

# WriteUp

Volume 17, Number 1

<http://www.stc.org/region3/sun/www/>

Jan/Feb 2000

## FTCC Awards Banquet Held at MOSI

By Honorita Capell, Suncoast Chapter

Science and technology came together Saturday night when the Florida Technical Communications Competition banquet was held at the Museum of Science and Industry. After dining on a sumptuous buffet, and in a relaxed and celebratory atmosphere, more than fifty guests celebrated and honored the winners of the three annual competitions.

STC First Vice President, Mark Hanigan, playing the effervescent master of ceremonies, gave special recognition to the awards' committee, chaired by Victor Chapel, and to the first-round judges. Mark gave impromptu gratitude to Paul Butt, whose



Best of Show winner, Gayle Stroup and STC President, Mark Hanigan strike a pose.

name was inadvertently left off the program, for his contribution to the event. In addition, Mark acknowledged and thanked the three non-member donors for the indispensable support that they freely gave to the FTCC. These boosters were: PricewaterhouseCoopers, LLP, which provided the use of its computers to display the online competition entries, in

addition to financially underwriting the costs for materials printing and mailing; the Knowledge Development Center, which hosted the judges' site at its facility in November, and the Hillsboro Printing Company, which provided the complimentary programs. According to Mark, these generous contributions made the program possible.

The Suncoast Chapter of the STC began its statewide competition in 1991. Mark developed the concept, and then newcomer, Michelle Ratcliffe, ran with the idea. With a team of about 25 volunteers, from a membership of 60, gray matter was probed, ideas massaged, and procedures tweaked until the pro forma model became the annual competition it is today.

Mark said, "The competition is one of the best activities that the Suncoast Chapter provides. Each person can take on something small, medium, or large, and by working together, people naturally network just by spending the day together. The participants come out with a finished product and a meeting of the minds. Everyone has a wonderful experience."

Since the STC and its chapters are non-profit, any funds realized over and above the actual cost of the activities are funneled back to the STC, are used for student scholarships, or are used for other activities within the chapter, said Mark. Michelle added that the Suncoast Chapter competition engages in revenue sharing with other



Photo by Lore Eargle

Best of Show entries (from top: DESC Environmental Guide for Fuel Terminals, Motorola LS350 User's Guide/Quick Reference card; and Seminar-On-A-Disc)

chapters that send entrants to our competition.

The FTCC is comprised of three separate competitions: Technical Art, Technical Online, and Technical Publications, which give all entrants the opportunity to display their talents. All competitors are judged within their own classification of entry, which provides each with an equal chance to win an award.

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## Write Up

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Write Up communicates chapter and Society news six times per year for the benefit of members and friends of the Suncoast Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

### Submissions

Meeting writeups, feature articles, and software/book reviews are encouraged (100-700 words). Preferred formats include MS Word e-mail attachment or text in the body of your e-mail message.

### Reprints

Advance permission is not needed to reprint articles from Write Up in STC newsletters. Please credit the author and publication, and send a copy of your newsletter to the Write Up editor.

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# From the Editor

## Changes, changes, everywhere!



Much has already happened in the first month of the year 2000. (Wow, that sounds so futuristic, doesn't it?) I thought we'd start off the year with a bigger issue, a different format, some new sections, and my favorite, a double dose of humor (page 7). Read on for a breakdown of the changes and news in this issue.

### Newsletter Changes

I thought the newsletter needed a face-lift for the new year. I'm not sure if it will always be 12 pages; we'll have to see how much information I can dig up each time.

I've included my picture so that you can put a face with my column. I'm no egomaniac, however. For consistency, I wanted every column's author to have a picture.

There's also a new Member Profile column. Each issue will highlight a different member (not necessarily a new one).

### Chapter News

We have a new Suncoast Chapter webmaster—Shannon Haynes. Shannon is taking over the site from Kristie Kucjez, who has done a wonderful job. Thanks for your hard work and dedication, Kristie.

We have a new Student Liaison. Taking Stephanie Monahan's place is Pam Treme, former Student Suncoast Chapter President. The student liaison is an STC member who provides information, support, and suggestions to the student chapter. The student liaison also represents the student chapter in Administrative Council meetings. They are a society-level support system and communications medium.

The student chapter visited IBM Global Services Information department in December. Read all about it on page 6.

### Society News

The Society news includes the new membership forms (page 9), complimentary membership for non-member conference attendees (also on page 9), and information on deducting your STC dues from your taxes (page 10).

Like the changes? Don't like the new format? Let me know what you think. Thanks!

**Mary Lauby**

## Quotes from writers



Use the right word and not its second cousin.  
*Mark Twain*

You only learn to be a better writer by actually writing.  
*Doris Lessing*

A writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for most people.  
*Thomas Mann*



# Do I Need to Create a Help Style Guide?

By Jim Sands, Chicago Chapter

Do you really need an online Help style and standards guide? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you have a document that new Help authors can read to quickly determine how your Help systems are written and formatted?
- Is your online documentation consistent in format, spacing and information types?
- Do all of your online documentation projects appear to have been written by the same author?

If you answered “no” to any of the above questions, you're a likely candidate for a corporate Help style guide.

Some Help authors prefer not to develop a style and standards document because they feel it will limit their writing style. Likewise, few people enjoy taking the time to develop a guide because of deadlines on other projects. However, few of us would drive cross-country without a map. Why should we develop large-scale documentation projects without similar guidelines?

Some of the most important features found in a Help style guide should be:

- A description of the way Help is accessed by your applications (i.e. F1, Help button, etc.)
- Examples of the different information types, or content chunks that you use
- A map of the typical backward and forward linkages used in your topics
- The characteristics of fonts, spacing and colors used in your style sheets. The easiest way to do this is to include screen captures of the style setting dialog boxes.

- The usage of buttons and hotspot graphics
- Samples of writing style, with a “few” of the rules authors should follow
- Your file naming conventions, and typical release procedures
- Examples of TOC and Index organizations
- Your testing documents and procedures
- A listing of additional resources

Many of the above features can be described using screen captures and examples. Keep the guide as brief and simple as possible. Once you have created the guide, test it on a non-Help team member. It may take a few hours to develop, but a good Help style guide will result in substantial time savings once your team starts writing.

## Want more information?

*Standards for Online Communications*, by JoAnn Hackos and Dawn Stevens 1997. Wiley. ISBN 0-471-15695-7.

## Have a question about Help?

Jim Sands is an independent online Help consultant and welcomes your questions and comments. Send questions to [ohlp@msn.com](mailto:ohlp@msn.com), 847-918-8761, or to Sands & Associates, 650 Whitney Court, Suite 404, Gurnee, IL 60031. All questions will be answered in *Help 101* rather than individually.

*Help 101 offers practical tips and educational resources for online Help developers. This column is a regular feature of both WriteUp and Byline, the newsletter of the Chicago chapter.*

## FTCC [Continued from page 1](#)

During the ceremony, Mark read a little Carlin-esque poem to us that illustrated that the English language is not exact, and some people have difficulty with it. The poem raised the questions of some different expressions having the same meaning. For instance, fat chance and slim chance have, on the surface, opposite meanings, but mean exactly the same thing.

Victor also presented the Art competition awards, and the STC Region 3 Director-Sponsor, Michelle Ratcliffe, presented the Online awards. Lore Eargle, the Suncoast Chapter secretary, did the honors with the Publications Awards. Lore Eargle and Julie Chapel shared the role of awards photographer. You can view the complete list of award recipients in the online copy of the newsletter at <http://www.stc.org/region3/sun/www/newsletter.htm>.

## Best of Show Award Winners

### Art Competition

*Motorola LS350 User's Guide/Quick Reference Card*  
ITC Team - Motorola, Inc.

### Online Competition

*Seminar-On-A-Disc, Multimedia Edition, Access 2000 Level 1 Intro*  
Product Development, InfoSource, Inc.

### Publications Competition

*DESC Environmental Guide for Fuel Terminals*  
William Middleton, Defense Energy Support Center;  
Carol Cramer, U.S. Army Corp of Engineers - Mobile District;  
Meg Morrison, CH2M Hill

## February Meeting Reminder

Neil Perlin presents

### Trends in Technical Communication

**Date:** February 10, 2000

**Location:** Lake Summit Conference Center  
Tokyo A Room  
13575 58th Street North  
Clearwater, Florida 33760

**Directions:** The Lake Summit Conference Center is located in the Icot Center between 49th Street and Ulmerton Rd. in Clearwater. Look for the first building on the right (directly after you cross a small bridge).

**Cost:** \$15.00 includes dinner and presentation (Students may attend at a 50% discount.)

**RSVP:** Please RSVP by noon Feb. 7th to Debra Mixon at (813) 891-6084 ext.4314 or [debra.mixon@trcinc.com](mailto:debra.mixon@trcinc.com)

## Correction: FTCC Volunteers Omitted

In the Nov/Dec 99 issue, some FTCC volunteers were omitted.

In addition to being the FTCC Co-chair, **Mark Hanigan** also served as a judge.

**Martha Collins**, STC Treasurer, served as a fill-in judge.

**Beth Hollenberger-Darrell** was a much needed and much appreciated volunteer.

And thanks to **Jeff Allen**, the manager at the Knowledge Development Center for enabling us to use the KDC.



## President's Message

By Eileen McPartland, Suncoast Chapter President

advantage of inquiring about a volunteer position now is that you can speak to the current volunteers and work with them first hand. You can work with your predecessor and learn all about the duties before you fill the position.

This year, the administrative council has some problems coordinating all the busy schedules, so we had virtual council meetings for November and December. We worked together to limit the amount of time spent volunteering, yet covered all the duties of each position. This is an example of the many things that volunteers can do to keep this chapter a success.

Remember, volunteering is a great opportunity to work with new people and get more involved in our organization. And most of all, you can make new friends and have a lot of fun, too!

*Eileen McPartland*

## Featured Web Site

Suggested by Andy Cloughton

### The Gallery of "Misused" Quotation Marks

<http://www.juvalamu.com/qmarks/>

It's a known fact that most technical writers have a good, or at least odd, sense of humor. This "humorous site" has three "sections": "Current Exhibits" contains a plethora of choice examples of wrongfully used quotation marks; "Permanent Collection" features links to "historic masterpieces"; and "Donation Rotunda" contains the form to submit your "donation".

Each "donation" has an exhibit number in keeping with the museum theme, and each exhibit has delightfully witty comments.

This site also contains links to two similar sites: the Gallery of Annoying Email Signatures and The Home for Abused Apostrophes.

# Delivering Web-based Help Systems

## January Chapter Meeting

By Bob Bennett, Suncoast Chapter

The January meeting was held at LaPaz Restaurant on the Courtney Campbell Causeway in Tampa. This new facility is the old east wing of the Tex Mex Cantina where we have held so many previous meetings. The *new* part is a wall to separate the bar noise from the more genteel proceedings of the meeting — a very welcome addition.

Chapter President, Eileen McPartland, opened the meeting (I would never want to belong to an organization whose meetings actually “come to order”) by introducing the new president of the USF student chapter, Mary Greer, and our new webmaster, Shannon Haynes. Announcements followed:

Barbara Odom is seeking volunteers to solicit corporate support for the Annual Conference in Orlando this May. Volunteers will call prominent technology businesses in Central Florida to request either cash contributions or the loan of computer equipment for the duration of the conference. For more information or to volunteer, e-mail Barbara at [bcodom@aol.com](mailto:bcodom@aol.com).

Finally, STC (the international society) is continuing its effort to encourage the instruction of technical writing at the high school level. Teachers interested in adding this to their class work can attend a seminar that suggests methods and offers other support. The society will even subsidize the expense under certain circumstances. For more information, see <http://www2.stc.org/pics/pcc/pccmain.htm>, or e-mail Karen Bachmann at

[karenb@trcinc.com](mailto:karenb@trcinc.com).

Eileen then introduced Mark Lewis, founder of the Clearwater based HyperWriters, who then gave an engaging presentation on the delivery of web-based Help systems. While this subject sounds very similar to that of the October comparative presentation given by Stephanie Bergeron, Mark focused on the technical aspects of deploying these systems.

Mark first carefully defined “web-based” Help to eliminate classic Windows Help which runs only on the Windows operating system. True cross-platform, web-based Help that runs on any computer seems much more complicated. Windows Help is now relatively easy (hold that thought...) by comparison. Mark also dismissed Microsoft HTML Help as not suitable for web deployment because, like Windows Help, it compiles all topics into a single file. This requires the reader to download the entire Help system in order to view a single topic — an unacceptable burden in the web environment.

By contrast, true web-based Help systems allow the reader to download topics one at a time, as they are needed. Each topic is a unique, garden-variety .htm file. That's the easy part.

The complications arise with the code necessary to display familiar organizational elements that distinguish web-based Help from a mere web site: the table of contents and the index.

This groundwork having been laid, Mark then “opened the hood” of web based Help to reveal a snarl of .ocx, .hhc, .hkk, .cab, and .css files all interconnected by a tangle of java applets. He stressed that all of the appropriate files must be delivered with the Help system, placed in the appropriate directories, and “registered” with the operating system. Sometimes, it is even necessary to “enable” the browser to display the Help.

He supplied a very thorough hand-out that explains such details for representative web-based Help systems. Copies will be available on his website ([www.hyperwriters.com/stc/deployment.htm](http://www.hyperwriters.com/stc/deployment.htm)) by the end of January.

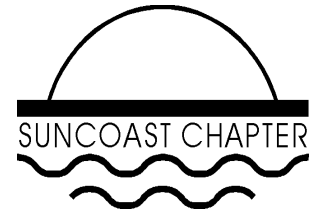
Mark is the founder and President of HyperWriters, a consulting company specializing in all types of online Help. He started the company about two years ago and is now completely occupied serving the needs of his clients. The secret to his success, he says, is treating your customers (especially the first few) very, very well. It is exhausting, but it produces excellent references.



Photo by Bob Bennett

Mark Lewis and Suncoast Chapter President Eileen McPartland take a break from the meeting.

# Chapter News and Happenings



## Membership Update

**By Melissa Lamb**  
Suncoast Chapter  
Membership Manager

### New Members

Bradley Himes  
Cindy Marinak  
Rosemary Micire  
Paul Tennant  
Marilyn Arato  
Carrie Campbell  
Honorita Capell  
Andrea Norris  
Richard Wills  
Ken Wiggins  
Marie-Claire Graves

### Senior Members

Mary Joan Cox  
Mary C. Lauby  
Khairunnisa M. Hoosainali  
Phillip C. Wilkerson

A warm welcome to all our new and transferring members. We're glad you're part of the Suncoast Chapter. Also, congratulations to our senior members.

### Address Changes

If you have an address change, please send your new information to the Database Manager, Denise Passmore at [woodstuck.@earthlink.net](mailto:woodstuck.@earthlink.net).

## SSTC meets Big Blue

**By Mary K. Greer, Student Suncoast Chapter President**

On Wednesday, December 22, six members of USF's SSTC were given a half-day tour of IBM Global Services Information department. Kathy D'Adamo, an STC member and IBM employee, coordinated 30 minute visits with website developers, engineers, editors, usability personnel, and managers.

Each professional described their role in the technical writing process and welcomed questions from students eager to learn more about how tech writers work individually and in teams. We also enjoyed a conference call with an IBM tech writer who telecommutes from Texas. The pros and cons of telecommuting were discussed as well as the type of personality and discipline necessary to make telecommuting work effectively for both employer and employee.

In addition to learning about the nuts-and-bolts of the technical writing process, students learned the importance of teamwork in the creative process. Every project requires input from all members of the team and good negotiation skills are necessary to bring a project to satisfactory completion.

SSTC thanks IBM Global Services and Kathy D'Adamo for planning an interesting site visit for our organization. If any other businesses are interested in sponsoring a small group of students for tours or shadowing, please contact Mary K. Greer at 813-968-5112 or by email at [mkgreer@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:mkgreer@tampabay.rr.com).

## New Suncoast-L Administrator Announced

Ellen Phelps is our new Suncoast listserv administrator. She has taken it over from Helen Black, our former newsletter editor and the current manager of the STC Newsletter Competition.

## Sponsorships Needed for Annual Conference

**By Barbara Odom, Orlando Chapter**

Greetings:

I am the Corporate Support Manager for the conference in Orlando in May.

Our goal is to obtain sponsorship for 30 to 40 volunteers at \$100 each AND to procure some "loaner" PCs (number to be determined) for use at the conference. At this time, I need to get some volunteers from each Florida chapter to help me in this endeavor.

This entails making some calls to some key companies in your town who employ tech writers or have some connection to us, such as printing companies. This is a great networking opportunity as well as a way to get involved with the conference. Volunteers can contact me and I'll get everyone organized after the first of the year.

# Helpful Instructions...

Submitted by Kimberly Morrow, Suncoast Chapter



Some examples of why the human race has probably evolved as far as possible. These are actual instruction labels on consumer goods.

**On a hairdryer:** Do not use while sleeping. (Gee, that's the only time I have to work on my hair!)

**On a bag of chips:** You could be a winner! No purchase necessary.  
Details inside. (The shoplifter special!)

**On a bar of soap:** Directions: Use like regular soap. (And that would be how?)

**On some frozen dinners:** Serving suggestion: Defrost. (But it's "just" a suggestion!)

**On the bottom of a dessert box:** Do not turn upside down. (Too late! You lose!)

**On a package of bread pudding:** Product will be hot after heating. (Are you sure? Let's experiment.)

**On packaging for an iron:** Do not iron clothes on body. (But wouldn't that save more time? And whose body?)

**On a bottle of children's cough medicine:** Do not drive car or operate machinery. (We could do a lot to reduce the construction accidents if we just kept those 5 year olds off those fork lifts.)

**On a sleep aid bottle:** Warning: may cause drowsiness. (One would hope!)

**On a Korean kitchen knife:** Warning: keep out of children. (Hmm...something must have gotten lost in the translation.)

**On a string of Christmas lights:** For indoor or outdoor use only. (As opposed to use in outer space.)

**On a food processor:** Not to be used for the other use. (Now I'm curious.)

**On a package of peanuts:** Warning: contains nuts. (But no peas?)

**On a packet of airline nuts:** Instructions: open packet, eat nuts. (Somebody got paid big bucks to write this one.)

**On a Swedish chainsaw:** Do not attempt to stop chain with your hands. (Raise your hand if you've tried this.)

**On a child's Superman costume:** Wearing of this garment does not enable you to fly. (Oh go ahead! That's right, destroy a universal childhood belief.)

— *Original source unknown*

## A Technical Writer's Nightmare

Submitted by Perry Greene, Suncoast Chapter

**Stop me if you've heard this one before...**

A tech writer dies and arrives in Hell, where Satan growls, "I gotta escort these other sinners into the pit, lady. Take a seat and wait a minute!"

Terrified, the tech writer peeks behind a door and sees a tech writer agonizingly formatting 12 million lines of documentation on a flaming computer.

Aghast, she peeks behind a second door and sees a tech writer writing 23 million manuals on a mountain of screen captures written by a shrill, egomaniacal programmer who shrieks at every line.

In despair, she looks behind a third door and sees another tech writer like herself, chairing a never-ending meeting, munching bonbons, surrounded by fresh-faced admiring engineers offering her gifts of flowers, fresh fruit and fine wines and

telling her she's a documentation genius.

Satan returns and asks, "Well, which door, 1 or 2?"

The tech writer says, "I'd like Door 3, please."

"You can't have Door 3," Satan says. "That's Engineer Hell."

— *Original source unknown*

# Member Profile

## Meet Mary Osterbrock, Technical Writer



**Q. Where do you work?**

A. I work at Henter-Joyce, Inc., in St. Petersburg.

**Q. What does your company do?**

A. It is a software company. The owner created JAWS (Job Access With Speech) for blind computer users after he lost his vision in an automobile accident. It doesn't take the place of regular software, but is used with just about any software. Users substitute JAWS keystrokes for the mouse, and they hear rather than read the text and labeled graphics.

**Q. What is your title and/or your job description? What are your job duties?**

A. Technical Writer. Specifically, my assignments have revolved around the core Help topics and braille topics. The learning curve has been staggering. Other huge areas include working with individual popular applications and working with utility managers (configuration, dictionary, frames, keyboard, scripting) to customize the product for each user. I write exclusively in RoboHELP because online Help is the only practical way to make in-depth Help available to blind users.

We do produce a few reference pieces in hard copy, standard text as well as braille, which is very expensive. The product is always changing, and is produced in eight languages, which adds to the challenge. We have to keep track of changes for the translators.

I also established a kind of topic Table of Contents (TOC) of links at the beginning of many of the topics

that linked to headers below. I also painstakingly documented a section on Help screen navigation so that the new user could move around with confidence.

An obvious concern has been to translate a visual medium into one understandable and accessible to the blind while maintaining integrity of design for sighted users. Forty percent of the workforce at Henter-Joyce is blind, and that includes most of the highest-level developers.

Standardization is an ongoing challenge. Problems come from the most unlikely sources; the blind world cannot make up its mind whether the word "braille" should be capitalized. Add to that the fact that some of the sources and developers did not have English as a first language and I often wondered if I would ever sort things out.

**Q. What do you find most challenging or rewarding about your job?**

A. Well, being sighted has, at times, been a challenge. What works brilliantly in my mind might be totally useless to a blind person. On the computer side, the company threw out its old Help authoring software and installed RoboHELP.

Learning to use RoboHELP, JAWS, and all the usual support software while trying to write intelligently about braille and voice synthesizers and five types of cursors has been a challenge. I really loved having a dozen projects going at the same time, though, and that kind of surprised me.

The reward has been learning how

resilient people are, and that blindness is just one component of a person's being. And I was surprised to learn that blind people use the verb "to see" as effortlessly as sighted people do. I'd never thought about it before. On the whole, it has been a good experience.

**Q. What do you do in your free time?**

A. I am president of the League of Women Voters of North Pinellas County, a nonpartisan good government organization, so I'm pretty involved in the political process. Before becoming president I was their newsletter editor. I took the job of president because I thought it would be less work. It is.

**Q. Do you have any interesting tidbits about yourself that you'd like to share?**

A. I have a very spoiled Cairn Terrier, Gus, who has me pretty well trained. So I have all the disadvantages of a cat but none of the advantages.

Also, Henter-Joyce was picked as a case study after Paul and I responded to a questionnaire from RoboHELP's parent company, Blue-Sky Software. The path is <http://www.blue-sky.com/news/vpr/> and click **Case Studies** from the left column.

# The Latest from the Society and Other Chapters...

## New STC Fellowship Helps Practicing Technical Communicators Get a Taste of Teaching

News Release from STC

Practicing technical communicators can try their hand at teaching—with a little help from STC's new teaching fellowship program.

Under the program, STC will award stipends to technical communicators so that they can take on short-term teaching assignments. The goals of this program are to promote positive academe and industry connections, and to enable practitioners to help in the education and training of future technical communicators.

Fellowships last a minimum of one academic quarter or semester. Two teaching fellowships of \$2,000 each

are available for award. The stipend is paid directly to the practitioner in installments—one at the midpoint of the fellowship, and one after the fellowship has been completed and a final report submitted by the practitioner.

To see more information about the fellowship program—including contact information and deadlines for applying—please visit the STC office website at [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org). From the main page, select "Guides/Brochures," then scroll to "Guidelines for the Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals."

## New Membership Forms

Submitted by Melissa Lamb,  
Suncoast Chapter

In January 2000, Christopher Ruck, the STC Membership Director, announced that membership applications have been updated. The update includes a dues increase to \$125, which is tax deductible. Please discard all old membership applications. Old membership applications postmarked after January 1, 2000 will be returned to sender. You can download the new STC membership application at [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org).

## Currents 2000: A Road Map to the 21st Century March 3 & 4, 2000

The STC Atlanta Chapter is proud to announce its annual conference, Currents, on March 3 and 4, 2000, at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University.

Our theme this year is "Currents 2000: A Road Map to the 21st Century." An added feature of Currents 2000 is the inclusion of the Region 3 Student Conference, Directions 2000.

Currents begins on Friday, March 3rd, with a full-day workshop, Preparing for Single Sourcing, presented by Judy Glick-Smith. At the conference on Saturday, March 4th, you can choose any four sessions from our five topic stems and one student stem:

Access our website, [www.pobox.com/~stc-atlanta](http://www.pobox.com/~stc-atlanta), for complete conference information, fees (early registration ends 2/10), and registration form. You can also contact conference manager Cheri Pullar at 404-338-3478 or [cheri.pullar@hbc.com](mailto:cheri.pullar@hbc.com).

## Complimentary Membership for Nonmember Conference Attendees

Nonmembers who register at the full conference rate for STC's 47th Annual Conference, to be held May 21-24, 2000, in Orlando, Florida, will be invited to join STC—free—for the remainder of 2000. The STC office will include an application for a complimentary membership with the conference registration confirmation receipt letter.

A nonmember can return an application to the Society office by mail or fax; a drop box will also be available at on-site registration at the conference. The deadline to return the application to the STC office by mail or fax is June 30, 2000. Please note that the sooner nonmembers forward their applications, the sooner they can take advantage of STC's many services and benefits.

# RoboHELP Office Version 2000 Training

## One Size Does Not Fit All

By Kimberly Morrow, Suncoast Chapter



Recently I attended “RoboHELP Office version 2000 Basic/Intermediate WinHelp” training, offered by Blue Sky software and as I said in the title, “One size does not fit all”.

Will this class fit you? If you have never created a new topic or a table of contents, this class is for you. If you have never imported an existing document, this class is for you. If you have never compiled a Help project, this class is for you. If you have been working with RoboHELP for any length of time however, save your money.

You can find out more about using the product by searching the Robolist archives, taking specialized workshops, or experimenting with

the product. Moreover, it won't cost you a thousand dollars plus travel expenses.

Buyer beware when the course title contains “Basic/Intermediate.” I don't think there really is such a thing. It's all “basic” and you don't need to take a course to learn the basics about RoboHELP.

Currently Blue Sky does not offer any “Advanced” training courses for version 2000. Advanced courses are only being offered through what Blue Sky calls third-party consultants. By the way, version 2000 is not much different from version 7.

If you are just starting to use RoboHELP, try working through the tutorials that come with the product. Then

get to work. As you develop your project you will definitely have questions, but most likely they wouldn't be answered in the training course anyway.

If you do decide to pay for training, find out exactly what will be covered and to what extent. If you know specifically what you want to learn more about, find out if there are any classes covering just those topics.

On the positive side, I did meet some very interesting people (technical writers) and I learned some new techniques that I am already using in my current project.

## STC Dues are Tax Deductible

From *Tieline*, submitted by Melissa Lamb, Suncoast Chapter



If you pay taxes in the United States, you have several ways you can claim your STC dues as tax deductions.

### Charitable Expense

All STC members who pay taxes in the United States can deduct at least a portion of their STC dues if they claim this portion as a charitable donation. IRS publication 526 (rev. March 1998) defines this option: *You may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to a qualified organization. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive.*

As a 501(c)(3) organization, STC is a qualified organization. The only determination that you need to make is the amount that is more than the

value of the benefits you receive. STC's tangible benefits can be estimated at \$30 (\$15 for the Society's quarterly journal, “Technical Communication, and \$15 for the magazine *Intercom*). The difference between the cost of membership (\$125) and tangible benefits (\$30) is \$95, and you can claim that amount as a charitable contribution.

### Business Expense

Employees and self-employed consultants may claim the full amount of dues as a business expense.

### Miscellaneous Expense

Those who do not fall into the categories defined above may claim the amount of the dues as a miscellaneous deduction. (For miscellaneous deductions that can affect your taxes,

the total amount of miscellaneous deductions must exceed 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.)

If dues are deducted as a charitable expense, business expense, or miscellaneous expense, they must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 1999 can be deducted only on 1999 tax returns. If you have any questions, contact your local IRS representative or an accountant.

### Money or Goods, Not Time

While dues, contributions, and out-of-pocket expenses may be deducted as charitable expenses, time, and personal services cannot.

# Region 3 Director-Sponsor's Report

By Michelle Ratcliffe, Suncoast Chapter



The Phoenix chapter hosted the winter meeting of the STC Board of Directors in Phoenix, AZ, on January 13-15, 2000. Here is a summary of the actions taken as well as a few highlights of regional and Society level events.

## New Chapters

Approved the formation of:

- The James Madison University student chapter in Harrisonburg, Virginia, providing a \$150.00 USD start up grant.
- The Edison College student chapter in Piqua/Greenville, Ohio, providing a \$150.00 USD start-up grant.
- The Illinois Heartland chapter in Bloomington/Normal, IL. This is concurrent with the dissolution of the Illinois State University Student Chapter. Student members are a major segment of the new IL Heartland chapter and a mentoring program has been developed to match IL State students with professional members of the chapter.

## Appointments

- Lottie Applewhite, manager of the Journal Editor Fellowship Committee
- Diane Feldman and Patricia Tierney, co-managers of the Technical Editing SIG
- Carol Luttrell, manager of the International Technical Communication SIG
- Brian Follas, manager of the Illustrators and Visual Designers SIG
- Peggy Malecki, manager of the Conference Support Committee for STC's 48<sup>th</sup> annual conference in 2001 in Chicago
- Ernie Mazzatenta, manager of the STC Nominating Committee for 2000-2001

## Grants

These grants were approved:

- A merit grant of \$3,000.00 USD for the Boston chapter to serve as seed money for the *Carol Landers Spirit of Volunteerism Fund*. This is a unique program among STC chapters, but one that may be of interest to many. Carol Landers was a consistent, active, and some might say essential member of the Boston Chapter who passed away very suddenly last year at the age of 42. This grant, along with funds raised by the Boston Chapter, will support an annual award to a chapter member, aimed at recognizing outstanding volunteerism. The awards will be unique to each recipient and may include awards such as the registration fee for a professional conference, training course, or similar program or other appropriate award to recognize experienced members who have contributed their time, effort, and energies to the Boston Chapter.
- A merit grant of \$3,000 USD for the Manitoba chapter for development of its public relations program to increase membership as well as raise the awareness of community businesses of the importance and availability of professional technical communicators in that area.

- A Special Opportunities Grant of \$10,000 USD for *Technological Literacy in America, 1978-2000: A Project to Improve Technical Communication Education in the New Millennium* to Cynthia L. Self and Gail E. Hawisher.
- A Special Opportunities Grant of \$10,000 USD for *Website Materials Development for Careers in Technical Communication* to Stephen Bernhardt.
- A Special Opportunities Grant of \$10,000 USD for *Develop and Direct a Technical Writing Institute for Teachers in China* to Carol M. Barnum.

## Other Actions

- Recognition of STC as a cooperating society in the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) *Conference on Universal Usability: Solutions, Systems, and Methods* (to be held 16-17 November 2000 in Washington, D.C.) and designated Dr. Janice C. (Ginny) Redish as STC liaison.
- Approved the STC Intellectual Property Statement.
- Approved \$7,500.00 USD as startup funds for the Journal Editor Fellowship Program. This program is aimed at providing training to people interested in editing scholarly journals.

For more information on the programs mentioned above, please visit the STC website at [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org).

## Additional News and Highlights

- *Technical Communication*, the STC journal, goes online and searchable at the end of January 2000. Two years of issues, February, 1998-February, 2000, will initially be available, with other issues to follow.
- A public relations firm, Parker LePla, is conducting a "branding" survey for the Society. The results of the survey will lead to the development and implementation of an updated "corporate" identity for STC, as well as enable STC to market membership and services with a more consistent "voice."

## Upcoming Events

We are looking forward to having the 47th Annual STC Conference in our region in Orlando, FL, on May 21-24, 2000. The conference committee has received more proposals than any previous conference. Approximately 260 technical sessions are planned, a 20% increase over last year. And, as the 1999 Conference saw a 14% increase in sessions over 1998, the Conference appears to be simply getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

Forum 2000, which will be held June 12-14, in London, is the meeting of technical communications organizations worldwide. To find out more, visit the Forum 2000 website, <http://www.commonwealth.org.uk>.

Mary Lauby, **WriteUp** Editor  
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### **Mission Statement**

To improve the quality and effectiveness  
of technical communication  
for audiences worldwide.

# WriteUp

<http://www.stc.org/region3/sun/www>

*Shannon Haynes, Online Edition*

*Address Correction Requested*  
**First Class Mail**

## Calendar of Events

*Subject to Change*



- |                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| <b>February 10</b>     | <b>February Chapter Meeting</b><br><i>Trends in Technical Communication</i><br>Presented by Neil Perlin<br>Icot Center, Clearwater<br>6:30 PM |
| <b>March 3 &amp; 4</b> | <b>Currents 2000</b><br>STC Atlanta Chapter's annual conference<br>Atlanta, Georgia   |
| <b>March 9</b>         | <b>March Chapter Meeting</b><br>Meeting topic and location to be announced  |

**Copy Deadline for  
the Mar/Apr 2000  
Issue: March 10**

Visit our Suncoast Chapter website at  
<http://www.stc.org/region3/sun/www>  
for updates about STC conferences, chapter  
meeting details, and job listings.