

WriteUp

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

Sept/Oct 1999



The History of the FTCC: Part 2

By Mark Hanigan, STC First Vice President; Senior Member, Suncoast Chapter

Interested in volunteering?

We need FTCC volunteers. If you would like to join the FTCC team, please contact Victor Chapel at va_chapel@yahoo.com or Mark Hanigan at onwritetrk@aol.com.

Thanks!

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Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of an article that Mark Hanigan wrote about the early days of the Florida Technical Communications Competition. Part 1, which appeared in the last issue of the WriteUp, covered the events that led up to the decision to develop a Statewide Technical Communications Competition spearheaded by the Suncoast Chapter.

You may recall that the first installation of this article series left off with the formation of the Florida President's Council. This body met informally once or twice a year, usually in Orlando. Its original membership included the presidents of the seven Florida chapters: North-Central Florida, Space Coast, FIT Student Chapter, Palm Beaches, Everglades, Orlando, and Suncoast. Just to fill you in on the chapter historic events that have occurred since 1992:

- North Central Florida spun off a new chapter in Jacksonville—the First Coast chapter
- Space Coast and FIT merged to form the Space Tech Chapter
- Everglades chapter folded, and most of its members were transferred to the Palm Beaches chapter
- Suncoast chapter spun off a branch, centered in Naples and Ft. Myers—the Silver Sands branch
- A new chapter was created to serve the panhandle from Tallahassee to Mobile—the Northern Gulf Coast chapter

Meetings among the “original 7” chapters had been going on for about two years prior to my becoming the chapter president in 1992. Before my first Suncoast Chapter meeting as president, I went to a Florida President's Council meeting, which was presided over by our de-facto leader, Bruce Cone of the Orlando chapter. Bruce had a vision of all chapters working together to support each other's principal activity.



The first FTCC management team: Mike Capotrio, Michelle Ratcliffe, and Kim Adams speaking at the very first FTCC awards banquet.

At the time, the vision was for Orlando to continue to host Florida's regional conference (*Trends*, although it was called the *Florida Technical Writer's Conference* then), Palm Beaches to put together a statewide employment directory, and Suncoast to expand its public actions and art competition to the state level.

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Letter from the Editor



Responding to Chapter Meetings

I hope you all can bear with me while I use this column as a general discussion area. (I can't seem to find room anywhere else in the newsletter to mention these items!)

The past few months, we have had members respond that they will attend an upcoming meeting, but then not call to let us know they cannot attend. This presents a problem when we schedule meetings at hotels, where the chapter is charged for each meal. Of course, schedules change or you might have to work late unexpectedly. But we ask that if your plans change, please contact Debra Mixon, the Area Program Coordinator as soon as possible.

I mention this only to make everyone aware of how our chapter relies on an accurate count of attendees. Working together, our chapter can continue to conduct interesting

and productive meetings. Thanks for your help!

Saying Goodbye

Two of our chapter's members are moving out of the area: Sunny Zengler and Helen Black. Sunny has been handling the public relations for our chapter. Helen was the *WriteUp* editor for two years, and is currently the Suncoast-L administrator (e-mail listserv), and the manager of the STC Newsletter Competition.

Thank you both for your hard work and dedication. We will miss you. Good luck and keep in touch!

Mary Lauby

Correction

Editor's Note: The "47th Annual STC Conference Support Committee" article appeared in the July/Aug issue of the WriteUp missing a member of the support committee and including a typo. Here is the omitted committee member and the corrected section that contained the typo. My apologies to the author, Nancy Reach, and Sue Nurczyk, the omitted committee member.

Deputy Support Manager Sue Nurczyk, Suncoast chapter

Sue will be assisting Lori and managing all conference volunteers. If you are interested in serving on the

volunteer committee, e-mail Sue at snurczyk@elcotel.com. Sue is the technical communications manager at Elcotel, Inc. in Sarasota.

Publicity Manager Nancy Reach, Suncoast chapter

Nancy is managing the teams that develop the 47th Annual Conference website and the newsletters that are delivered daily at the conference. Nancy is also responsible for submitting articles to chapter newsletters and the InterCom. Nancy is a lead technical writer at Nielsen Media Research, the TV ratings company.



Modular Help Systems

By Jim Sands, Chicago Chapter

As software applications become increasingly complex, more companies are turning to modular software development. For example, Microsoft has an Office suite application that includes several modules (i.e. Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.) Likewise, a manufacturing application like SAP might have modules for inventory, accounting and process control.

Depending upon your needs, you purchase one or more of the modules you want in a “bundled” package. But what impact does modular development have on your Help files? Do you want one large Help file for the entire manufacturing application? If you do so, and a user

buys only the inventory module of your system, they will also see the Help for process control and accounting. This is usually not desirable.

Windows Help allows you to create a separate Help project for each software module, and then link these projects together into a Help system via a separate file called the master.cnt. Keeping the Help projects modular speeds up your authoring time, because writing and maintenance can be divided more easily among your team members.

With a modular Help system based on a master.cnt, if your customer decides to purchase only your inventory module, you ship them

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.

only the inventory Help file. If they purchase all of your modules instead, you ship them all of your Help files as well. The master.cnt is written to intelligently recognize what files are available. The master Help TOC and Index only display topics for the Help files that the master.cnt finds, ignoring others that you have not actually shipped.

The same procedure can be used with compiled HTML Help files, through a modification to the .hhc file. For more information on the specific wording for master.cnt and .hhc files, contact your Help authoring software vendor.

Another Successful Social

By Mary Lauby, Suncoast Chapter

Well, that’s a mouthful! I won’t try to say that three times fast. But in this fast-paced career of technical communication, it’s nice to take a break every once in a while. We did just that at this year’s July Social. We met at the clubhouse in the Post Rocky Point Apartments in Tampa on July 1.



Scott Shea, Mark Hanigan, and Nancy Reach pause from their discussion to pose for the camera.



Bob Bennett takes a drink while Mark Hanigan makes his shot.

Post Rocky Point Apartments is a favorite for our chapter members for many reasons and the pool table is definitely one of them. If you missed your chance to socialize with your fellow communicators this summer, don’t despair. You can come to the winter social tentatively scheduled for December 2 at—where else?—Post Rocky Point. I hope to see you there!

Society Page

With more than 23,000 members and 142 chapters, the Society for Technical Communication (STC)—a nonprofit educational organization—is the largest professional society in the world dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communication.

For more information, contact the Society office:

**901 N. Stuart Street
Arlington, VA 22203-1854
703-522-4114**

<http://www.stc-va.org>

Facts about the Society for Technical Communication are from STC publications and the Society's Web page.

History

In 1953, two organizations concerned with improving the practice of technical communication were founded on the East Coast: the Society of Technical Writers, and the Association of Technical Writers and Editors. These organizations merged in 1957 to form the Society of Technical Writers and Editors.

In 1960, STWE merged with the Technical Publishing Society, which had been founded in 1954 on the West Coast. The merger produced the Society of Technical Writers and Publishers.

In 1971, the organization's name was changed to the Society for Technical Communication. Today, STC is the largest professional society in the world dedicated to the advancement of the theory and practice of technical communication.

*From the STC web site
(www.stc-va.org)*



President's Message

By Eileen McPartland, Suncoast Chapter President

Multiple Paths

Let me paint a picture for you. You're at a party and someone asks you what you do for a living. You anxiously respond, a technical communicator. Suddenly the person looks back at you with a blank stare. It's quite obvious they've never heard of a technical communicator.

So do you respond with the definition of a technical communicator? Is there a verdict on what a technical communicator is? If so, does it change every day? Or, do you explain what you do on a daily basis? Does your job responsibility change often? Technical communi-

cations has so many paths that it seems like an endless road.

Next time you are in an STC meeting, ask your peers at the table which path they've chosen. Is it traditional media, online, training, web, indexing, usability? And is it employer, contractor, software, hardware, medical? You'd be amazed at the different backgrounds and stories of Suncoast chapter members.

Technical communications consists of many types of jobs, so it is difficult to give one definition. We all have interesting stories to tell as we spread the word about our profession.

Eileen McPartland

Featured Web Site

**Writers Write®
The Write Resource™**

<http://www.writerswrite.com/>



Writers Write® offers many links to all types of writing sites. If you're searching for technical writing links, on the left side of the page, scroll down to "Specialty Sections" and click [Technical Writing](#).

Besides including technical writing links, this site covers numerous topics related to writing, including book reviews, author interviews, job listings, writing contests, writers' groups and more. The site also provides a free Electronic Postcard service. You can create and send a card using a picture and music from their library, or you can even upload your own picture and music.

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One of my first chapter meetings was a planning meeting for the year. For this meeting, we had laminated placards made, each labeled with one of the projects we wanted to take on that year. One of those placards had the words “Florida Statewide Publications and Art Competition” inscribed on it.

My plan was for someone to take ownership of each placard, and become, at the very

least, the dialog driver of it. (The meeting format was roundtable discussions.)

A person who was not even a member—in fact was just attending her second meeting—took ownership of the placard and led the roundtable. She engaged the participants in lively discussions, and took copious notes. One could see her wheels of creativity spinning on overtime mode.

As the meeting came to a close, I approached her. “How would you like to run this statewide competition,” I asked. She replied, “I am not even a member.” My response was to the effect that it was “details.”

She enthusiastically accepted. Her organizational skills were masterful. She divided the tasks into basically the categories we have today: call for entries, materials, judging, judging day, publicity, student liaison, and banquet. She recruited

about 25 individuals to work on the project. This is an amazing number when you consider that our chapter size was barely 60 at the time.

Who was this innovative motivator? Michelle Ratcliffe!

Michelle divided responsibility for the major task groups between herself and her two deputies, Kim Adams and Mike Capotrio. The three worked in such harmony that it was not long before we affectionately dubbed them “*the triumvirate*.”

Throughout the summer, and into the fall of that year, we met at least once a week (and of-

ten twice a week) in downtown St. Petersburg to put this competition together. The meetings were both productive and fun; the post-meeting meetings are legendary! What is amazing about the first FTCC is that we did not have a model to follow; most of the materials were nonexistent!

The competition went smoothly. Everything about it—from the calls for entries to the advertisements to the entries themselves to the acrylic trophies and mounted certificate awards to the banquet itself—was first class!

The awards banquet, held at the then Sheraton Grande hotel on Kennedy Boulevard in Tampa, was elegant! Included among our honored guests were Society President

David Armbruster and Director-Sponsor Carol Barnum. Members from all Florida chapters, judges, and award winners were all in attendance. It was the first Suncoast Chapter meeting ever that topped 100 in attendance.

The FTCC contributed significantly to the growth of the Suncoast chapter; it was not long after that that we broke the century mark in membership. It also went a long way towards putting our chapter on the “STC map.”

As a result of David and Carol’s glowing report about our competition, the FTCC methodology became well known. Shortly after the Awards Banquet, incoming Society president JoAnn Hackos invited Suncoast Chapter to manage the *International Technical Publications Competition*.

We accepted this new adventure, which culminated with a judging day that coincided with the *Storm of the Century!* But that’s a story for another day!

Thanks to many members’ hard work,



Mark Hanigan and Michelle Ratcliffe, right after Mark convinced Michelle to manage the first ever FTCC. Michelle looks nervous but excited.



At the 1998 FTCC awards banquet, Nancy Reach congratulates fellow Suncoast chapter member, Ray Williamson on winning an Excellence Award.

the FTCC continues today. The deadline for entries for this year’s competition just passed and the FTCC team is hard at work. Watch for FTCC news in future issues.



Membership Update

By Melissa Lamb
Suncoast Chapter
Membership Manager

New Member

Andrea T. Smentek

Senior Members

Candace C. Cervenka

Carol L. Walker

A warm welcome to our new member. We're glad you're part of the Suncoast Chapter.

Address Changes

If you have an address change, please send your new information to the Database Manager, Denise Passmore at woodstuck.earthlink.net.

Preparing for Orlando 2000

Submitted by Nancy Reach, Publicity Manager
Conference Support Committee

Orlando will be the host city for the STC 47th Annual Conference, May 21–24, 2000 (hence Orlando 2000). Already the Florida team has achieved many firsts. The team was the first to hold a rally Sunday afternoon at the Cincinnati conference (May 16–19, 1999) to attract Florida volunteers to serve as “walking booths” to advertise the Orlando 2000 conference.

These volunteers earned an Orlando 2000 T-shirt by passing out stickers and memorabilia to conference goers. In all there were 30 volunteers who personally invited Cincinnati attendees to come to Orlando. Marking another first, the Florida team rally also brought together three teams of host chapters allowing the Cincinnati team to share valuable, practical advice with the Florida team (2000) and the Chicago team (2001).

In response to the Conference Advisory Committee's (CAC) redesign of the conference support function, the Florida team is lead by the president of the host chapter, who serves as a liaison to the CAC and who has a leaner, more efficient management structure. Florida Support Committee team leaders are:

Lori Corbett, Orlando Chapter, host chapter CAC liaison and support manager

Sue Nurczyk, Suncoast Chapter,

deputy support manager

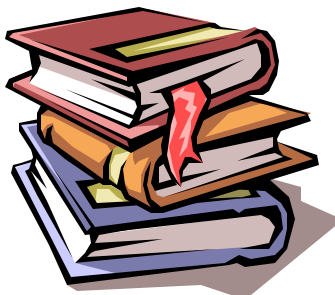
Nancy Reach, Suncoast Chapter, publicity manager

Barbara Odom, Orlando Chapter, corporate support manager

W. C. Wiese, Orlando Chapter, conference treasurer

In order to involve other Florida chapters in the important host duties for the conference, members from all the Florida chapters are encouraged to participate. Sue anticipates the need for approximately 60 volunteers at the conference. Typical jobs include handing out flyers, directing foot traffic to events, manning the volunteer room and hospitality booth, unpacking boxes, and setting up displays. The Volunteer Committee will begin recruiting these positions within the Florida chapters in January 2000.

Barbara is currently setting up her team so they can hit the ground running early in January. Positions are open for a liaison from each chapter to assist in obtaining donations (funds and/or gifts) from both local and national corporations for student attendance grants. There are also open positions for student volunteers, publicity, and hospitality activities at the conference. For details, please contact Barbara Odom at bcodom@aol.com.



Newsletter Quote

Writing is a profession in which you have to keep proving your talent to people who have none.

– Jules Renard (1864–1910)

Technical Writing Humor

Submitted By Sue Nurczyk, Suncoast Chapter



What if Dr. Seuss wrote a computer manual?

If a packet hits a pocket on a socket on a port, and the bus is interrupted as a very last resort, and the address of the memory makes your floppy disk abort, then the socket packet pocket has an error to report.

If your cursor finds a menu item followed by a dash, and the double-clicking icon puts your window in

the trash, and your data is corrupted 'cause the index doesn't hash, then your situation's hopeless and your system's gonna crash!

If the label on the cable on the table at your house, says the network is connected to the button on your mouse, but your packets want to tunnel on another protocol, that's repeatedly rejected by the printer

down the hall, and your screen is all distorted by the side effects of gauss, so your icons in the window are as wavy as a souse, then you may as well reboot and go out with a bang, 'cause as sure as I'm a poet, the sucker's gonna hang!

When the copy of your floppy's getting sloppy on the disk, and the microcode instructions cause unnecessary risk, then you have to flash your memory and you'll want to RAM your ROM. Quickly turn off the computer and be sure to tell your mom.

Original author unknown

Gaining Approval

By Bill Graham, Suncoast Chapter Treasurer

Do you seek approval? I seek approval, because it means more money for my employer, who will hopefully send some my way. But the approval I write about requires less writing and more trimming. Maybe trimming is too light a word. Try chopping or hacking. Go get your axe. One must be impartial here.

Every documentation project I submit goes through several reviews. First, the project engineer has to read it for technical accuracy. Then, my boss takes a look at the manual for writing issues. After I make the initial corrections to my documentation, I turn it in for another round of reviews by marketing and a group called CRT (Compliance Reliability and Testing). My projects fly through the review process until they hit CRT. It's like driving down the interstate at 70 MPH and encountering a huge traffic jam. Everything slows down to a crawl. Why does CRT slow the process down? CRT must accomplish two major tasks: read everything thoroughly and submit it to the appropriate agency approvals.

The CRT group continually tests our products to discover their actual capabilities. I try to anticipate as much as I can by building, programming, and testing the systems when I write about them. CRT takes a longer, harder look at everything and tells me what I can do to make my documentation more accurate. They are constantly aware of changes coming to products. With their advice, I am able to avoid the mistake of documenting obsolete features or products.

The most intricate task, however, is to eliminate unnecessary maintenance factors in the documents. For CRT, a maintenance factor includes anything that requires agency approval. One of the agencies we go through is UL (Underwriter's Laboratories). Everything that has a power rating must gain UL approval. If I write that a wallbox may accommodate nonpower-limited wiring, I have to be aware that UL may come back and instruct me to include only power-limited wiring.

The CRT manager showed us several passages in the manual that still duplicated specifications in the installation sheets. The problem ac-

tually stemmed from something very good. I was so thorough in re-writing the installation sheets that they covered every necessary detail. In the manual, however, I was not careful to eliminate all that I had put into the installation sheets. It still had a few drawings that I no longer needed. The factor that drew CRT's attention to the drawings was the inclusion of power ratings. Each drawing with the ratings would act like a magnet for UL's attention in the review process, and that costs money.

We also found that we could delete two or three major sections, because they were already covered in the installation sheets or the online help. Two entire chapters were no longer necessary for the manual. The meeting really wasn't a painful process after all. I took a dispassionate view of the exercise and agreed that we could make the changes. What we were left with was a manual that could sail through the UL approval process.

Mary Lauby, **WriteUp** Editor
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STC society for technical communication

Mission Statement

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

WriteUp

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

Kristie Kuczej, Online Edition

Address Correction Requested
First Class Mail

Calendar of Events

Subject to Change



October 7 Annual Membership Meeting/Web-based Help Systems

VeriFone, a division of Hewlett-Packard, Clearwater
Don't forget to bring a friend to this FREE meeting!

November 4 November Meeting

Meeting topic and location to be announced.
6:30 PM

December 2 December Social

Clubhouse at Post Rocky Point Apartments, Tampa
6:30 PM

Copy Deadline for Next Issue: November 5

Purpose

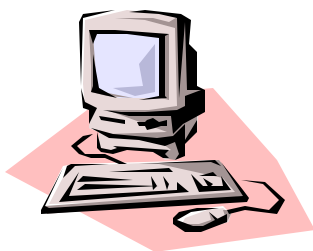
WriteUP communicates chapter and Society news six times per year for the benefit of members and friends of the Suncoast Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

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.

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