northbay news

In This Issue

society for technical communication

Touchstone 2000

Paul Millard, NorthBay Competition Liaison

Touchstone 2000 is the name selected for STC's Northern California Technical Competition. Entries for the competition are now being accepted. The deadline for entries is October 5, 2000.

According to Judith Herr, Touchstone's director, the annual competition has in the past rotated between the six Bay Area chapters. This year, however, a permanent standing committee has been formed to manage the contest.

The aim of the committee is to promote better recognition of the competition, to build a knowledgeable team that sustains some forward momentum each year, and to capture increased visibility outside the STC community (employers, educators, students, and the public).

Working closely with Judith Herr will be the Touchstone core committee comprising the following managers who have had leadership roles in prior competitions: Jane Brutan,

This Month's Issue

John Dibs
President

This month's newsletter issue contains several items of interest. At last month's meeting the winning entries from the 1999 Touchstone competition were displayed. As *Touchstone 2000* explains, now the competition is under way for this year. The competition offers an opportunity to enter your technical publications to be judged by peers and vie for several award categories. The competition also needs judges and volunteers. Send an e-mail to Paul Millard (pmmillard@home.com) or view the competition Web site at stc-touchstone.com to learn more about the competition. The deadline for entries is approaching: October 5, 2000. Last year two companies in the North Bay — Next Level Communications and ABT Corporation — were honored with awards.

This Month's Meeting
Thursday, September 21, 2000

Just what they need,
just when they need it:
an introduction to embedded assistance
A Presentation by Andrea L. Ames
Region 8 Director-Sponsor, STC

Presentation Topics will be as follows:
* Basic Assumptions: Process, definitions, approach
* Online documentation today: Perceptions and problems
* Embedded assistance: Giving users what they need when they need it
* Infrastructure and technological issues
* Capabilities beyond "documentation"
* Developing embedded assistance: What you need to know

Andrea Ames has over 15 years of technical and technical-marketing communication experience in print and online mediums, over 9 years of architecture, design, and development of online systems, including help systems, Web sites, and multimedia productions, and over 7 years of research in new media -- primarily online -- including 3D and immersive environments.

Meeting Time & Schedule

Date:	Thursday, September 21, 2000	
Location::	Parker Compumotor, 5500 Labath Dr., Rohnert Park	
Time:	5:30 - 6:30	Networking and Refreshments
	6:30 - 8:15	Introductions and Program
	8:15 - 8:30	More Conversation, Idea Swapping

Welcome new STC members!

Please welcome new member Catherine Madonia, and tranferring member Annalise Beck to the NorthBay chapter. Annalise is former president of the Hawaii STC chapter, as well as formerly active in the Puget Sound chapter.

The Cotati Philharmonic (Really)

by Ken Delpit

Try this for fun: pair cultural institutions with unlikely locales. You might come up with entries such as the "Penngrove International Opera Plaza" or the "Smithsonian Institution, Freestone branch." You would be hard

pressed to top "Cotati Philharmonic," though, especially because it is the only one of these three that really exists.

As it turns out, Kurt Huget of Moonlight Rodeo fame is not the only multi-talented North Bay technical writer. Ron Teplitz, Senior Technical Writer at Alcatel USA in Petaluma, has lent his cello and skilled hands to a volunteer group of Sonoma County musicians. Presumably because Ron was too modest to accede to the group's being named "Ronzoni and the Chord Makers," the orchestra went with the more civic-minded appellation "Cotati Philharmonic."

Led by Music Director and Conductor Gabriel Sakakeeny, the orchestra is made up of about 70 musical and administrative volunteers. All the pieces

seem to be there—from cellos to violas—along with a shared love of good music and an enjoyment of performing. The group gave two performances this spring and summer, each of which played to an appreciative, enthusiastic audience.

Music of the New World, April 8

Performed at St. Joseph Church in Cotati, the spring concert consisted fittingly of hopeful, uplifting pieces: Symphony in C-Major by Georges Bizet, The Lark Ascending by R. Vaughn Williams, and Symphony No. 9 (From New World) in E-minor by Dvorák. James Potochny played an exquisite solo violin for The Lark Ascending. With fine indoor acoustics and the abounding musical

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... the orchestra left the audience inspired, patriotic, and clamoring for more.

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energy, the church itself seemed to rejoice in good vibrations. Ron's writing skills even made a guest appearance, Ron having penned informative program notes about the concert pieces.

Hero Music, July 1

The group got into the summer spirit for the July concert, drawing bows outdoors at La Plaza Park in Cotati. Arthur Fiedler might have approved of calling the event "Cotati Pops," but we'll never know. The group drew inspiration from both classical and contemporary composers. With rousing selections by G. F. Händel, Ludwig van Beethoven, John

Williams, Calvin Custer (arranger for Themes from James Bond and Star Trek), Alexander Courage, and John Phillip Sousa, the orchestra left the audience inspired, patriotic, and clamoring for more.

Next Concert, October 7

Mark October 7 on your DayTimers and Palm Pilots. The CP is going to be putting on "Halloween: the Concert," with selections by Mussorgsky, Saint-Saens, and Berlioz at St. Joseph church. I can think of at least four reasons why you ought to be there or be square: (1) the concerts are free; (2) you won't have to drive 50 miles and find downtown parking; (3) the CP is a hard-working, dedicated group deserving of your support; and (4) best of all, you'll hear some splendid music and have a great time.

For more information, call (707) 792-4600 ext. 664 or surf on over to www.cotatiphil.com.

☞

Touchstone

Publications Competition; Lynda Straus, Online Competition; Richard Mateosian, Judging Coordinator; Mel Cox, Web Designer; Linda Boling, Web Mistress; Gwaltney Mountford, Databases; and Mary Pyefinch, Treasurer.

With the judging portion of the competition less than a month away, the focus of the committee's attention is on attracting both participants and judges. Touchstone has therefore created a Web site, www.stc.touchstone.com, that features an Entries section that details contest rules, eligibility requirements, and fee schedules. Interested participants can log onto the site, fill out a form, and arrange to pay the entry fee.

If you're interested in being a judge, or in a host of other jobs that will emerge shortly, contact Judy Herr immediately, www.herrj@home.com.

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A Learning Revolution – It's About Time!

Adapted from an article by Dr. Paul Beam, Co-founder, Online-Learning.com

A fundamental revolution in education is underway, yet few people are aware of the battle!

For a telltale sign of the times, ask anyone what memories they have of their last classroom education experience. Odds are that they will recall grueling traffic and parking congestion, expensive course fees, inconvenient study groups, unavailable instructors, or endless, boring note taking. Much of the traditional classroom learning experience is certainly ripe for overhaul.

And the pressure for change is clearly growing. As the rate of new information growth accelerates, the rewards for keeping on top of the learning curve become increasingly lucrative. An educational carrot motivates both individuals managing their careers and businesses seeking competitive advantages – all must keep current in order to stay competitive.

For technical writers, the learning payback is particularly alluring. According to http://www.technicalwriter.computerjobs.com, while the average technical writer in the U.S. earns $42k, those skilled in the new document language of XML command $61k on average, a 43% premium!

Against this backdrop, the Internet is quietly revolutionizing education (along with many other aspects of our lives). E-learning is becoming a business weapon – reducing the time and cost of training, expanding the knowledge base of employees, and providing a rich educational experience.

Experts inform us that online training can create a 50% time saving and a 40 to 60% cost saving when compared with regular classroom training. However, the biggest advantage – in front of time and cost savings – is convenience. Students can learn whenever and wherever is most effective for them.

How Online Learning Works

With online or "internet" learning, a student accesses a digital cache of information (a combination of data, voice, and video) to take a lesson. To mitigate the isolation of learning online, effective internet learning programs also provide the following essentials:

- an instructor to lead the class, answer questions, and communicate assignments and course milestones
- online tests, assignments, and personal feedback to facilitate "learning by doing"
- frequent, responsive communication between instructor and classmates
- online collaborative "group learning" from classmates via chat groups, bulletin boards, e-mail, or voice links
- world-wide "anytime, anywhere" access to the course, and course media that can be accessed over both high and low speed lines
- course content that is continuously updated to the most current internet knowledge sources

Convenience and Learning

What would prevent a student with an already busy life from "logging on to learn" just before the next course deadline? With no fixed schedule for learning, a scenario such as this is more than likely. Yet with an online instructor, an essential safeguard is in place to ensure the course milestones and instructional objectives are met.

Instructor Access

Unlike the traditional classroom model, instructor access is not focused around the 10 minutes after class, and students do not have to ask questions in front of the class! With online learning, a personal e-mail to the instructor is the norm, and a list of FAQs can effectively complement the learning experience.

Online-learning.com

Tim McFarland, Vice President – Marketing and Business Development, online-learning.com

Online-learning.com offers professional development courses for technical writers. It delivers courses over the internet via a combination of CD, e-mail assignments, chat rooms, bulletin boards, and live discussion. Course offerings include Professional Technical Writing, Professional XML Authoring, and HTML Programming.

Sessions start monthly and last for three months. Certificates are issued upon the successful completion of your course.

Online-learning.com offers STC NorthBay members a 20% discount on courses. Be sure to mention your membership upon registering to receive the discount. For further details including course descriptions, visit www.online-learning.com or contact info@online-learning.com.

Learning by Doing

Online feedback via tests and marked assignments are critical components of the online learning process. Many online learning proponents believe that an internet course should span at least a few weeks, allowing time for the personal effort that is critical for effective learning.

Groups

Many Internet courses support group meetings and assignments – facilitated by e-mail, – private chat rooms, bulletin boards, and voice calls. These forms of

A Learning Revolution

meeting are more convenient than traditional group meetings, especially considering that students may prefer the anonymity of an e-mail exchange to the awkwardness of meeting with strangers in a study group. Add to this the power of a personal network of classmates that can span the globe, and you have a powerful learning tool!

The Wealth of the Internet

Imagine a class in which the day that new research occurs across the world, the research is part of your class material. The speed of the Internet – and its research potential – opens new doors to course content. It's like having an unlimited-content textbook!

It should be no surprise that according to the market research group IDC, the market for technology-delivered training to pass $11 billion by 2003 in the U.S. alone! Analysts are predicting that the greatest growth will be in non-technical training areas for custom online course development, such as process, policy, or product training.

No matter what the content type, the online learning revolution is expanding students' ability to access knowledge as well as tapping more of their learning potential. The convenience and the power of the Internet provides the breakthrough. Now it is finally okay to skip class – traditionally speaking, of course!

Paul Beam is a professor in the English Department at the University of Waterloo, where he instructs and researches online learning and technical writing. Dr. Beam is working with other principals of www.Online-Learning.com to provide courses in technical subjects and to develop custom online courses for commercial companies.

New XML Mailing List

XML-DOC is a new online mailing list for documentation professionals and anyone else interested in discussing the XML tools and techniques and how they apply to the creation of documentation. The mailing list encourages the following topics:

- XML-based content and document management systems
- Single-sourcing with XML
- DocBook, the SGML and XML DTD for documentation
- Transitioning to XML authoring from a FrameMaker environment
- Converting legacy documents to XML
- Publishing (transforming and delivering XML content)
- XML training and certification
- Document analysis and data modeling
- Profiling and customizing for multiple audiences and delivery formats

To subscribe to the list, send a blank e-mail message to:
 xml-doc-subscribe@egroups.com, or subscribe at the XML-DOC Web site: http://www.egroups.com/subscribe/xml-doc/

From Michael Smith, the list moderator: "My hope for XML-DOC is that it will not only help to raise the level of awareness about XML in the documentation community, but also give us, as technical communicators, a clear point of contact with the XML developers and product vendors who are now creating and refining the XML authoring tools, content management software, and XML publishing solutions."

7th Annual Hands-On Ergonomics Fair, October 7

The Hands-On Ergonomics Fair is a noncommercial, interactive trade show produced by Judy Doane, Director of the San Francisco Repetitive Strain Injury Support Group, and cosponsored by the Cumulative Trauma Disorder Resource Network and UCSF. Admission is free to both the public and vendors.

Held annually on University premises on the first Saturday in October, this event provides injured workers, proactive computer users, as well as the public at large with the opportunity to see demos and try out ergonomic office products, voice recognition software, and wellness aids. These products and services all relate to maintaining physical health and preventing workplace injuries such as carpal tunnel syndrome, tendonitis, vision problems, and other repetitive strain injuries. Participants at the fair can interact with vendors from all of California, comparing and contrasting the latest cutting-edge products in one central location, without the usual sales pressure found in a retail environment.

Time and place: 1 - 5 pm, UC Laurel Heights Campus, 3333 California Street (at Presidio Ave.), Chancellor's & Presidents' Conference Rooms, Sublevel 1 (accessible by public transit). For a list of vendors and directions, visit www.ctdrn.org/rsi-support/ sanfrancisco/hands-on_event.html. We hope to see you there!
Joan Lichterman, Founder and Coordinator, 1990-1999, East Bay RSI Support Group joan@ctdrn.org

SIGs: A Good Investment

George F. Hayhoe
Fellow, South Carolina Chapter

In a past discussion on TECHWR-L, an e-mail discussion list for technical communicators that is not affiliated with STC, several posters debated whether STC SIGs are worth the SIG assessment that the Society instituted a few years ago for SIG membership. Some writers noted that they didn't see any value returned from the SIGs they belonged to, while others observed that their experience had been quite different.

I belong to seven STC SIGs. Admittedly, some provide more value for the dollar than others (at least in terms of tangible benefits such as newsletters and listserve activity), but all of them have been well worth the investment. I'd like to offer a few observations based on my experience as a SIG member as well as four years on STC's board of directors and two years on the SIG advisory committee in the early 90s:

• As with chapters, each SIG's level of activity is entirely a result of volunteer effort. None of the SIG dues is paid to volunteers, who donate their time. The larger, more enthusiastic, and giving the membership, the more bang the members get from their bucks.

• The most tangible SIG products are their newsletters. Paper, production, printing, and postage are incredibly expensive, and those costs continue to rise.

• As with most professional organizations, the cost of delivering SIG services exceeds the fee the organization charges its members. The SIG membership surcharge recovers only a portion of the cost per member for the services provided.

• STC's board of directors debated charging for SIG membership for at least 4-5 years before instituting the additional fee a few years ago. The argument for SIG dues was to shift part of the expense of SIGs directly to those who use SIG services. The board delayed implementing the surcharge for several years to allow the SIGs to grow sufficiently so that the additional fee wouldn't have an adverse

A founding member of the Techniques for Relaxing SIG

effect on membership. Despite the additional cost, SIG membership has grown each year, not declined.

• The thoughtful and informative Annual Conference sessions offered by many SIGs (amounting essentially to SIG stems in a couple of cases) have added significant value to the conference, which has an extraordinary value to begin with.

• The Information Design SIG is about to become the first SIG to sponsor a special section in an issue of STC's journal, *Technical Communication*. The May 2000 issue will feature an introduction, three commentaries, a bibliography, and three articles on information design.

Would I prefer that there was no additional fee for STC SIG membership? Of course I would, but I know that it isn't a realistic expectation, and I'm quite satisfied with the return on my investment in the seven SIGs I'm a member of. But if I belonged to a SIG that was not returning adequate value for my financial investment, I'd have two alternatives. I could volunteer to help solve the problem by taking an active role in the SIG, or I could "vote with my feet" and not renew my SIG membership next year. ✍

STC to Launch Financial Industry Special Interest Group

Maurice Martin

Would you like to become a member of a special interest group (SIG) devoted to the issues unique to technical writers and instructional designers connected to the financial industry? The STC is currently in the process of forming such a SIG, and is seeking members to get it started.

Technical communicators should consider joining the SIG if they work for the following types of organizations:

• Accountancy Firm
• Business or Economic Analysis Company
• Commercial Bank
• Credit Union
• Investment Firm
• Loan Broker or Loan Servicer
• Mortgage Broker or Mortgage Banker
• Private Mortgage Lender
• Real Estate-related Company
• REIT
• Stock Brokerage Firm
• Thrift
• Any other company related to the financial industry

If you're interested, and you're an active STC member, please e-mail your expressed interest (or questions) to Steven Marshall at steven_marshall @indymac.com. Please include your name and e-mail address.
maurice@stc-va.org
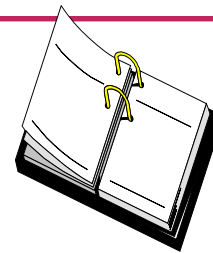
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This Month's Issue
Continued from page 1

This month's issue also features Online-Learning.com. An article by co-founder Dr. Paul Beam highlights the arguments for choosing to learn online. Note the discount to online-learning.com's course fees available to STC members.

A submission by Ken Delpit this month draws attention to the Cotati Philharmonic, to which chapter member Ron Teplitz belongs as a cellist. Ken's keen interests in technical, musical, and other topics drive home his outstanding qualities as a writer. Thank you Ken for

your enthusiasm and contributions.

Finally, several announcements have been included. Read about an ergonomics seminar in San Francisco, a new special interest group (SIG) for the financial industry, and a newly formed XML e-mail list.

Share your job announcements, news, accomplishments, and writing on topics of interest, to the *NorthBay News.* The chapter newsletter is a great tool for exercising your writing skills and getting your company name in lights. E-mail submissions to jdibs@earthlink.net one week prior to month-end for consideration in the next month's issue.

Coming Soon!
October 19-21, 2000

STC Regions 7 and 8 Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii

For late-breaking information, see www.pan-pacific.org, and Jack Molisani's articles there.

Technical Writer

Located in Sausalito, Equilibrium offers the advantage of being a company with a successful product on the market for nine years, while currently in pre-IPO mode, developing a dynamic new internet-based b2b infrastructure product, with major funding from our parent company, CMGI.

Job Description

Publications team member dedicated to ensuring that all documentation phases (planning, designing, writing, editing, and production) are completed on schedule and according to departmental styles and standards. Reports to the Publications Manager, working in a team environment alongside engineers, quality assurance specialists, and product managers under tight deadlines.

Responsibilities

- Write, edit, and review user guides, tutorials, product specifications, and help systems
- Comply with departmental standards for grammar, style, and formatting
- Incorporate edits as discussed and directed
- Gather product and design information from other departments
- Work with pre-release products and report any identified problems
- Author technically-oriented content for the corporate Web site
- Communicate project status and any problems to manager on an ongoing basis
- Provide manager with schedules and milestones for assigned tasks

Requirements

- BA/BS or equivalent
- Minimum 2 years technical writing experience
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills
- Strong analytical and organizational skills
- Ability to present instructions and concepts in a clear and concise written form
- Aptitude for learning complex software applications and systems
- Ability to perform independent research and analysis
- Knowledge of FrameMaker
- Experience with HTML helpful
- Working knowledge of Windows and Macintosh OS

Help Wanted!!

Desired Knowledge/Skills

- Work experience in a software development/Internet environment
- Experience copy writing/copyediting of marketing and public relations content
- Experience with graphics/imaging software
- Experience with single-source publishing, incorporating WebWorks Publisher
- Some knowledge of alternative operating systems (Unix, Sun, etc.)
- Some knowledge of JavaScript

Leslie Evans, Sr. Recruiter
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We meet on the third
Thursday of each month

Our October Meeting

Thursday,October 19

Charlie Grantham
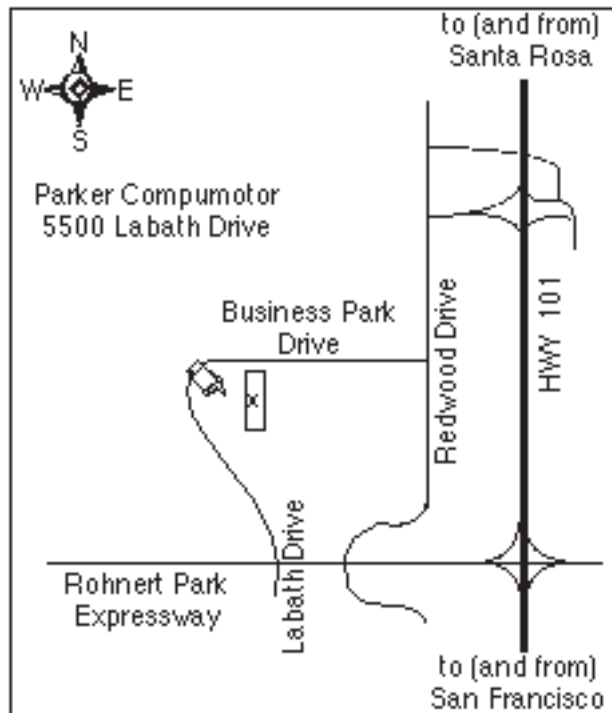**author of "The Future of Work:**
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