co-editors, and they are always looking for article submissions. Writing an article about a meeting you attended, a tool you are using, or an idea you have is a great way to get your name circulating in the community.

Philanthropy – Lori Klepfer is working on some leads in terms of community organizations on which STC members can volunteer. These organizations may include, but are certainly not limited to, adult literacy and computer skills education.

CTSC (Cleveland Technical Societies Council) – NEOSTC recently joined this consortium of area organizations, as it provides the ability to easily network with other related societies in Northeast Ohio. Check out their website at www.ctsc.org for a list of upcoming events and programs that may be of interest to you.

NEO/Pittsburgh/Youngstown State University joint STC meeting – On December 7, 2002 we are planning a joint meeting with the Pittsburgh and YSU chapters to give members of all three chapters the opportunity to get to know each other. Region 4 Director-Sponsor Mike Bates will be demonstrating a hands-on portable usability lab at this meeting, which will be held in the Youngstown area.

Contact information for all members listed here can be found on our Web site at http://www.neostc.org/official/officers.htm.

NEOSTC Site Gets a New Look

by Karla Caldwell, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

If you're reading this, you're seeing the handiwork of our new chapter Web committee. Brian Baddour, Rick Elliot, and Ken Rogers are making waves on NEOSTC.org with a design overhaul, some new features, and plenty of new content.

The black and white table navigation developed a couple years ago has been improved and enhanced with the addition of a new color scheme and left navigation bar. You can also use Google® to search the site and beyond.

The Web committee is slowly but surely building an exciting list of content too. Already online are copies of the chapter's bylaws and strategic plan, contact information for chapter officers, and an up-to-date calendar. Future plans include a map of the chapter coverage, a member year book, and ideas and scenarios to tempt your technical imagination.

What you see today are the first in a long line of changes that will come to make NEOSTC.org your source for information and collaboration. To make recommendations or suggest what you would like to see, contact any member of the Web committee.

Judging Opportunity Reminder

by NEOSTC Competitions Committee

We are still able to accept judges for publications judging (working with the Mid Tennessee chapter). To participate as a judge in either distance or on-site judging, please refer to the following general information.

Required Qualification:

♦ Five or more years in technical communication or related field with or without membership in STC.

♦ Additional/Preferred (at least one of the following):

♦ Degree in technical communication or related field

♦ For publications competition: publishing background (two articles or one book)

♦ Teaching experience in communication or a related field (one year full time or two years adjunct or part time)

♦ Winner of an STC or other communication competition award

We expect all judges to:

♦ Be able to perform judging tasks as a member of a team at either a consensus or remote judging session, and

♦ Have the time to complete the judging within the timeframe of the competition

Dates:

♦ Oct. 11 Last day for accepting entries

♦ Nov. 7 Meeting to distribute entries and train judges - Rockwell International, Lori Moreland

♦ Nov. 23 Meeting for consensus judging* - Lakeland Community College, Doug Kepp

* If you cannot attend, we can arrange for distance judging.

For more detailed information about the call for judges and competition please see: http://www.neostc.org/comp/call.htm .

Thank you,

Jeanette Evans, Doug Kepp, Lori Moreland

September Meeting Wrap-Up: 2002-2003 Kick-Off

by Sharon Ambro, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

There were several tables each with a different discussion topic. Each table had at least one topic "expert" from the chapter to initiate conversation and answer questions.

The discussion topics about NEOSTC included:

♦ Employment

♦ Technicom, Programs, and Networking Lunches

♦ Web Site

♦ Newsletter

♦ Membership and Public Relations

♦ Chapter History and Past-President's Council

♦ Competitions and Academic Relations

These discussions helped to better inform NEOSTC members about the workings of the chapter as well as the volunteer opportunities it offers. We hope all members will continue to stay involved and get more involved.

Creating Dynamic Screen Captures with Camtasia

by Dannette Thompson, Sr. Technical Writer, Foundation Software, Inc.

The debate is this: Should screen captures be used in online documentation or not?

While the debate rages on regarding static screen captures, several software tools put another wrinkle in the issue — that of dynamic screen captures. These tools allow you to capture a changing software window and play it back as a "movie." This can include cursor movements, typing and any other demonstrative activity, such as the addition of notations and callouts. Typically, dynamic screen captures are used to illustrate a user's actions or to display a complex operation within software. However, with a bit of imagination and the right audience, they can serve a variety of purposes.

If your take on the debate is that dynamic screen captures can be useful in online documentation, the market offers many tools that can help you create them. One such tool is Camtasia™, an 8.25 MB download from TechSmith, the makers of the static screen-capture software Snagit™. (A 30-day trial version of Camtasia can be downloaded free from http://www.techsmith.com.)

Camtasia interface

Camtasia offers a very simple interface with a variety of options, all of which allow you to create simple dynamic screen captures. While Camtasia is uncomplicated to learn, and a movie can be created in a matter of minutes, it does not offer as many playback options as some of its more robust competitors, such as Qarbon's ViewletBuilder™.

One of Camtasia's most significant advantages is its simple learning curve. A "Quick Help" menu option gives you the bare-bones basics for using the software in four short steps. If you need additional information or added tips, however, a variety of online documentation is offered, including a "tip of the day," a built-in HTML help system and tutorials on TechSmith's Web site.

The first step in recording a dynamic screen capture requires you to set up your capture, which can involve as little as indicating if you want to capture the entire screen or only a portion and whether the playback should be recorded or live. Camtasia's options for capturing a portion of a screen allow you to trim superfluous screen areas, such as the Windows taskbar or a desktop with images irrelevant to the recording. Using the "window" option, Camtasia breaks apart portions of a screen and treats each as a separate window. This allows you to focus users' attention on portions of a software screen without distracting circles or arrows. For example, you could capture an entire screen, then use Camtasia's "zoom" effect while moving to a "window" within that screen. Again, setting up this effect is a simple process that involves selecting two menu options and employing the correct keyboard shortcuts as you record.

Camtasia annotations palette

Camtasia offers additional recording effects, including annotations such as a watermark or date-and-time stamp, cursor and keyboard sounds, and panning from screen area to screen area. All of these effects work seamlessly within the normal recording process and offer quality output.

Whether recording a simple or relatively complex capture, the results usually meet TechSmith's marketing claims of "lossless" quality. However, in order to take full

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advantage of Camtasia's resolution and smoothness of movement, the built-in CODEC created by TechSmith should be used. For those unfamiliar with video recording issues and codecs specifically, Camtasia's online help system offers a very basic overview of the concept. A CODEC is a small but complex tool controlled by the operating system and used by video recording and playback devices. It controls how the video information is encoded and decoded and how that information is compressed for more efficient file storage and transfer.

TechSmith has created their own codec, called "TSCC." In order to get quality videos from Camtasia, they recommend the use of this codec. While the software allows the use of other, Windows-standard codecs, the resulting quality does not stack up to its competitors'. In order to get clear and smooth captures, one must use the TSCC codec. The caveat to this, however, is that the codec must also exist on the machine where the video is played back. This requires you to distribute the codec, which you may do free of charge with the purchase of a Camtasia license. The software comes with an executable installation program that can be called during the installation of an online help system and silently installed, but this obviously requires additional consideration and effort that may not be feasible for all online system distributors. Another option is to use the "pack and show" feature in Camtasia. This creates an executable file that installs the codec and plays the movie almost simultaneously.

Overall, while the codec issue is a consideration for many users, Camtasia offers a simple, affordable method of creating dynamic screen captures. The 30-day trial period offers more than enough time to explore the program before committing, and the movie files produced by the product are easily integrated into an online documentation system.

Whether or not you think those captures belong there depends on which side of the never-ending screen capture debate you fall. No dynamic screen capture tool — no matter how good — can solve that debate in the world of technical communication.

Conducting a Postmortem

by Saul Carliner, STC Fellow

A postmortem is a meeting of all members of the project team at the end of the project to identify:

♦ What went well and should be repeated on future projects; and

♦ What did not go well and how to avoid these situations on future projects.

In addition, the postmortem should provide time for the members of the project team to thank one another for their contributions. Often during the course of a project, team members become so comfortable working with one another that they do not thank each other for their contributions or acknowledge exceptional work. As a result, team members might not realize that their colleagues appreciate their contributions. The postmortem provides a formal opportunity for team members to offer one another such recognition.

Here are some tips for conducting a postmortem:

♦ Send a meeting notice to team members at least two weeks in advance. Invite all team members to participate.

♦ Prepare and distribute an agenda before the meeting. A typical agenda for a postmortem is no longer than 60 to 90 minutes and contains separate items for the following:

  o What went right

  o What to improve on future projects (do not use the postmortem as a "blaming" session; instead, use the postmortem as an opportunity to identify problems and suggest solutions to them); and

  o Acknowledgement and appreciation.

♦ At the meeting, create a positive, productive environment. Ask someone to recorder the proceedings. The recorder should prepare minutes, which will be distributed after the meeting.

♦ Set the right tone for the meeting by emphasizing the positive and providing each team member with an opportunity to speak. For example, when asking about what to improve for future projects, rather than just asking people to provide suggestions, go around the meeting table and ask each person to provide at least one suggestion, then open up the question to the group for feedback.

♦ Avoid passing judgment on comments. Each team member may have experienced a project differently, depending on the members' personalities and their roles in the project. While some team members may have had a positive experience, others might not. Only by hearing how each team member perceived the project can the project team better understand their interactions with one another.

- Close with some sort of celebration. For example, you could provide a cake that says "Congratulations" or a small gift for each team member.

- Publish the minutes of the postmortem within two business days.

- For suggestions requiring changes to your organization's policies and procedures, provide a follow-up memo to team members within one month of the meeting to tell them whether the policy and procedures will be changed.

Postmortem meetings provide valuable closure to projects, letting participants separate emotionally from one project so they can move onto the next.

Saul Carliner is a popular speaker and author on information design, e-learning, and related management issues. His books include Techniques for Technical Communicators, An Overview of Online Learning, *and the upcoming* Designing e-Learning. *Saul is a Fellow and past international president of the STC. You can contact Saul at saulcarliner@worldnet.att.net or visit his Web site at http://saulcarliner.home.att.net.*

Remember Your First Meeting?

by Mike Bates, Region 4 Director-Sponsor

I walked into my first meeting in Northeast Ohio and didn't know anyone. I no sooner stuck my name badge to my shirt and someone was there to introduce themselves to me. From there, the person took me around the room and introduced me to others. I left that night feeling as though I had met 20 new professionals in my field. I couldn't wait to go to the next meeting.

Since then, I have moved four times and been a member of four different STC chapters. Each experience has been different. Each chapter has had something unique to offer me. From Bowling Green to Cleveland; Jacksonville, Florida to Raleigh, North Carolina, and back to Cleveland, one thing is certain. I have established an incredible network of friends and colleagues through STC that I will never forget.

What does this have to do with you? Consider the times. Think about the unfamiliar faces at your next STC meeting. Think about the people that you may not have seen in a while.

This fall, many of you and your chapter leaders will be running formal membership drives. You will be looking for new members and trying to identify ways to retain your current membership. You don't have to be the

Membership Drive Chairperson or on the committee to help. Here are a few suggestions.

Meet one new person at your next meeting. Take an opportunity to seek out one person at a meeting who is new or who you have not met before. Make an effort to get to know them. Consider what it was like when you first started in STC. You didn't know anyone and you weren't sure what value the Society could have for you. Listen to what the individual is looking for from the meeting and focus on how you can help them.

Contact a member that you haven't seen in a while. Many people just become busy with other parts of their lives or have moved into positions that are outside the field of technical communication. Ask your membership chairperson for the name of one person who is no longer an STC member or who you haven't seen in a while. Contact that person. Let them know what has happened lately at the chapter and Society levels. Invite them to the next meeting and, most importantly, find out why they stopped coming or are no longer members. It's important to listen to what our members want out of the Society, but it is equally as important to learn why folks have stopped participating.

Promote services at the chapter and Society levels. So many of you are involved in chapters that are very active. You have excellent programs which keep you coming back for more. Think about the services that your chapter and the Society have to offer. Consider the employment banks, mentoring opportunities, listservs, and other services that you use within your own chapter. Also, consider services like the Special Interest Groups (SIGs), employment bank, research opportunities, and award programs that the Society offers.

Take a proactive role in keeping your chapter and the Society alive and well. It is your responsibility. Even if you are not sure where to start, think back to your first meeting. Remember what kept you coming back. Then think about why you are still attending meetings today. You suddenly have two stories to get you started.

Mike is the Manager of Information Architecture at Rockwell Automation and Region 4 Director-Sponsor. He can be reached at mpbates@software.rockwell.com

The Esoteric Editor

by Karla Caldwell, Esoteric Co-Editor

This year, we've had a lot of activity on the chapter Web site — most notably, a brand new look. In order to be consistent with the rest of the site, Sharon and I have decided to update the Lines & Letters online format to what you see now.

We'd like to hear what you think about NEOSTC's new online look and find out how you feel about the changes to Lines & Letters . What do you like? What don't you like? What can we change to make the site easier for you to use? We'll look forward to hearing from you.

This issue, we've posted some of your responses to the new newsletter publication format and discuss the most recent changes to your chapter newsletter. Read on for more:

Last issue, we shook up the format a little and delivered the first issue of our companion publication Lines & Letters Light along with the entirely-Web-based Lines & Letters . Here's what some of you had to say:

> Dear editors,
>
> Thank you for doing a nice job with the competitions Call for Entries/Call for Judges in the last newsletter mailing. I hope most of our chapter members agree that it was both efficient and effective to combine the call with the newsletter mailing.
>
> As for your new newsletter format and hybrid approach, I like them both! The paper newsletter is most readable with a length I like. As for the online newsletter, I'm on my way right now to visiting ... I think I'll start with looking for the review on the book that covers the "Meditation on a Receipt"...
>
> Jeanette Evans, NEOSTC Competitions Committee

Hi Guys,

Nice issue of Lines & Letters Light. I like the concept. No offense, but I prefer to read publications in print because I'm an old-fashioned paper person. The online issue looks good too!

Laurie Harrison, NEOSTC Member

Hello,

> I like the new short format printed piece. Just enough to skim over, then makes you want to check the Web site for more! I like it!
>
> Tricia Oleksy, Membership Committee Chair

Do you have some thoughts or comments you'd like to share regarding the new Lines & Letters format? If you do, send messages to Karla and Sharon at lleditors@hotmail.com.

Membership News

Welcome New Members

In August, Joseph W. Petitto joined the NEOSTC. Please help us in welcoming him to our chapter.

Jennifer N. Whitney, formerly of the James Maddison University Student Chapter in VA., and Carol E. Gasser, formerly of the Hoosier Chapter have also joined us.

If you see Carol, Jennifer, or Joseph at any upcoming meetings, make sure to welcome them to Northeast Ohio.

### A Special Welcome to Some New "Junior" Members

Over the summer, our chapter was also lucky to add two new "junior" members. Congratulations to June Muhic on the birth of her daughter, Lucia, and to Barb Philbrick on the birth of her son, Henry.

Congratulations Dennis!

Dennis Verbiar, our chapter treasurer, started off the new STC year with a new job at Phillips. Don't forget to offer your congratulations at the next meting.

Chapter Membership Counts

The membership count as of Sept. 30 was 184 for the NEOSTC.
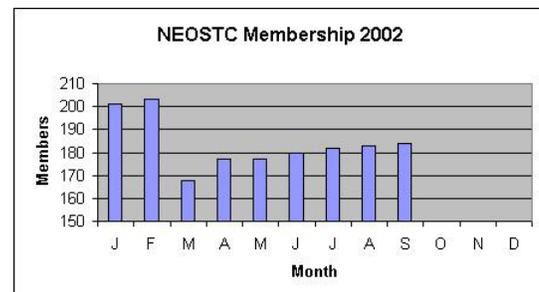
Total membership for STC International reached 20,537.

If you or someone you know in the chapter has good news that you want to share, e-mail the editors at lleditors@hotmail.com.

Regional Opportunities

Region 4 Conference

The Central Ohio Chapter of the STC is hosting the 2002 Region 4 Conference on November 8 and November 9, 2002. Mark your calendars now and plan to attend – Friday, November 8 is the leadership workshop, and Saturday, November 9 is the regional conference .

♦ Date: Nov. 8-9

Details:

The Leadership Conference will be held on Friday afternoon, November 8, 2002 at Chase Manhattan Mortgage Corporation at Easton. Tina Rich will present a hands on session on Tongue Fu!, followed by a presentation on the state of the Society from Ed See, STC President, and Mike Bates, Region 4 Director/Sponsor.

The Region 4 Conference will be held on Saturday, November 9, 2002, at Columbus State Community College. This year's conference will feature several nationally known speakers and topics from the 49th Annual STC Conference that was held in Nashville, TN, in May. One glance at the conference program, and you'll see topics like Cascading Style Sheets, XML/Single-Sourcing, Information Architecture, Web Usability, and Help Authoring Trends. Take a look at our regional conference program, and you will see many of these same vital topics. And what is even better is that the same industry leaders who presented these topics in Nashville will be coming right here to Columbus to deliver their expertise to you!

We have a full day planned with over 20 topics to choose from. And we are bringing speakers from far and wide! Neil Perlin will present two sessions; one on XML and the other on Small Steps to Single Sourcing. Joel Sklar will deliver the keynote address and present a session on Cascading Style Sheets. We will also have hands-on sessions; Central Ohio's own Michael Starr will share his expertise on Dreamweaver and Course Builder.

And it doesn't stop there! Learn how to conquer MS Word, hear the Confessions of a Professional Service Consultant (or how to redefine your work in this tight job market), learn about Preemptive Project Management, Writing for the Web, Help Authoring Trends, Web Usability, Industry Gurus, and Dealing With

Change. Other sessions include a Job Hunting Panel, Online Editing, Special Needs, and Information Architecture.

The half-day Leadership Conference is $50 for non-members, $40 for members, $35.00 Corporate Discount (3 or more from the same company), $20 for students. The Region 4 Conference is $95.00 for non-members, $85.00 for members, $75.00 Corporate Discount, and $25.00 for students.

Attend both the Leadership and Region 4 Conference: $135.00 for non-members, $115.00 for members, $100.00 Corporate Discount, and $30.00 for students.

So, plan now to attend this information-packed conference! Don't forget to mark November 8 and 9, 2002 on your calendar! For more information, contact Brenda McGuire at mcguireb@battelle.org or Sue Wolford at sue.wolford@chase.com, or visit our conference Web site.

Structured Writing Workshop by JoAnn Hackos - Learn how to write for single-sourced documents.

♦ Date: Nov. 18-19 (8:30 AM)

Details:

How do I write modular content without knowing the context in which modules will be presented?

> **What information types do we need to use for our content?**

Is it possible to have too many different information types?

> **Will I lose my creativity if I just write modules instead of creating an entire book or help system?**

These and more questions occur every time I talk about content-management and single-source strategies to an audience of writers, editors, and managers. Everyone wants to understand what it will be like to write in a content-management environment. People who are willing to embrace a new way of working want to know what to expect. Those anxious to expand their career options want to learn what the new options are all about. They are prepared to take on new roles like information architect and repository manager, once they understand what the new roles are.

To respond, I designed the new structured-writing seminar as an extension of my long-standing Single-Source Strategy seminar. Structured writing gets closer to the decisions that writers, editors, and project

managers need to make. The emphasis is on your own materials with much hands-on participation. From information types through content units, you discuss with teammates and other attendees what the best solutions might be. You tackle granularity and semantic markup, as well as the implications of XML.

If you want to understand how your job is changing and how to respond creatively, join me in this two-day seminar. The best course? Bring a small team so that you can begin to make decisions together.

- When: Nov. 18-19, 2002 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM
- Where: Columbus, OH
- Fee: $775 (with a two for one discount)
- To Register: Online or by phone at 303-234-0123
- Instructor: JoAnn Hackos

Business Planning - Business Advisors of Cleveland will discuss business planning and market determination for small business start-ups.

- Date: Oct. 16 (7 PM)
- Location: Maple Heights Branch - Cuyahoga County Library

Business Finance - Business Advisors of Cleveland will present informational seminar on creative financing for small business start-ups.

- Date: Oct. 23 (7 PM)
- Location: Maple Heights Branch - Cuyahoga County Library

Introducing the Special Needs SIG

by Kim McConnel, SNSIG Member, Senior Member
Central Ohio STC

The Society for Technical Communication's new Special Needs SIG is dedicated to providing information that will assist technical communicators with disabilities in the practice of our profession; furnishing all technical communicators with information that will help them make our communication products more accessible for users with disabilities; and offering strategic leadership, both within the Society and through alliance with other professions, to help harness technology and methodology to assist people with disabilities in the general population.

Those are lofty goals, but we have pulled together a highly committed and energetic team to pursue them.

We have already made significant progress: a comprehensive Web site, a soon-to-be-released dynamic new online newsletter (Achieve!), the publication of Guidelines for Persons with Special Needs at the 49th annual conference, a highly successful progression at the same conference, and the publication of several articles.

But we have much yet to do, and we need more people. If you have a disability yourself, if you don't have a disability but prepare communication products for users who do, or if you meet neither of those two parameters but are committed to the concept of helping people take the "dis" out "disabilities," then we urge you to join us.

By completing the sign-up sheet, you can be added immediately to the SNSIG, meaning you can (with your permission, of course) be added to our robust and spirited listserv, receive our online newsletter, and join our efforts to fulfill our mission. Even if you are not in a position to contribute time as an Active participant — at least, not immediately — we still ask for your support in joining us now as a Patron, thereby committing to include your SNSIG affiliation when you submit your STC membership renewal later this fall. Quite frankly, as a brand new SIG, we face not only a daunting list of tasks to pursue our objectives, we also must overcome a significant budget challenge in order to fund those tasks. So if you want to support us but cannot at this time commit volunteer hours, please consider joining us as a Patron.

If you have a disability and are willing to share that information with us when you sign up, that would help us gather the data we need to focus our research and publishing initiatives in the areas that will benefit the most people. We urge you to join us and benefit from the information and resources we have already gathered, whether or not you are in a position to participate actively at this time in our undertakings.

Contacts:

- Lori Gillen, Membership Co-Manager, STC Special Needs SIG, lori.gillen@McKesson.com
- Dan Voss, SIG Manager and Membership Co-Manager, STC Special Needs SIG, daniel.w.voss@lmco.com

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More information:

- SIG Home (http://www.stcsig.org/sn/index.shtml)
- SNSIG Mission Statement (http://www.stcsig.org/sn/aboutsig.shtml)

Research STC's Sustaining Organizations for Job Opportunities

by Sharon Ambro, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

What are sustaining organizations?

Sustaining organizations are companies that support professional activities in the field of technical communication. They pay annual dues to STC for certain benefits, such as tax deductions. Each organization is allowed one representative that receives all the benefits of a typical member, including discounts on the STC Annual Conference, Intercom, and Technical Communication.

How can sustaining organizations help in your search for employment?

Go to http://www.stc.org. On the Membership menu, click Sustaining Organizations. Click the Sustaining Org. List link in the left-hand margin. This page includes a partial list of STC's sustaining organizations. Be sure to include these companies in your job search. You already know they value and support technical communicators. Good Luck!

Lines & Letters Editors

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