

Byline



Bi-Monthly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

President's Message Furthering your Education

By Betsy Maaks



I attended a regional STC conference here in Chicago in 1992, when I heard the keynote speaker urge us to spend 7% of our income (or time) on our further education in technical communication. We are part of a highly technical business since we moved from writing with pen and paper. And every year the technology changes. Then, our businesses change as well. We need to be relevant to stay competitive. Attending STC conferences has supplied me with relevance, year after year.

One area in which the STC Summit excels is the top-notch exhibitors who provide hands-on and face-to-face discussions of the latest tools we need for our business. I take advantage of it and talk with experts and product managers of the applications I use daily at work. Then I take their business cards for follow-up.

Another area is the leadership opportunities and training that STC offers at all levels of commitment. Many STC presidents probably start-

ed when someone asked them to help at the meeting registration table at chapter meetings, or write an article for the newsletter. Small things, low commitment.

It's when you find yourself working with really great people for a top-notch professional organization, and that organization can help to move your career forward, that's when you find that 7% of your time to volunteer. Join us on Thursday, June 16 at Manny's Ale House in Elmhurst for a **volunteer celebration and trivia night**.

Consider enhancing your leadership experience and training by attending the **Virtual Leadership Day** that STC will offer on Saturday, June 18. Find out **why you should attend** and **who should attend**.

If asked what session at the Summit was the best, I would say it was actually the first one I attended among my selections. It was titled, "Metrics that Matter: Making the Business Case that Documentation Has Value." This is

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Registration is now open
for the Chicago eLearning
& Technology Showcase

August 16
NIU Naperville

Get more info...

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Find us online!



June Program

Celebration, Business Meeting, and Trivia

Do you know...

- ◆ What 810-mile fault line was discovered and named by Andrew Lawson in 1895?
- ◆ Who was the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Ares?
- ◆ In which Star Trek film does Spock die?
- ◆ In a courtroom, what is "D.A." short for?
- ◆ What country is located between Panama and Nicaragua?

Whether you know these answers or not, come join us for a rousing game of trivia at our June meeting. (Our game is played in teams, so you can discuss and come to a consensus before you submit a team answer.) You'll get to meet our 2016-17 chapter officers, relax, network, and have fun. Who knows, you might even take home a prize!

Thursday, June 16

6:00 - 7:00 PM Dinner

7:00 - 8:00 PM Business meeting and trivia

Manny's Ale House

683 St. Charles Rd.

Elmhurst, IL 60126

\$5 Members | \$10 Non-members | \$5 Students

This meeting includes a buffet dinner with

- ◆ Greek salad
- ◆ Veggie pizza
- ◆ BBQ chicken pizza
- ◆ Beef sliders
- ◆ Chicken marinara
- ◆ Chocolate chip cookies
- ◆ Soda and water

Register now! [Ω](#)

Answers to the trivia questions above: San Andreas Fault, Mars, Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, District Attorney, Costa Rica.

April Recap

Improving Customer Experience with XML and DITA

By Mandy Morgan

On April 21, Eric Fox, Business Development Manager at Dakota Systems, and Pete Wagner, consultant with Dakota Systems, shared their expertise on improving customer experience with XML and DITA. They also discussed implications for technical writers as technology continues to evolve to augmented reality.

XML and DITA assist technical communicators in describing data or providing additional information about documents. These systems lend themselves to creating structured content. By using XML structured authoring, technical communicators can reuse components in multiple documents while creating efficient data flows within groups of writers.

In a project for the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, Eric and the Dakota Systems team were faced with a document originally contained in multiple volumes. This made it difficult for users to find information easily. By using XML and DITA in structured content, the Dakota Systems team was able to create a PDF of the documentation, then change the output to ePub, and then to a mobile application. This made the documentation accessible on multiple devices and easier to search through, and enhanced usability.

By looking at this example, Eric went on to discuss interactive troubleshooting with augmented reality. This process merges documentation with the actual task the user is working on. By using augmented reality, users can imagine and see the unseen of a particular task, while reviewing the documentation relevant to the task at hand. The documentation functions with the users in context. Augmented reality provides another outlet for technical writers to implement structured content through XML and DITA to enhance the user experience.

Thank you to Eric and Pete for sharing their experiences and implications for technical writers as technology moves forward.

(See photos on next page.) [Ω](#)

Beyond Education: The Real Value of Tech Comm Conferences

By MaryKay Grueneberg

con-fer-ence \ˈkän-f(ə-)rən(t)s noun: A formal meeting in which many people gather in order to talk about ideas or problems related to a particular topic...usually for several days.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) Summit is an annual five-day educational conference that addresses all aspects of Tech Comm. It is the premiere international Tech Comm conference held in North America. The STC Summit is so much more than just an educational conference for Tech Comm professionals.

Oh, sure, there were plenty of educational opportunities. The Summit offered two keynote speakers, three pre-conference certification workshops, and over 80 education sessions covering seven different themed tracks.

But, in my opinion, the *real value* lies before, after, and in between all of that education.

The *real value* is found in the professional connections that are made during the conference. I dare not use the word “networking” because the word is so overused and covers so many different things. Connections, whether personal or professional, offer another layer of support in your everyday lives. Connections give you access to expertise in new areas.

The *real value* of a conference is the opportunity to find a professional mentor. Or, if you are more advanced in your field, it is an opportunity for you to become a mentor to someone new to Tech Comm.

The *real value* comes in the form of peer-to-peer recommendations and access to projects and employment.

The *real value* is the unofficial sharing of ideas, innovation, and technology. It is discovering that there are other people in other companies and other countries that are going through the very same process and technology issues as you and your team.

The conference is over...so now what?

What you do with all the newfound knowledge and connections is equally important as acquiring them in the first place. As for me, in the week since the conference, I have connected with many new friends and associates on LinkedIn and Twitter. I have had several email conversations as follow-up to discussions started at the Summit. I’ve joined a Slack discussion channel for key topics. I’ve joined a study group to prepare for taking the certification exam to become a Certified Professional Technical Communicator (CPTC). That’s just in week one, but it doesn’t end here. The journey and the value will continue throughout the year until it is time for the next Summit. It’s all part of what one friend has described as “keeping the magic of the Summit alive.”

So, the next time you talk to your boss about attending a conference, don’t just describe the conference content, explain the *real value* of attending. Ω



Eric Fox from Dakota Systems discusses how to improve customer experience with XML and DITA at The Parthenon on April 21. A Greek buffet was enjoyed by all.



Golden Support Award presented to The CARA Group

By Elizabeth Burke, Vice President

It was an honor this past March for STC Chicago to present our first Golden Support Award to The CARA Group. The Golden Support Award was established to acknowledge a business or group that has shown continued and exceptional long-term professional support of the STC Chicago chapter.

The CARA Group has supported our Chapter and our mission for over a decade. A few of the ways CARA supports our Chapter and our members is by providing meeting venues, participating and contributing to Chapter programs and workshops, and sponsoring both our competition activities and awards banquet. CARA is an active supporter reaching out to our leadership frequently to offer their help and to pass along Chapter information to their consultants.

For those who might be unfamiliar with this exceptional organization...

The CARA Group is a consulting company specializing in instructional development, change management, and technical communications services. The organization that exists today was launched in 2002 and operates based on the philosophy of treating both clients and consultants as friends and with respect. The CARA team approaches each engagement with one goal in mind: a successful experience for both the client and the consultant delivering a quality product for the client and empowering the consultant in a successful encounter.

It is this dedication to CARA's clients and consultants as well as their exceptional work that earned CARA a spot on the Inc. 5000 List for five consecutive years.

For more information about CARA, visit their website: www.caracorp.com.

STC Chicago is looking for a Publicity/Marketing committee manager for the 2016-17 program year. In addition to publicizing the Chapter's achievements and activities (via social media and other outlets), the Publicity/Marketing Committee publishes the At-A-Glance monthly bulletin. Contact president@stc-chicago.com if you're interested.

Associate Fellow Applications Are Due October 1

If you'd like to nominate a candidate or be considered for the honor of Associate Fellow, now is the time to begin the process. See <http://www.stc.org/membership/recognition/honors> for eligibility requirements and instructions. Ω

President's Message

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an important aspect of our jobs: that technical communicators are perceived as skilled and valuable partners in the technical side of whatever the business needs to communicate. So, how do we become equal players to the business functions that are perceived as "more important" (i.e., "bring in more revenue")?

I've attended a good number of such sessions at STC Summits and webinars, and this is the best one for content, practical application, and just a thoroughly well presented and cogent discussion. Kudos to STC outgoing President Bernard Aschwanden and Chris Ward from Webworks for turning a "joint" sales business case into meaty nuggets that anyone can use to justify their value as technical communicators. They really looked under the hood to identify the whys and hows of using metrics.

I walked away with one really good sound byte [intentional sic]: "Metrics present facts to change beliefs." We are justifying the belief that we add value to the business effort, by creating and managing content, which is a business asset, because our documentation benefits many groups within the company. (You do share it with all the internal groups, don't you?) Is it Sales, who become informed spokespeople? Is it Support, QA Testing, as well as IT Services, which benefit when tech writers test the product and reduce bugs, not to mention that IT and Engineering don't have to write the stinking manuals?

Customers are reading the documentation as part of their discovery process when deciding whether to buy a product. If that isn't value, then...? Last words: "Build the documentation story early, then build the metrics around the story."

I encourage you to plan for next year's STC Summit in Washington, D.C. and to entice you further, to [view a video](#) capping the Anaheim Summit. Ω

Member Spotlight

Mandy Morgan

Mandy Morgan was recently elected Secretary of STC Chicago for the 2016-17 program year.



How long have you worked in tech comm?

Professionally, I've been working in tech comm for about two years. I studied technical communication at Missouri State University for both my undergrad and graduate degrees. At the end of my first year of graduate school, I started as a technical writer intern at kCura, and soon began working as a full-time technical writer.

When and how did you first get involved with STC?

I first got involved with STC as an undergrad at Missouri State. Our graduate students ran our chapter and at first I attended the meetings for the free pizza. However, the meetings became super interesting and I discovered a lot about the industry and I was hooked. As a first-year graduate student, I served as the president of our student chapter and helped host a mini Summit at Missouri State. When I moved to Chicago, it was only natural that I continue with STC.

What's the most significant thing you've learned from being involved with STC?

The most significant thing I've learned from being involved with STC is that you can never stop learning about the industry. Each meeting and each interaction I have within the organization has taught me something new. It's amazing to see the different perspectives that everyone brings from their jobs—whether working full-time or as a consultant. There are so many facets of this industry; it's pretty incredible.

What advice would you give someone who is thinking about joining STC?

Join right now! There's amazing opportunities to network and meet other people in the industry. There's always someone with words of wisdom, or someone that knows of a job opportunity. Plus, you'll continually add to your professional skillset and can take ideas back to your day-to-day.

What's your favorite STC moment?

My favorite STC moment was this year's Summit. I gave my first presentation about usability testing to a packed room. It was indescribable to hold the floor and share the knowledge that I've learned about usability testing to other industry professionals. It was definitely a culmination of the experiences I've had in STC thus far. By being an STC member and continually learning, I definitely had the confidence to get up and share my experiences.

How long have you lived in the Chicago area?

I've lived in the Chicago area for two years now and I absolutely love it! Chicago was a dream city for me, although it can get difficult being a St. Louis Cardinals baseball fan. The city always has something interesting and fun to do. And the food is unbelievable.

What are you currently reading?

Currently I'm reading *Bazaar of Bad Dreams* by Stephen King. It's a collection of some of his short stories. Typically, I'm always reading non-fiction. I actually just wrapped up a book about David Bowie and the songs he wrote in the 1970s.

What kind of music do you listen to?

I listen to just about everything. I will rock out to anything from folk music to classic rock to pop. I am obsessed with music and lyrics. Ω

Congratulations to Our New Officers!

As a result of the April elections, STC Chicago welcomes the following new officers for the 2016-17 program year:

President	Elizabeth Burke
Vice President	Elizabeth Gecas
Secretary	Mandy Morgan
Treasurer	Pete Wagner
Nominating Committee	Cynthia Laughlin, Cheri Gerlach

You can meet them all in person at our June meeting. Ω

STC Chicago Chapter Leaders | 2015-2016

President

Betsy Maaks, president@stc-chicago.com

Immediate Past President

Adam Evans, ipp@stc-chicago.com

Vice President

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Secretary

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Dan Dornbrook

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STC mission statement: Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

News guidelines: Send articles to byline@stc-chicago.com. Preferred format is a Microsoft® Word document file via email. We reserve the right to edit for style and space.

Advertising: We encourage advertising that follows STC guidelines and promotes services to STC Chicago members.

Half page (7.5"x4.5"): \$300 (1 issue)

Whole page (7.5"x9"): \$500 (1 issue)

Discounts for multiple issues

The advertisement and payment must be received by the 20th of the month before the next published issue of the newsletter. (Byline is published in February, April, June, August, October, and December.) We will not run your ad until payment is received. Submit ad files in electronic copy only in .tif, .gif, or .jpg format to byline@stc-chicago.com.

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