



tecolote

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Tecolote is the official newsletter of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Our mission is to advance the profession of technical communication across New Mexico by increasing networking among professionals, creating opportunities for members to improve skills, and recognizing technical communication excellence.

From the President's Pen

by Jonathan Price

About Awards

Want to remind your boss of your value as a technical communicator? How about showing off an award from the STC competition?

The other day I was visiting Linda Gillis with Sandia National Labs, and I noticed that she has two plaques over her computer, from previous competitions—a nice way to telegraph her expertise to visitors...and upper management.

An award helps you demonstrate that you have won the respect of your peers. If your boss sometimes looks a bit distracted when trying to quantify the return on investment in you, and your work, perhaps you need to boast a bit more, and point with pride.

Think back. In the last two years, what's the best project you have worked on? There aren't many limits. You can submit a wide range of technical publications, online content, and art.

You get a detailed critique from the judges, as part of the response. And you might win one of three levels of award. And if you win one of the top two levels, the chapter sends your work on to the international competition, where you could win even more recognition.

When do you have to get the form, and submit? The absolute last minute is the end of September. For more details, see Call for Entries on page 5.

Me, I've won a half dozen awards over the years. But my favorite was for a book I did years ago, with more than a dozen coauthors, called the Macintosh Playhouse—articles on all the non-professional, non-business ways you can have fun with a Mac. That got recognized at the international level. Just the other day I was talking with our team of writers and editors, and I told them, "You can get one of these."

"Will it be in our name, or the company?"

"Your name. Right here."

So imagine your name engraved on a brushed steel plaque set in a nice wooden frame. Now where could you hang that, so everyone who comes into your office will spot it right away?

Best,

Jonathan

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We welcome submissions from Kachina
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Best Practices in Software Simulations

by Jodie McLemore

On April 12, William Horton presented the webinar, Best Practices in Software Simulations. This interesting and informative workshop focused on techniques to design and produce software simulations that effectively allow users to learn at different levels of interactivity. Horton's methods for individualizing software simulations are analogous to individualized classroom instructions for meeting the needs of different levels of learners. Horton demonstrated the different learning levels and gave suggestions for simulation modeling, guiding, monitoring feedback and re-teaching concepts at each level. A flow chart on the architecture of coach-me activities provided a clear overview of the feedback system, listing the steps involved in learning to use software and examples of simulation responses.

Addressing production of software simulations, Horton began by emphasizing careful planning, creating a checklist and paying attention to minor details. Examples of important, but seemingly minor details, include labeling specific mouse actions and demonstrating a mouse click in five distinct steps. Horton suggested that you create a basic template for each element in your lesson—the menu, the hint, the error correction—to save time during production. At the end, your simulation should clearly signal successful completion—so the user knows it's really over.

Throughout, Horton invited participants to doodle on the screen, respond to surveys, and send in comments and questions via chat. Overall, his webinar presentation clearly communicated the concept that, "A simulation is much more than a demonstration."

Life After RoboHelp

by Jodie McLemore

Neil Perlin, who runs Hyper/Word Services, presented the interactive webinar, Life After RoboHelp: How We Got Here and Where To Next on May 24. This "old RoboHelp consultant" and seasoned technical communicator shared his view of the changing Help development environment as tools move toward XML. These tools still turn out HTML code, but they use XML to handle content organization, emphasizing tags and templates, often producing XHTML.

Perlin began his informative webinar with a historical perspective of Help development during the past thirty years, guiding listeners through the introduction of RoboHelp, the move to develop documents using HTML, RoboHelp's near death experience, and recent signs of life support. Perlin described the turmoil and uncertainty these changes have introduced into what had previously been a stable area of our profession.

Addressing the current state was Perlin's next topic. For many Help developers, RoboHelp is still viable; there is speculation that Adobe will present a rewritten version sometime in 2007, but when asked to verify a date, Adobe personnel have responded, "No Comment." Other programs such as Flare (Madcap Software), ePublisher Pro (Quadralay), and AuthorIT (AuthorIT Software) are available. Perlin presented a detailed comparison of RoboHelp with each of these competing programs, pointing out their highlights and problematic areas.

The final topic Perlin addressed was selecting the right tool. He suggested these criteria—whether output will be hard copy or on-line, the tool's mental model (internal logic), technical ease of use, and vendor stability.

Perlin stressed that the move toward structured content also gives us an opportunity to set standards, train authors on the selected tool and supporting technologies, enforce the standards we set, rationalize workflows, and document our projects. The possible demise of RoboHelp has shaken up the Help world, giving us an opportunity to reconsider our process and our ideas of Help.

A New Chapter Member Benefit—Credit Union Privileges

by Konnie Andrews

The STC Kachina Chapter is now an affiliated association member of the Mountain America Credit Union (MACU). This means that you, as an STC Kachina Chapter member, qualify to open an account at MACU without paying the customary \$25 (refundable) fee. Membership in the credit union provides you access to the following services:

- Checking account services, including online checking and direct deposit
- Savings accounts, including special IRA savings accounts
- Free notary service
- Auto, home equity, mortgage and other loans
- Auto, homeowner's, renter's and business insurance
- Long-term care and term life insurance
- Discounts at health providers
- Investment and trust advice

Our chapter's assets are currently in three accounts at MACU: a basic organization (no fee) checking account, a savings account, and a 6-month certificate of deposit. We made the switch primarily because of the excellent interest rates offered by MACU and also because they offer nonprofit organizations such as STC a no-fee checking account with no minimum balance.

Here's a snapshot of some of the rates offered by MACU as of July 24, 2006:

- Primary savings account (minimum \$100): 1.24%
- 12-month CD: 5.22%
- Mortgage loans from 6.75%
- Auto loans from 6.5%

For more information about services and membership visit www.macu.com or stop by the Albuquerque branch at 8104 Wyoming Blvd NE, Suite C (in the north-south trending strip mall east of the Smith's at the northeast corner of Wyoming and Paseo del Norte).

Kachina Chapter Finances	
Here's a snapshot of our chapter's financial status as of June 30, 2006. Please send questions to Konnie Andrews at konniewandrews@comcast.net .	
ASSETS	
Savings and Checking Accounts	\$5776.25
Certificate of Deposit	4010.31
Inventory (Estimated—primarily software)	500.00
Petty Cash	25.15
LIABILITIES	
Current Liabilities	345.19
Long-Term Liabilities	---
NET WORTH	\$9966.52

Call for Entries

The New Mexico Kachina Chapter is managing the 2006 Southwest Regional Publications, Art, and Online (PAO) Competitions. The competitions are open to all technical communications professionals, regardless of affiliation with the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

The Competition Web page is posted on our website:

<http://www.stc-nm-kachina.org/NewSite/Competitions/competitions.htm>

Fees range from \$45 to \$85 per entry. The entry forms are being converted to a fillable PDF format. We expect to have them completed and posted on our website in mid-August. The deadline for entries is September 30, 2006.

We also need judges from our “local area” (New Mexico). Please see the below “Call.”

Wanted: PAO Competition Judges

In addition to managing this year’s Southwest Regional PAO Competitions, our chapter will also be judging entries. We would like to assemble seven teams of three judges each. One judge on each will serve as “Team Lead.” We will need judges to evaluate technical art, technical pubs, and online communication entries. The “Call for Entries” on the Kachina website lists the products that can be submitted to each of the three categories of competition.

Judges should have several years’ experience producing, managing, or teaching about the communication products they will judge. However, judges do not have to be members of STC. We welcome the participation of other local technical communications professionals, including college professors. We will hand out entry packets to judges on October 7th. A consensus judging session will be held about a month later.

Most judges find the experience to be both educational and enjoyable. Please contact Bob Johnson or Judy Prono if you are willing to be a judge this year or need more information in order to decide. Thank you in advance for your participation!

- Bob’s email address: ziagrants@msn.com
- Judy’s email address: jprono@lanl.gov

STC Award in the 2006 Supercomputing Challenge

by Judy Prono

For the past 13 years, our chapter has sponsored an award for the Best Written Report in the New Mexico Supercomputing Challenge. A year-long program, the Challenge allows middle and high school students from around the state to use the computing resources of Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories to conduct science projects. The 2005–2006 program wrapped up on April 25 with an awards ceremony in Los Alamos.

In addition to award certificates and a plaque, the team that wins our STC award for Best Written Report receives a \$100 gift certificate to purchase books on technical communication for its school. This year’s award went to Chirstopher Morrison and Nicholas Kutac (Team 77) from Rio Rancho High School. Their project was on “Analytical Fire Modeling: Fire in its Environment.” In their report, they explained how they created a model based on the Elliptical Fire Theory to predict fire flow and what additional work, mainly in terms of including more variables, is needed to make their model more accurate.

Editors from the Communication Arts and Services Group at Los Alamos National Laboratory served as judges for the award. This year Sue King and Lisa Inkret joined me in evaluating finalists’ reports. Our key judging criteria were how well the reports explained the “what” and “so what” of projects, their overall readability, and how well they integrated text with graphics. In addition to the award, we provided finalist teams with written critiques of their reports and suggestions on how to improve them. We received several thank you notes from students and their teachers for the feedback we gave the teams.

Around STC

A “cyber tour” of our Society, our Communities, our Leaders, our Future!

by Bob Johnson

Our Society’s next Annual Conference will be held in Minneapolis during its usual place on the calendar: May. It’s not too early to start putting travel funds aside, lining up a van or two, and “talking up” the conference within your communities – both geographic and virtual. General information about the 2007 Conference is here:

http://www.stc.org/cfp/cfp_GeneralInfo.asp

If you missed this past Conference, the Society has posted some (208) of the session materials on this web page:

<http://www.stc.org/53rdConf/sessions/session.materials.asp>

The Tieline Knowledge Base is a collection of feature articles that have been published in the Tieline since 1996. Articles are arranged by topic. Worth a look! (requires STC member login)

<http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/tielineKb01.asp>



STC has seventeen Special Interest Groups (SIGs). If you don’t belong to one, we encourage you to learn more about them and join one or two. This month we feature these three active SIGs:

The Environmental Safety and Health SIG: <http://www.stcsig.org/esh/>

The Management SIG: <http://www.stcsig.org/mgt/>

The Usability and User Experience SIG: <http://www.stcsig.org/usability/>



Chapter Spotlight: As you probably know, STC has chapters worldwide. Take a virtual tour of the Australia Chapter. Here is the link to their website “down under”:

<http://www.stc-aus.org.au/>



Ms. Susan Burton is our Society’s new Executive Director. She has stated a desire to visit chapters. We will be extending an invitation to her to visit our chapters here in New Mexico (Kachina Chapter and the Trinitite Chapter @ NM Tech). This article on the web page below provides more information about Ms. Burton’s background and experience:

<http://www.stc.org/membership/initiatives01.asp>



What does the future of our Society look like? Many of our STC leaders conspired fairly recently to answer that question. The efforts of their work have been captured in a concise, presentation-format document called “The New World of STC.” It is essentially the framework for creating a business model-based Strategic Plan. The 30-page document is posted here:

http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/theNewSTC0506.pdf

STC Webinars

The Kachina Chapter is presenting STC webinars again this year. These lunchtime learning seminars are presented free of charge to members and students, although any and all contributions towards the expense of presenting them are appreciated. We ask that nonmembers pay \$10 for each webinar.

All webinars take place on Wednesdays from 11:00 am to 12:30 pm. Webinars are held at K-Tech Corporation in their new building located at 10800 Gibson SE (east of Eubank).

RSVP to Jonathan Price in advance at jprice@swcp.com or 254-4148. We must have a minimum of five members signed up to purchase these presentations.

August 23, 2006 — It Might Be GUI, but It Doesn't Have to Be Messy!

Presenter: Leah Guren

The seminar covers all aspects of a GUI style guide, with emphasis on Microsoft, Apple, and Unix platforms. Key topics include an introduction to GUI and user experience, labeling and error messages, and discussion of why technical communicators need to get involved with the GUI.

September 13, 2006 — Visible: The New Visible

Panelists: Austin Skaggs and Christine Granger

Learn how one department overcame its disconnection from the rest of the company and negative perceptions by communicating about value more clearly and becoming more visible.

September 27, 2006 — Creating Interactive CBTs with Captivate - in Half the Time

Presenter: Kevin A. Siegel

Macromedia/Adobe Captivate is a powerful tool for creating software simulations, also known as Computer Based Training (CBTs). During this seminar, you will learn how to maximize the potential of each recording option, Demonstration, Assessment Simulation, and Training Simulation, including how to create "hybrid" CBTs that will cut your development time by 50 percent.

October 11, 2006 — Designing Business Forms: A No Nonsense Approach

Presenter: Nathaniel Lim

Filling out forms is a part of life. The design of a form determines how clean and complete the data on it becomes. This presentation focuses on the basic designs of hardcopy forms, common design pitfalls, and logical flow. Why is this topic important? Consider the Palm Beach County (Florida) ballot from the year 2000 elections. A poorly designed ballot (which happens to be a form) can influence the course of world politics.

October 25, 2006 — Ten Ways to Increase Your Value as a Technical Communicator

Presenter: Holly Harkness

To remain employed, to win recognition, to expand our role, we need to market our versatility and demonstrate how we can add value within our organizations. As a result, we can not only weather the stormy seas of corporate reorganizations, we can actually chart a rewarding career path for ourselves. This webinar will also help contract technical communicators.

November 8, 2006 — Choosing the Right Usability Technique (to answer the right question)

Presenter: Whitney Quesenbery

Selecting the right usability techniques is critical to a successful project. This seminar will review options for usability evaluations and examine how they can be used most effectively. Hints for selling usability by picking the right technique for the job — and showing that you understand the business goals (and constraints) for your usability work will also be presented.

STC Webinars continued

November 22, 2006 — Selling Technical Communication Services — Both Inside and Outside Your Organization

Presenter: Robert Dianetti

Marketing, training, and customer service departments don't often see the value or understand the effort it takes to analyze technical communication needs and develop effective materials. You need to know how to help others identify needs at an early stage so you can offer effective and timely solutions. This early buy-in will help you create more business, better manage the project, and give you building blocks to grow your career. Plus, the end-user gets what they really need.

December 6, 2006 — Creating Training that Sticks

Presenter: Maggie Haenel

You want to create great training, but many factors impact your ability to deliver a superior learning experience. Having a solid understanding of how adults learn, what makes them remember and how to enable transfer learning to other situations gives you an advantage as a training developer. In this seminar you will acquire the knowledge you need to begin building superior training immediately and experience the results in your development process.

January 17, 2007 — The Xfactor — From HTML to XHTML

Presenter: Neil Perlin

Description to come.

Additional information about these webinar topics is provided at: <http://www.stc.org/seminarsList.asp>.

Upcoming Live Presentations

Saturday, September 16, 2006 — User Experience

Presenter: Chris Rivard

Thursday, October 5, 2006 — Help and Web Customer Assistance

Presenter: Joe Welinske

Upcoming Admin Council Meetings

Saturday, August 19, 2006 — At UNM

Saturday, September 16, 2006 — Location TBD

Calendar events are listed at the time of printing and cover the next few months of activities. Some events may change. Please check the STC Kachina Chapter website for updates at www.stc-nm-kachina.org. STC Kachina Chapter members will receive periodic email updates with locations and sign up information. If you would like to list an event in the next Tecolote issue, email jprice@swcp.com with event information.



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