

Byline



Quarterly Newsletter for STC Chicago Members

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Byline Wins Third Consecutive APEX Award

By Dan Dornbrook

Byline, the STC Chicago newsletter, and Editor Tom Lunde have won an Award of Excellence in the APEX Awards for the third year in a row. Of the 385 newsletters entered in the 2009 APEX competition, *Byline* is one of 62 that received the Award of Excellence.

The annual APEX awards are based on excellence in graphic design, editorial content, and the success of the entry—in the opinion of the judges—in achieving overall communications effectiveness and excellence. Grand Awards honor the outstanding works in each main category, while Awards of Excellence recognize exceptional entries in each of the sub-categories.

The competition is sponsored by Communication Concepts Inc., of Springfield, VA, which provides consulting services to organizations in the communications field. The firm publishes www.writingthatworks.com, a web site for business writers and communicators, and *Writing That Works: The Business Communications Report*, a bi-monthly newsletter covering business writing, editing and publishing for communicators in corporate, nonprofit, agency and independent settings.

Tom said of this year's award, "I am very pleased with the consistent quality we have been achieving with *Byline*. I get a lot of input and articles from our members, and many people in STC Chicago have stepped forward to author articles and provide member spotlights. In addition, since we mail *Byline* (instead of emailing *Byline* or posting an online version) I feel this helps us to reach more members. Granted, it is much more expensive and time-consuming to print and mail each issue, but we know when we do that we are reaching every one of our members and not just those on our email list or those who regularly visit the STC Chicago website."

STC Chicago President Dan Dornbrook, who edited *Byline* for a year in the early 2000s and a year in the mid-1990s, said, "Publications have always been a real strength of our chapter and a benefit that our members value dearly. I commend Tom for his dedication in editing *Byline* year after year, and I commend the many members who have contributed articles and photos to make our newsletter great."

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Chapter Receives Third Community of Distinction Award

STC Chicago has received the 2009 Community of Distinction Award from the Society for Technical Communication. This prestigious award represents the highest community honor conferred by the Society.

Linda Jansak, a past president of the chapter and current manager of our Public Relations Committee, said of the award, "We are pleased to be recognized for our efforts here in Chicago. We are especially gratified to have received this award for the third consecutive year."

This year, the citation on STC Chicago's award certificate read, "For your successful membership campaign, your newsletter archives, your use of social media, and your innovative e-Learning and technology showcase."

According to the guidelines for Community Achievement Awards, "The awards not only acknowledge that the obligations of a properly functioning community have been met, but that the winning communities have performed well beyond expectations. The awards program recognizes, in a visible and meaningful manner, communities that demonstrate outstanding, innovative, and sustained performance in advancing the goals of the Society."

Members accepted this year's award during an Honors Banquet at the 2009 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta in May. Ω

STC Chicago Member Profile - Nancy L. Webb



| | |
|---|---|
| Member Since | 1992 |
| Job Title | Professor of English—College of DuPage |
| STC Affiliation | Chicago Chapter |
| Years of Experience | 5 years as a technical writer and 26 years as an instructor |
| Tech Comm Philosophy | I want to foster an interest in technical communication and have my students gain an appreciation of excellence in writing. |
| Favorite STC Moment | Adding our Technical Communication certificate program to the STC Academic Database |
| Favorite Work Moment | When students have a positive internship experience and see the value of working with professionals |
| Working on Now | Getting more students to enroll in our certificate program |
| Favorite Movie | <i>Shakespeare in Love</i> |
| Favorite Music | All kinds -- depends on my mood |
| Favorite Book | <i>Howards End</i> by E.M Forster |
| Favorite Technical Communicators | Donald Bush and Daniel Riordan |
| Where I'd Like to Be 10 Years From Now | On a beach |

Chapter Elects Officers for 2009-2010 Program Year

Congratulations to the newly elected 2009-2010 STC Chicago officers:

- President: Dan Dornbrook
- Vice President: MaryKay Grueneberg
- Secretary: Malcolm Culbertson
- Treasurer: Linda Kelley

Congratulations also to the 2009-2010 Nominating Committee: Russell Friend, Steve Napora, and W. Kelly Oja.

The officers and Nominating Committee members' terms began at the annual business meeting during the June 10 networking event at Allstar Sports Bar in Chicago. Voting was conducted online in early June.

Dan Dornbrook (President)

Dan has been a technical writer in the Chicago area since 1994 and an STC member since 1993. He was *Byline* editor in 1995-96 and 2001-2002, served as program manager from 2004 to 2006, chapter treasurer from 2006 to 2008, and vice president since 2008. He received a Distinguished Chapter Service Award from STC and a President's Award from the chapter in 2005. Said Dan, "As president of STC Chicago, I will continue to look for ways to improve service to our members. Our chapter is your chapter. Every member counts and every volunteer makes a difference."

MaryKay Grueneberg (Vice President)

A senior member of STC, MaryKay joined the Chicago Chapter in 1996. She has been a judge for the chapter's annual Technical Publications, Art, and Online Communications competitions for the past nine years. She has served on the Competition Committee for several years, including four years on the Judges' Review Panel. Looking for a way to be more involved in the

Chicago Chapter, MaryKay has served on the Administrative Council as secretary for the past two years. She has been a technical writer since 1983 and has won numerous awards for her writing from both the Chicago Chapter and recently from the West Michigan Shores Chapter. Said MaryKay, "As vice president, I will work closely with the president to find new and innovative ways to service our membership. I will also strive to expand our membership as well as our volunteer base."

Malcolm Culbertson (Secretary)

Malcolm is a senior member of STC. He has 10 years experience as a project manager and technical writer, and currently works for Siemens Building Technologies, Inc. in Buffalo Grove. His previous STC experience includes co-chair and chair of chapter competitions from 2002 to 2004, two terms on the Nominating Committee (2002-2003 and 2008-2009), and two terms as secretary (2005-2007). Chapter honors include the President's Award and the Distinguished Chapter Service Award. Said Malcolm, "I am proud of having the original idea for informal STC gatherings which became—after crucial input and the actual work of implementation from Linda Jansak and Mary Sojoodi-Whalen—Thursdays@STC Chicago."

Linda Kelley (Treasurer)

Linda Kelley telecommutes to her job as Senior Technical Writer at Synergex in Gold River, California. Linda has been a member of STC for over 20 years. During that time she has served as Co-Editor of the Sacramento Chapter newsletter (for which she received an Award of Distinguished Technical Communication), as a six-time judge for the international STC Newsletter Competition, as Program Manager for the Chicago Chapter from 1998 to 2001, and as the current Treasurer of the Chicago Chapter. She received a Distinguished Chapter Service Award from STC in 2001. Said Linda, "As treasurer, my

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primary goal will be to continue to manage the chapter's money in a fiscally responsible manner, bringing the greatest benefit to our members for the funds that we have available."

W. Kelly Oja (Nominating Committee)

An STC member since 2000, Kelly became active in the Chicago Chapter in 2003. Kelly has been the membership manager for the chapter since 2006 and he served on the Nominating Committee in 2008-2009. Kelly is a SharePoint administrator and technical writer with seven years experience. Kelly says, "I have enjoyed serving on the Chicago STC Nominating Committee and look forward to continuing for another year. I see this as an opportunity to recognize chapter members for their accomplishments in the technical communications field."

Steve Napora (Nominating Committee)

A member of STC since 2006, Steve has served on the chapter's Nominating Committee since 2007. He was also awarded the STC Chicago student scholarship in 2007 after returning to school to enter the field. He has worked for various freelance clients since becoming a technical communicator and is currently about to begin a new project designing operating manuals for a Web services company. Said Steve, "My first two years on the committee allowed me to both serve an outstanding chapter and meet some wonderful people. I look forward to serving with another great group of committee members."

Russ Friend (Nominating Committee)

Russ has been an active member of the STC since he first joined the St. Louis Chapter in 1977. When he was in St. Louis, he won the Best of Show Award in St. Louis Competition in 1979 and later served as a judge and Competition Manager. In the early 80s, Russ moved to Chicago as a result of finding out about an employment

opportunity through STC acquaintances. He became active here right away, and has served the chapter in various roles since 1986, including treasurer, employment committee manager, Nominating Committee, vice president, and president. Russ has also won several awards in various Chicago Chapter competitions. In addition to his service to the chapter itself, Russ is a direct contributor to others' success in technical communication. For example, he has taught courses at St. Louis Community College (1981), College of Lake County (1986 and 1989), and Illinois Institute of Technology (1987-1993). When he was immediate past president, he worked on revitalizing the Technical Workshops. He continues to assist the workshop coordinator and this spring presented the RoboHelp 7 workshop. He has been a presenter with the Institute for Professional Development that is sponsored jointly by STC Chicago and Northern Illinois University, and last fall served as a mentor. Ω

STC Membership at a Glance

Total members: 13,263
Members residing in the U.S.: 11,236
Members residing in Canada: 1,206
Members residing elsewhere: 821
Total communities*: 155
*Includes 104 professional chapters, 30 student chapters, and 21 SIGs.

STC Chicago Membership at a Glance

Total Affiliated Members: 340
Associate Fellows: 7
Fellows: 5
Members: 112
Senior Members: 197
Student Members: 19
Ω

The Top 10 Mistakes Writers Make when Looking for Work

By MaryKay Grueneberg—Vice President, STC Chicago

Excerpted and summarized from the presentation, “The 10 Most Common Mistakes Technical Professionals Make When Looking for Work,” by Jack Molisani, president, ProSpring Technical Staffing, with the author’s permission.

This presentation was given with the assumption you are working with one or more recruiters. These tips also apply when you are submitting directly to a company.

1. Not following submission directions

- Read all directions – and follow them all.
- First impressions last – do not let your first impression be a negative one.
- E-mail, fax, or snail mail? Use the method of *their* choice, not yours.

2. Not building personal relationships

- Develop a personal relationship with your recruiter – this helps especially if you are not an exact match for a position.

3. Bad manners

- Do not mail your resume to multiple recruiters in a single e-mail.
- Keep a log of where your resume has been sent – sending multiple resumes gives a bad impression.

4. Applying when you are not even remotely qualified

- Don’t apply without considering the requirements – **Do** apply for jobs that are a bit of a stretch, but at least be in the ball park.
- Pay attention to the “must have” vs. “nice to have” requirements.

5. Not summarizing skills vs. requirements

- Not all recruiters have the time to read your resume from top to bottom – some just skim for keywords and needed skills.

- Be proactive – send a matrix of the job requirements vs. your skills, so they don’t have to do it for you.

6. Misnaming your resume

- Recruiters get tens if not hundreds of electronic resumes a day – would you want to receive 100 resumes a day named “resume.doc”?
- Name your resume so it can be found easily – “Susan Jones.doc,” for example.

7. Poor resumes

- Your resume is the first sample of your writing skill – programmers can get away with bad writing or formatting, but technical writers cannot. A single typo is one too many!
- Recruiters and hiring managers judge candidates based on their resumes – and you **will** be disqualified if you have sloppy mistakes in your resumes.

8. Mis-evaluation of importances

- Highlight your strengths; minimize your weaknesses.
- Put the most applicable information, experience, and skills near the top of the resume – put less- or non-applicable experience near the bottom.

9. Not anticipating questions

- Explain things like gaps in your work history, your citizenship or work visa status, a move from contract to permanent or a move from permanent to contract, the need for relocation assistance if out of state, etc.

10. Not keeping your skills current

- If you can really “pick up” a new skill “in a week” why haven’t you already done so?

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“Top 10 Mistakes” - Continued from Page 5

- There are plenty of ways to stay current – professional organizations, continuing education, and conferences are abundant.

To summarize, you will be successful in your search for work if you:

- Follow submission directions.
- Build personal relationships.
- Use good manners and netiquette.
- Apply for jobs for which you are qualified.
- Include a summary of how your skills match the job requirements when you submit your resume.
- Name your electronic resume so it can be identified.
- Proofread your resume.

- Highlight your strengths; minimize your weaknesses.
- Anticipate and answer questions.
- Keep your skills current.

For the full presentation and other useful presentations related to job searches, go to www.ProSpringStaffing.com and check under “Resources.” Ω

Start Preparing Now for Annual Chapter Competition

Elizabeth Burke, Competition Entries and Awards Committee Manager

Plans for the 2009 STC Chicago Chapter competition are underway. The Chicago Chapter committee members are reviewing changes launched at the national level as well as the local level for this year’s competition. One change this year centers on STC National’s decision to suspend the Art category for the year 2009. This decision **does not** affect the Chicago Chapter’s competition and STC Chicago plans to offer and support the Art category in this year’s local competition.

STC Chicago recognizes the skill required in communicating effectively through art and we continue to support your effort. STC Chicago encourages our membership and others to participate in our local competition with Art submissions. While entries receiving awards in the Chicago Chapter competition cannot advance to the international competition, achievements acknowledged by your peers remain strong.

While the entry fees have yet to be determined, the Chicago Chapter continues the same fee structure as last year, with no difference in the cost for entries whether you are a member or non-member.

It’s never too soon for you to think about your entries for this year’s competition. Begin selecting the Help systems, documents, and artwork that you will submit for the STC Chicago Chapter competition and get a head start on the submission process.

With each year’s competition, STC encourages members and chapter participants to volunteer as a judge. Competition judges gain valuable insight and knowledge from the judging experience. Consider volunteering as a judge this year.

Watch for information regarding competition entry and judging opportunities in the coming weeks. Ω

President's Message - Summit Reflects Tough Times, Looks to Brighter Future

By Dan Dornbrook



The 2009 Technical Communication Summit in May in Atlanta reflected the challenging times in which we live and work as technical communicators while at the same time offering hope for a brighter future.

As many of you may have guessed from the extraordinary incentives offered by STC in the weeks before the Summit, advance registration was much less than in past years. Even with a late surge in registrations, attendance was about 800, compared with STC projections of 1100 and historic peaks of 1500 or more. Other professional associations suffered similar declines this year, according to STC leaders, largely because of current economic conditions in the nation and the world.

As a result, the Summit schedule was compressed by half a day, in part to allow for same-day homeward travel on the last day, which was often difficult in past years. (Speaking of travel, O'Hare was emptier than I have ever seen it in daytime.) Receptions and other social events were reduced, while technical sessions were somewhat fewer and much more focused. In short, we got down to business.

Technical sessions were organized into tracks that centered on highly relevant topics, such as structured content and job hunting. This structure made it much easier than in the past for attendees to target the sessions that we wanted, in part by minimizing conflicts between sessions aimed at similar audiences. In addition, the online Summit at a Click – provided free to Summit participants and available at extra cost to those who could not attend – makes the contents of every session available to every participant.

The biggest take-away from these sessions is that the core skills of a technical communicator – gathering information from those who have it and distilling into useful forms for those who need it – are more necessary than ever, and it is up to each of us to keep up so we can apply those skills where we live and work. STC plays a crucial role in helping us do that.

Social networking tools such as Twitter and ScribbleLive were more popular than ever and made this year's Summit truly interactive by providing real-time feedback on everything from session content to room temperature. (Anyone who keeps a sweater or jacket in their cubicle for air conditioning season understands the relevance of the latter topic.)

This tool-enhanced networking did not replace face-to-face networking, however. If anything, the virtual conversations – including some with colleagues not at the Summit – increased the in-person conversations among participants and gave everyone food for thought.

Finally, the Summit had some seriously entertaining moments. One of the most memorable was the keynote speech by *New York Times* technology columnist Scott Pogue, who not only illustrated his points about making technology usable by and useful to people, but performed a live version of the musical salute to the Apple iPhone that has made him a star on YouTube. One colleague said it was the best and most relevant keynote that he has heard in more than 30 years of STC conferences.

If you missed this year's Summit, I highly recommend attending the ones scheduled for 2010 in Dallas, 2011 in Sacramento, and 2012 in – oh, yeah – Chicago. You will be glad you did. Ω

How the STC Financial Crunch Affects You as a Member

By Richard Mateosian - STC Berkeley President

The following article is reprinted from Ragged Left, the award-winning monthly newsletter of the STC chapter in Berkeley, CA. For more information, visit www.stc-berkeley.org.

Here at the chapter level, we often look at the STC headquarters operation as something distant and out of touch. The truth, however, is that STC and its U.S. chapters are one big organization. This fact became really important recently when headquarters gave us a report on our finances. Over the next 18 months, we face a large budget deficit and a severe cash flow problem. Without immediate action, the organization could cease to exist.

STC has made big cuts. We have moved to a much less expensive office, cut staff, and reduced other expenses. If we get through the next 18 months, we will probably be OK, but for now, we need to take drastic action. Fortunately, there is a remedy.

For many years we have run our chapter efficiently. Until we adopted recession pricing late last year, our meetings paid for themselves, as did other activities. Each year we receive funding from headquarters based on the number of members we have, and each year we spend only about half of it. Our chapter has substantial funds over and above what we need for the next couple of years. Many other chapters have similar or even larger reserves. These funds should be enough to get us over the hump.

All chapters will determine how much money they need to cover their expenses through the end of 2010. They will subtract that amount from their current bank balances and remit the remaining funds to STC headquarters before September.

As noted, these are STC funds. The Berkeley Chapter does not exist as an independent organization. Still, we are proud of the way we have tended and cared for the money in our account. We like to think of it as our own, even though it's not. Leaders of other chapters feel the same way, so there has been a lot of grumbling. You may have heard some of it, especially if you monitor #stcorg on Twitter. It's natural to be angry and to point fingers, but the truth is that the STC management who got us into this mess are long gone, and the current crop are working really hard to put out the fire. Using the excess funds from our chapter bank account will have little effect on our meetings and activities. We weren't using those funds to support our activities, so we won't see much difference. Unfortunately, however, there's more.

One cause of STC's financial problems is that we do not fund our activities entirely out of dues. We rely on a substantial surplus from the annual conference to make up the difference, but that surplus did not materialize this year and probably won't be there next year either. STC will ask us for contributions (tax deductible) and will raise dues. Naturally, that will make many of us ask ourselves if STC membership is still a wise investment.

Personally, I have no trouble answering that question. I'm active in four chapters and some SIGs. Most of my income over the last 18 years has come through contacts I made in STC. I value the Society's efforts to gain respect for our profession and to support our arguments for fair compensation. I have learned a great deal about technical communication by attending STC meetings and conferences and by participating in STC competitions. I will contribute what I can, and the higher dues will not deter me.

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Portfolio Tips for Technical Writers

By MaryKay Grueneberg, Vice President, STC Chicago

Excerpted and summarized from the presentation, Portfolio and Interview Strategies, by Jack Molisani, president, ProSpring Technical Staffing, with the author's permission.

The “ground rules” given by Mr. Molisani during his presentations are simple: everything presented here is just his opinion...it is not true unless you try it and see if it's true *for you*. Given that disclaimer and set of ground rules, let me just say that these tips worked for me.

Having almost ten years of experience as a hiring manager of technical writers and a technical writer myself, I thought I had a good grasp on what hiring managers were looking for. I was wrong. That is to say, I was not entirely correct. While the basics remain the same, there are new things to consider in these hard economic times. It is no longer good enough to be a good writer. Gone are the days when job postings garnered 5-20 applicants, with only a handful truly qualified for the position. Job postings today are getting hundreds of applicants – many of them equally qualified.

“STC Financial Crunch” - Continued from Page 8

I know that the calculation is different for many of you—especially those of you who are suffering in the financial downturn. Some of you will drop your STC memberships, but we won't be dropping you. We'll still send you the announcements and hope that you show up at meetings. You can still subscribe to the job list and participate in other activities and networking opportunities.

We'll be hoping that you join again when things change. And we'll be working hard to make sure that STC can continue its mission of advancing our profession. Ω

So what is an unemployed technical writer to do? First, clean up and tighten up your resume (*see related article*). Then, once your resume has grabbed the attention of the potential employer, use your portfolio and your interviewing skills to set yourself apart from all the other qualified candidates.

So, what is a portfolio? Portfolios for writers have evolved over the years. They are more than a simple collection of writing samples. Your portfolio is a tool that you can use to walk potential employers (or clients, for contract writers) down a path of understanding that you are an expert in your field, you really have done what you claim, and you can solve the problems that they have.

What should you put in your portfolio? Of course, your portfolio should be customized to reflect your skills and your accomplishments, as well as your particular field of writing. In general, using a quality artist's portfolio, clear page protectors, and tabs, include the following items:

- **Project Plan** – Showing an example of a project plan that you have created and used demonstrates that you know what you are doing, that you are more than just a technical writer. A project plan shows that you understand the entire process involved with documentation and can provide solutions from end-to-end.
- **Results of the project plan** – Whenever possible show samples from documents created from the project plan and show that the plan worked.
- **Advertisements, data sheets, product reviews** – If available, show ads or product reviews for the products you have documented. This is especially helpful if you have worked on any “known” products. Name-dropping never hurts!

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- **Awards and recognitions** – If you've won an award or received a letter of recognition for a project, use a sample from that project and place a copy of the award or letter right along with the sample.
- **Before-and-after sample** – Show a really bad "before" sample – the messier, the better. Then, show a really good "after" sample. This shows that you can make perfect clarity out of total chaos.

What if you don't have samples? There are many reasons why you might not have current samples: you may be just out of school, you may have only worked for high-security companies who do not allow you to keep samples, you may have worked at a company with tight style restrictions that don't 'show' well, etc. Whatever the case may be...if you don't have samples, create samples. Create a project plan after the fact. Find something that is published that is really bad, rewrite it, and use it as your before-and-after sample. Rewrite

something you wrote a long time ago, using different authoring tools or techniques.

Remember:

- People believe what they see, not what they are told.
- "Tell a story" is good, but showing an example is better.
- A portfolio is not a series of examples, it is a tool for you to *guide the interview* where you want it to go.
- Don't let the employer "scan" your portfolio – walk him or her through it.

You are positioning yourself as an expert in your field. Prove it with your portfolio.

For the full presentation and other useful presentations related to job searches, go to www.ProSpringStaffing.com and check under "Resources." Ω



Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase on August 19

Celebrate the emergence of Chicago as a world-class center for elearning. Join hosts CISPI, and CCASTD and STC Chicago at the -Chicago eLearning & Technology Showcase on August 19 for a cutting-edge exploration of new media and interactive elearning tools.

Invited Speakers:

- Anna Belyaev, Founder and CEO, Type A Learning
- John Patterson, Director of Business Development, Pixel Brothers, Inc.
- Jennifer DeVries, President and Senior Solutions Architect, BlueStreak Learning

Where: Roosevelt University, 430 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago

When: August 19, 2009 | 8:30 am – 6:00 pm

Who: Organized by CISPI, CCASTD, STC Chicago

Cost: \$35 for STC Chicago, CISPI, and CCASTD members; \$60 for non-members

Contact Information:

info@chicagoelarningshowcase.com

To register, go to:

<http://www.chicagoelarningshowcase.com> Ω

Byline

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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* at byline@stc-chicago.org. Preferred format is a Word for Windows document file via e-mail. 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 printings. For details, go to our web site and click on *Byline* Advertising.

The advertisement and payment must be received by the 20th of the month before the next published issue of the newsletter (e.g., submit ad and payment by November 20th for the December issue). 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.org.

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