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RMC Wins Top STC Chapter Achievement Award

by Jay Mead

The Rocky Mountain Chapter has won the Chapter of Distinction award for 2000-2001 from the International STC, in the 600+ chapter size category. This honor puts our chapter in the top ranks of the STC for service to members and quality of our offerings. The award was presented at the International STC Annual Conference in May, and accepted by incoming RMC president David Garrett and incoming vice-president Martha Sippel.

Chapter of Distinction is the highest award in the STC Chapter Achievement Award (CAA) annual competition. To win the award we had first to qualify for the CAA Excellence level, and then to be chosen from the pool of Excellence winners. International STC Board members make the selection, and choose one Chapter of Distinction winner from each of the six STC chapter size categories.

The CAA competition recognizes overall chapter achievement, in comparison to similar chapters throughout the STC. The STC 2000-2001 competition guidelines define the competition's purpose: "The chapter achievement award program recognizes chapters for exceptional accomplishments in meeting STC goals. The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning chapter have been met, but that the winning chapters have performed well beyond expectations. The award program

recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, chapters that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society."

The STC Board citation accompanying the award recognizes the Rocky Mountain Chapter's "outstanding leadership and service to STC members, especially in the area of professional development." Said current RMC president Linda Gallagher, "The award shows how much we do as a chapter for our members, which is a lot!" Linda went on to cite important chapter services that influenced the judges' decision, including our strong annual chapter competitions, the seminars program, mentoring, and special events such as the ProWeb joint meeting in May 2000 and the Webcast meeting last November. In addition, the award recognizes continuing chapter services such as the newsletter, job line, and Web page.

Our competition entry consisted of a binder detailing all of our activities for the year, along with a full set of supporting material such as the newsletter and other publications. RMC Council members lauded Linda's own part in compiling the entry and winning the award. Said one, "Linda's strong leadership and hard work this year are clearly reflected in this award — we all owe her a big thank-you!" **RMC**

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Technicalities

EDITORIAL

Managing Editor Stephen Wertzbaugher
Layout Editor Stacy Leeds
Article Editors Jay Mead, Bridget Julian

Technicalities is published bi-monthly by the Rocky Mountain Chapter (RMC) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and is distributed to chapter members, editors of other STC newsletters, and officers of the Society. It is available on request to anyone interested in technical communication. Other STC chapters and publications may reprint material if credit is given.

Readers are encouraged to submit material on subjects of interest to Society and chapter members. Please credit repeated material and send a copy of the original material to the editor, Stephen Wertzbaugher, c/o IMR, 6025 S. Quebec, Suite 260, Englewood, CO 80111.

The editor can be reached during the day at 303.689.0022, via fax at 303.689.0055, and by e-mail at news@stcrmc.org. Please submit electronic files in ASCII text format and include a telephone number where you can be reached. To fax articles or artwork, please call the editor. The deadline for article submission is one month prior to issue release (first of the month, every other month).

The *Technicalities* staff reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length; substantive editing of feature articles will be reviewed with the author prior to publication.

RMC 2000-2001 OFFICERS

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TO LIST JOB ANNOUNCEMENTS

303.458.0401 ext. 302
Send e-mail to: jobs@stcrmc.org
Job listings are posted on the
Chapter Web site.

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From the Editor

It's a Wonderful Life...for Space Alien Technical Writers

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

My first year as Managing Editor of *Technicalities* draws to a close, my second year is about to begin, and I must say that my journey has been an educational one. I must also say that I could not have been successful without the help, attention, and talent of the other volunteers who dedicated their time to make me look oh-so-good: Jay Mead, Stacy Leeds, Bridget Julian, Gail Bernstein, Dana Cline, Ruth Gaulke, Jolie Gallagher, and all of the others. If I missed your name, I humbly beg your forgiveness! Since reaching my fortieth year, I have found that my memory is not as sharp as it once was...

My first year witnessed *Technicalities* winning two awards in the 2000-2001 STC Newsletter Competition, an award for Excellence and an award for Most Improved Newsletter. We are extremely proud of our achievements and look forward eagerly to another award-winning year — and we are determined to win a Distinguished award in next year's competition. With the talent we have gathered I don't think that will be a problem.

Do space alien technical writers exist?

I would also like to take a moment to welcome next year's STC RMC chapter officers:

- ▶ President — David Garrett
- ▶ Vice-president — Martha Sippel
- ▶ Treasurer — Hugh Gallagher
- ▶ Secretary — Molly Malsam
- ▶ Nominating Committee — Joel Meier and Suzanne Schneider

I know that some of these individuals are not new to their offices, but I still feel like saying Woo Hoo!

Now on to this issue's topic: I have none. It's summer, after all. However, someone who shall remain nameless suggested that I write about space aliens. Fascinating. I'd never given the topic much thought, but the more I pondered it, the more I wondered, "Do space alien technical writers exist?" Considering the complexity of their advanced technology, space aliens would surely need competent, articulate, and literate individuals to explain, clearly and concisely, how to use such technology.

And assuming that space alien technical writers exist, the next logical question is, "Do our alien counterparts suffer the same oppression, misunderstanding, and short-sightedness that bedevil earth-bound technical writers?" I hope not. If they do, how would these space aliens have achieved their advanced level of technology and civilization? The answer is obvious, I hope — they wouldn't have.

Of course, everything I have discussed regarding space aliens is speculation. Do space aliens even exist?

Enough idle speculation! From the Cosmos to you, have a great summer!

RMC



President's Corner

Last Hurrah

by Linda Gallagher

Well, my year as chapter president has come to an end. It was a great, though hectic, year for me — together, the other chapter officers, committee and SIG managers, committee members, other volunteers, and I accomplished a great deal.

We had a terrific year of chapter membership programs and even broke some new ground with our first Webcast of the Bill Horton presentation in November, an accomplishment we hope to repeat soon. We held publications and online competitions (and we'll revive our art competition this year). We mounted three seminars at reasonable prices to help you with professional development at a moderate cost. And we won the International STC Chapter Achievement Award at the Distinguished level, an

important milestone for our chapter and something we can all be deeply proud of. Thank you to everyone who made this accomplishment possible!

As for me, I spent a lot of time attending meetings,



RMC president Linda Gallagher with incoming president David Garrett

answering e-mails, and talking to current and prospective chapter members. It took a lot of time, but it was rewarding as well: I think I met more new people in the last year than in the previous couple of years combined. I've enjoyed meeting and talking to all of you. I think that we have a lot to share and teach each other, and that the STC is a great place to do both. I hope you'll continue with your membership and get involved in the chapter.

I plan to stick around, though, so as I pass the gavel to new RMC president David Garrett, I'll just say:

see you in September! **RMC**



Chapter News

Technical Communication and Instructional Design: It's All in the Family, So What's the Difference?

by Jan Bakken

Linda Gallagher opened the May chapter meeting by thanking StorageTek and Diane Ohrt, who were gracious enough to host our meeting. Linda also mentioned the chapter level awards received at the STC Annual Conference in Chicago. Our chapter won a Chapter of Excellence award, and a Chapter of Distinction award for our size chapter. (See related story on page 1.)

Kim Lambdin, former Education Project Manager at Rhythms NetConnections, presented an excellent program comparing technical communication and instructional design. The Powerpoint presentation, which is on the RMC Web site in its entirety, generated much discussion. Kim first described the skills of technical communicators and instructional designers, and pointed out similarities and differences. Because her expertise is in instructional design, she posed the question "Could some of the methods of instructional design be applied to technical communication?" The comparison of the two disciplines was extensive and can be seen in Kim's presentation, but a few key points are well worth mentioning.

Kim summed up the role of instructional designers using the "ADDIE R" model developed by Dick and Carey [*The Systematic Design of Instruction*, 3rd Edition. Harper Collins: USA. 1990.]. This stands for the following:

- Analyze
- Design
- Develop
- Implement
- Evaluate
- Revise

The ADDIE R model could readily be applied to the task of writing user manuals. A technical communicator's need to identify his or her audience is analogous to the instructional designer's identification of the learning style of the student. Another facet of instructional design applicable to technical communication is the need to distinguish between means and ends.

The last point Kim touched on was the difference between formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluations include those done during the process, allowing

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Technical Communication and Instructional Design: It's All in the Family, So What's the Difference?

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changes to be implemented before a project is finished, plus an end evaluation. Summative evaluations measure longer-term effectiveness of instruction. They are more expensive and therefore used less often.

Kim suggested that if you, as a technical communicator, want to apply instructional design techniques to your work, several courses may be helpful:

- ▶ Introduction to instructional design
- ▶ Adult learning
- ▶ Cognitive processes
- ▶ Instructional message design
- ▶ Human factors

There is no way to properly convey all that we learned from Kim in a summary. Check the Web site at www.stcrmc.org for her excellent presentation, complete with bibliography.

Prior to the main event, Lolita Mannick of the CIC SIG arranged a well-attended presentation entitled "Do You Need a Web Site?" It was a terrific presentation that merited a complete summary for the RMC Web site. Four members presented their opinion on the subject, and there was a very active subsequent discussion. If you are wondering if you should have a Web site, check out the online meeting notes. **RMC**

The STC Mentor Program Wants YOU

by Bridget Julian

The April STC meeting at J.D. Edwards focused on building a chapter mentoring program and was enlivened by a good turnout and thoughtful discussion. A fast-paced FrameMaker SIG meeting preceded the main event.

Our fabulous Rocky Mountain Chapter of the STC wants to attract a more diverse membership that would include young technical writers as well as established professionals. Leaders surmised that mentoring might be one way to accomplish this goal — and what do technical writers do when confronted with a new subject? Why, go to the subject matter expert, of course!

Speaker **Tania H. Reese** of Reese & Associates presented an inspiring and informative overview of adult learning and conditions for successful knowledge transfer. When asked to reflect on what a mentoring relationship could mean for STC members, the audience came up with concepts of shared experiences involving trust and responsibility. Several people wanted to have both formal and informal exchanges.

According to Tania, the task ahead of us is to form a concept of what it means to be a technical writer, and then create a program designed to help all chapter members acquire those skills. But whose definition should be used? According to Linda Gallagher, for example, a good technical writer needs a combination of "soft" skills such as organizational and interviewing abilities, sound information design and writing skills, and "hard" or tool-oriented skills for word processing, page layout, online content development, and graphics (see "Who Are We?" in

the March/April 2001 issue of *Technicalities*). Do you have other ideas? Let the mentoring committee know — or consider joining them for their next meeting!

Tania's "elements of success" for a mentoring program include the following: organizational and administrative support, a recruitment and orientation plan, a way of

matching up prospective mentees and mentors, a shared commitment to the program on both sides, and planned development activities. Judging from the meeting turnout, organizational support is no problem. So, who wants to be a mentee? And — perhaps less obvious — who wants to be a mentor? Tania stressed

that mentors learn from teaching others; and she also pointed out that the relationship doesn't have to be one-way. Perhaps you are a great online help designer, while I am an indexing genius. Who's to say that we can't pair up, swap roles, and teach each other our skills?

Tania stressed that a good match between mentee and mentor is critical — and that this involves the mysterious element of personal chemistry. With this in mind, audience members suggested that a "Meet a Mentor" evening might be a helpful addition to filling out interest forms. Other suggestions for recruitment and development activities included dinners, listservs, and electronic bulletin boards for mentors and mentees. Sound interesting? Help the STC make this program a success! For further information, contact Jim West at jaawest@aol.com or Dawn Stevens at Dawn.Stevens@Jeppesen.com. **RMC**

STC RMC's mentoring program is designed to help all chapter members acquire the skills needed to be well-rounded technical writers.



Most of you write for high tech industries. Some days, a new technology sparks your creativity just enough that you won't stop writing even for a bathroom break. But other days, 14 cups of coffee and nine candy bars can't keep you awake. Technology can be exciting but, frankly, it can also be boring.

But why should it be boring? When you research a subject, do you sometimes discover such tediously written sentences as "This document provides a description of the role of backup and restore technologies, with the specific intent to provide the context for standards efforts and solutions development for data movers, with an additional analysis of the issues that compel migration to a new solution, along with the proposed solution and analysis of"? With documentation like that, of course, technology becomes boring, if not downright incomprehensible!

Unfortunately, many people never learned to write simply and directly. They are afraid to appear (heaven

forbid!) informal. Hoping to impress the reader, these folks lard their sentences with nominalizations, passive voice, and bloated phrases. But instead of impressing readers, they sedate them. And worse, overblown diction can cause readers to suspect the author is masking ignorance of the subject.

Even as seasoned writers, we occasionally discover in our own drafts more words than ideas. (Remember those grade-school assignments when the teacher required a minimum of 1,000 words? How creatively did you pad your essays?) We were conditioned to fill the page; now, writing with fewer words can be difficult, like breaking a bad habit.

To trim the fat from your own writing, look for some of these:

- ▶ **Passive voice** — Scan your paragraphs for those weak "to be" verbs. Find any passive constructions that you can rewrite in active voice. For example, rewrite "the unit can be installed in a rack" as "install the unit in a rack."
- ▶ **Nominalizations** — Nominalizations, or verbs transformed into nouns, can drag a sentence into

Instead of writing as if you are paid by the word, write as if each word is money spent.

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STC RMC Calendar

See the RMC Web site for more information about any of these activities.

July - August 2001



Summer Break —
Enjoy your summer!

September 2001



Thursday, 9/6 —
STC RMC Council meeting



Thursday, 9/20 —
Chapter meeting

Technicasualties

by Ted L. Penberthy



Why independent contractors should read each clause very carefully.



Winners, Winners, Everywhere!

by Bridget Julian

2000-2001 was a great year for Rocky Mountain STC, and our chapter was recognized in many ways. Here are some of the highlights.

Chapter Awards

In June, the Rocky Mountain Chapter received the Chapter of Excellence award, as well as the Distinguished Chapter award, from the STC. This is due to the efforts of our wonderful members and tireless leaders — but a special thank-you must go to **Linda Gallagher**, our current chapter president. Thank you, Linda!

International Publications Award Winners

This year, the RMC had two print format and four online format entries win awards at the international STC competition. Congratulations to this year's winners and many thanks to all who participated!

Print Winners

- ▶ Distinguished Award, Annual Reports: "UCAR at 40," **Bob Henson, Nita Razo, Zhenya Gallon**
- ▶ Merit Award, Training Materials: "Designing Documents for the Web," **Zoa Techmedia**

Online Winners

- ▶ Distinguished Award, Online Tutorial/Training: "Learning Colorado Trails," **Lynne Monson, Brandon Berman, Bruce Soule, Martha Nelson**
- ▶ Excellence Award, Online User Support Tools: "NREL Best Practices Website," **Lynn Kaemmerer, Julie Kennedy, Kelly Bailey, Kristi Theis**
- ▶ Excellence Award, Online Tutorial/Training: "JeppChart Training," **Dawn Stevens, Aviation Courseware Group**
- ▶ Merit Award, Online Reference Material: "CRRT Online: Putting It All Together," **Larry Prado, Ginny McDonald, Kevin Highland**

International PR Competition

Jay Mead led the PR committee for the Pan-Pacific Conference. Jay's tireless efforts helped to ensure the

meeting's success, and also garnered Jay's team — which included fellow RMC members **Frank Tagader** and **Jason Cox** — a Distinguished Award from the STC.

Newsletter Awards

We are especially pleased to announce that *Technicalities* won two awards this year: an Excellence Award and an additional award for Most Improved. Join current newsletter team members **Steve Wertzbaugher, Stacy Leeds, Jay Mead, and Bridget Julian** for another exciting year! Contact us at news@stcrmc.org.

Distinguished Chapter Service Award

Larry Prado is this year's recipient of the Distinguished Chapter Service Award, in recognition of his efforts as 1999-2000 President of the RMC and his many other contributions, including acting as manager of the RMC Seminar committee and presenting at chapter meetings and regional conferences. Congratulations, Larry!

George E. Hoerter Scholarship Award

This year's recipient of RMC's George Hoerter scholarship is **Rohit Verma**, a candidate for the Master's of Science (M.S.) in Technical Communication at the University of Colorado at Denver. He is particularly interested in exploring how the Internet might be used by marginalized individuals and communities to create a more powerful voice in a medium that is currently dominated by e-commerce and other institutional presences.

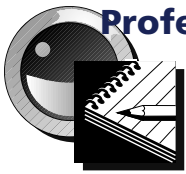
RMC Presidential Awards

Each year, the RMC honors chapter members for their distinguished service. This year's Presidential Award recipients are **Carol Claton, Alana Cote, Anne Halsey, Lynnette Reveling, and Kim Weathersby**.

Awards often recognize individuals but, as the chapter award shows, the excellence of the RMC is due to every chapter member. So celebrate — and get ready for another award-winning year! **RMC**

Coming This Fall — The 27th STC RMC Annual Technical Art, Publications, and Online Communications Competition

As busy as you probably are this summer, don't forget about the next annual STC RMC technical communications competition. You can enter your work in the art, publications, and online competitions. The official Call for Entries, which will be published soon on the chapter Web site, will give you entry guidelines for all three competitions. The deadline will be here before you know it. This year it is October 19, 2001. Watch for a flyer to be included in the next newsletter, and watch the chapter's Web site, www.stcrmc.org, for more information in the next few weeks. **RMC**



Professional Development

Make Plans for the STC Region 7 Conference

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

Looking for something fun and exciting to do this fall? Clear your calendar, pack your pencils, and hop a flight to Portland, Oregon, the Rose City, October 5 and 6 for two days of professional interaction, idea sharing, and career development at the STC Region 7 Conference.

Hosted jointly by Oregon's Willamette Valley Chapter and Mid-Valley Chapter, the Conference will explore how our peers in the profession are adapting to changes occurring in our industry, a theme similar to the one presented at the International STC Conference in Chicago.

The Conference addresses specific trends from five broad tracks: Career and Management, Communicating, Translation, Tools, and Miscellaneous, which covers such topics as usability, style,

and international design. The host chapters have also planned several pre-conference workshops.

But wait, there's more!

Following the conference, October 7, join the spectacular guided Sunday morning Portland Riding Excursion and Walk (recently featured on the Discovery Channel program

The Tourist), which includes a ride on Portland's new trolley to the city's San Francisco-style NW District.

Your guide is Sharon Wood Wortman, author of *The Portland Bridge Book*, who has been leading tours for Portland Parks since 1991. A buffet lunch in Chinatown and a tour of Portland's new \$12.5 million dollar Chinese Classical Garden are optional.



Portland's Steel Bridge

For more information about this year's STC Region 7 Conference, visit www.region7conference.com. See you there! **RMC**



Volunteer Spotlight

Technicalities Volunteer Opening: Advertising Manager

by Bridget Julian

Your ever-improving newsletter needs an Advertising Manager. The ideal manager is someone interested in identifying and contacting vendors of products beneficial to our readers. If you enjoy matching needs and resources and have some contacts in the technical communications field, or want to learn more about technical communications resources in our region, *Technicalities* wants

to hear from you! The Advertising Manager performs an important service to RMC members by identifying and publicizing local businesses of interest to members, and bringing in needed income to the newsletter.

Please e-mail newsletter editor Steve Wertzbaugher at stephen@imrgold.com for more details. **RMC**

Thrifty Writing

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dull and difficult reading. If you have used lengthy nouns with endings in "ment," "tion," and "ence," try replacing the noun with a verb to communicate the same idea. For example, rewrite "this document provides a description of" as "this document describes." You keep the same meaning with half the words.

- ▶ **Unnecessary phrases** — You may be overusing fatty phrases such as "due to the fact that," "it is important

that," or "under circumstances in which." In many cases, you can replace these phrases with such simple words as "because," "must," or "if."

Short, simple sentences help readers move quickly through the document and easily comprehend instructions. So be thrifty! Instead of writing as if you are paid by the word, write as if each word is money spent. **RMC**



The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

For the latest chapter news, visit our Web site at www.stcrmc.org.

Upcoming Technical Communications Conferences and Events

For more information about the following conferences and events, see the STC Web site, www.stc.org/related.html.

August 1-4

Association for Women in Communications
2001 Annual Professional Conference
Renaissance Harborplace Hotel
Baltimore, Maryland
www.womcom.org

September 30-October 2

11th Annual STC Region 6 Conference
Hilton North
Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.stcregion.org/region6/conf.htm

October 5-6

2001 STC Region 7 Conference
DoubleTree Inn Lloyd Center
Portland, Oregon
www.region7conference.com

October 8-12

Human Factors and Ergonomics Society
45th Annual Meeting
Minneapolis Convention Center
Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.hfes.org

October 11-13

2001 STC Region 5 Conference
Westchase Hilton
Houston, Texas
www.stc-houston.org/r5conference

October 15-16

13th Annual InterChange Conference
Boston & New England Chapters of STC
Boxborough Woods Holiday Inn
Boxborough, Massachusetts
www.interchangeconference.com

October 21-24

Association for Computing Machinery
SIGDOC 2001 Conference on Design
of Communication
Santa Fe, New Mexico
www.cs.ucr.edu/~stilley/sigdoc2001

October 24-27

American Medical Writers Association
61st Annual Conference
Norfolk Waterside Marriott
Norfolk, Virginia
www.amwa.org

October 24-27

IEEE Professional Communication Society
2001 International Professional
Communication Conference
La Fonda Hotel
Santa Fe, New Mexico
www.ieeeeps.org/2001

October 31-November 3

American Translators Association
42nd Annual Conference
Regal Biltmore Hotel
Los Angeles, California
www.atanet.org

November 5-8

American Society for Information Science
and Technology
2001 Annual Meeting
JW Marriott Hotel
Washington, DC
www.asis.org

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