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tecolote

Tecolote is the official newsletter of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the Society for Technical Communications. 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.

Chapter News by Bob Johnson

Since our last newsletter, our chapter has continued to be in full steam ahead mode. I continue to be impressed with the experience, abilities, and work ethic of each of our Admin Council members. The annual STC competitions are also in full swing. Judy Prono, our Past President has been doing a great job coordinating our efforts for this complex endeavor.

Up and coming events include the Region 5 Conference in late October to be held in Salt Lake City. Our Treasurer John Stikar and I will be attending as your representatives. We look forward to learning what other chapters are doing to maximize value for STC members in their geographic areas. Watch for our Post-Conference report in the November Tecolote.

One of our newest Council Members already has to say goodbye. Our Secretary, Molly Miller, and her family are eagerly making arrangements for their move to Albany - no, not New York - but Oregon. She will have three STC chapters in that beautiful state to choose from. We offer Molly, Dennis, and Dominic our best wishes in their new endeavors. Please stay in touch, Molly! Who will take her place? If you are perhaps interested, please contact me for details on this important Council position.

Rumor has it that a good time was had by all at our Chapter barbeque on August 19th. About 20 members attended. I had hoped for more, but as Doris Day used to sing, “Que Sera, Sera” (am I dating myself?). Should we try again around Thanksgiving or Christmas? - just stirring the pot.

Until next time!

Bob Johnson in the newly-elected President of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter. He is a Senior Technical Writer employed with TechReps, a division of KTech Corporation. His primary area of expertise is DoD and DOE environmental compliance documentation.

**SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
 NEW MEXICO KACHINA CHAPTER**

From the Editor

by Carrie McChesney

After a brief organizational hiatus, the Tecolote is back with a new editor, different layout, and some new features that we think you'll like. For starters, we've made the move from Pagemaker to InDesign, and the newsletter production has crossed platforms from Windows to Mac. This has taken a bit of time to manage, but it's been a lot of fun exploring the latest Adobe layout tools. All of this has occurred concurrent to the STC New Mexico Kachina chapter website redesign, which will be implemented soon. It's taken some time, but we think you'll agree that the enhancements are well worth the wait.

The Tecolote newsletter includes many new features - chapter President Bob Johnson keeps you up to date with his Chapter News section, and Ted Finch presents the Tecolote Toolbox, which offers valueable tips and tricks for technical communicators. Future issues include a Member Spotlight section, which profiles our colleagues across the state, and Of Special Interest, which covers a different STC Special Interest Group in each issue. The Chapter History provides a look into our chapter's past, and the Calendar of Events section helps you plan the fun and informative events in the future.

If you have any feedback, suggestions, or would simply like to say hello, please send us a note. If you would like to write an article in a future edition of the Tecolote, send your proposal to me, Bob, or Ted. We look forward to hearing from you!

Carrie McChesney is a Publications Analyst for Software Solutions Unlimited, Inc. and owns JoePie Tech Works, a writing, editing, and design firm for digital and print media. She can be reached at cmchesney@mac.com.

Logo Contest

by Jonathan Price

Do you have a talent for graphic design? We need a new logo for the chapter-- and we're offering \$500 to the designer who comes up with the best entry in our contest. Submit entries to Jonathan Price at jprice@swcp.com by October 31st.

Criteria: We need variations on the logo, to work in the banner of our revised web site, on the newsletter (in paper and electronic versions), and on stationery. The text should read: Kachina New Mexico Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. The dimensions of the web logo would be 712 x 82 pixels (or a little higher, if necessary). No specific limits for the logo for the newsletter or stationery.

Wish list: We'd like a logo that suggests our state, to make our chapter stand out from others. We hope you can make some visual distinction between the chapter and the STC as a whole. We would also like to have our logo look contemporary, high-tech, oh, and beautiful.

Inspired? Got a question? Call Bob Johnson, our president, for ideas 254-4142, or email him at bjohnson@ktech.com. And, please, pass this call for entries along to any designers you know!

Jonathan Price is a professional Web writer and editor, as well as the STC New Mexico Kachina chapter's Vice President for Programs. You can reach Jonathan at jprice@swcp.com, or visit his website at <http://www.webwritingthatworks.com>.

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Tecolote is the newsletter of the New Mexico Kachina Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

Managing Editor

Carrie McChesney, cmchesney@mac.com

Associate Editors

Bob Johnson, BJohnson@ktech.com

Ted Finch, TFinch@ktech.com

Contributing Editors

Jonathan Price, Maryjane Long,

Whitney Quesenberry

Chapter President

Bob Johnson, BJohnson@Ktech.com

Vice President for Programs

Jonathan Price, jprice@swcp.com

Publicity Coordinator

Ellen Tormgrimson,

EllenT@danielbstephens.com

Membership Coordinator

Maryjane Long, mlong@swcp.com

Submissions

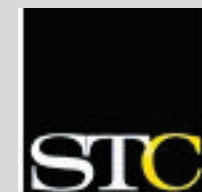
We welcome submissions from Kachina members for publication. Submit articles in plain text format to TFinch@ktech.com

Reprints

You are welcome to reprint original Tecolote articles provided you acknowledge the source and send a reprintcopy to the Managing Editor.

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STC Kachina New Mexico Chapter
PO Box 25291
Albuquerque, NM 87125-5291
www.stc-nm-kachina.org



Tecolote Toolbox

by Ted Finch

Welcome to the new Tecolote Toolbox section! As technical communicators, we are continually wrestling software, formatting graphics, and wrangling process flows. Given the nature of our work, we are devoting a section of each newsletter to sharing the skills we have, and the skills we would like to develop.

In each issue, I will present technical tips provided by myself, chapter members, and other sources. I welcome your suggestions and feedback, and encourage you to contribute your own tricks of the trade for future issues.

I look forward to providing some valuable knowledge for our chapter members. Please contact me or the newsletter staff with any suggestions for future articles, or if you would like to provide a guest article.

Ted Finch is an Associate Editor for the STC Kachina Chapter's Tecolote newsletter. By day, Ted is a technical writer at TechReps (KTech Corporation). Previously, he was the Tips and Tricks writer for the Utah State University Student STC Chapter newsletter. Ted can be reached at tfinch@ktech.com.



The New Intercom Online

Announcement from the STC National Office

The new Intercom Online is now available on the STC Web site! You can view the site at <http://www.stc.org/intercom>

Previously, the Intercom section of the STC Web site contained links to the feature articles of the current issue. The new Intercom Online contains links to the entire Intercom article index for the current issue, including letters to the editor, Society Pages, and departments such as Witful Thinking and Off Hours.

The new Intercom Online also features a full-text search utility that allows precise searches of all back issues from 1999 to the present. Some articles from the current issue will be available as “teasers” to non-members, but most of the articles will be reserved for members only.

Intercom Online is completely data-driven and has been entirely designed using CSS. Like the rest of the STC Web site, Intercom Online has been validated using W3C utilities and should prove extremely accessible and compatible. Intercom Online includes built-in accessibility features; to learn more about these features, click the “Accessibility” link in the footer of any page in the Intercom Online site.

Improving the value of STC remains our goal, and we're excited to add this helpful feature to the STC Web site!

This announcement is provided by the STC National Office. You can visit the new Intercom Online at <http://www.stc.org/intercom>.

“Intercom Online is completely data-driven and has been entirely designed using CSS”

Transformation Update

by Bob Johnson

First, if you are asking yourself, “What Transformation?”, please visit the STC Transformation website for the full scoop. The URL is <http://www.stc.org/transformation>. There is also a listserv and direct email address to ask questions or provide your input.

In July there were two new postings on the Transformation website. In the first, the author gives some background information on what brought about the transformation initiative and also addressed a few myths regarding the transformation. The second article is entitled “7 Leadership Qualities.” The article applies the principles discussed in an article that appeared in the May issue of “Selling Power” and how those qualities are applicable to our Society and chapter leadership during this time of transformation.

On September 1st, the latest information regarding the new membership categories and costs were posted. The page URL is: <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article9.asp>. You may have also seen an article on the July/August issue of Intercom by our Society’s immediate Past President, Thea Teich. The focus of Thea’s article is “communities of practice”, which seems to me to be the central focus of the transformation.

I think it is important to realize that at the local level we have the power and resources to transform our communities of practices as best meets the needs of our members. We should continue follow the Transformation as it progresses at the Society level but not be waiting for dictates from on high to determine our course of progress at the local level. I thought it best not to take up a lot of space in this issue of the newsletter by giving a detailed rehash of the above articles. I encourage you to read them as you have the interest and opportunity.

The STC Transformation website URL is <http://www.stc.org/transformation>.

Membership Survey Results

by Maryjane Long

This year the council decided to reach out to our fellow STC members by contacting members by phone. We were successful in talking to approximately one-third of our statewide membership. Here are the results.

We are a diverse group, both geographically and professionally. Although most of us have full-time jobs within government, business, and education sectors, some of us are independent contractors or run our own consulting businesses.

The main reason we are members is to keep up with what’s going on in the field and to network. Many of us also like to read STC’s Intercom magazine. Those of us who have been able to attend the phone seminars also give them high marks.

A number of us would be willing to participate on a panel, volunteer to judge in the regional publications competition, mentor students, or present a workshop.

As they say, location is everything. And with regards to our attending meetings or seminars and workshops, it is the location that determines if we can attend.

Now that the Council has heard from its members, the next step is to address some of the issues in the strategic plan.

Maryjane Long is the NM Kachina chapter’s Membership Chair and Senior Technical Writer for the ITSC department of the Indian Health Services. Maryjane can be reached at mjlong@swcp.com.

*“Good design
is clear thinking
made visible”*

—Edward Tufte

Tecolote Quote of the Month, heard at Edward Tufte’s recent course on Presenting Data and Information in downtown Albuquerque. To learn more about Edward Tufte and information design, visit his site at www.edwardtufte.com.

Top Ten Reasons to Attend an STC Regional conference

by Brenda Huettner, Associate Fellow, Southern Arizona Chapter

1. Save \$\$\$! For a fraction of the cost of the annual conference, you'll get the wisdom and advice of many of the same experienced technical communication professionals who present at the STC Annual Conference and other conferences around the country and around the world. For less than the cost of a single course at a local university, you'll get professional guidance in a wide variety of subject areas. Compare STC Regional conference costs (typically under \$200) to those of for-profit conferences—you'll agree, the regional conferences offer the biggest bang for the buck you'll get all year!
2. Fun, fun, fun! You get to meet and hang out with other people who understand exactly what you do! Share war stories, exchanges tips and tricks, compare techniques and environments.
3. Learn something new. You'll find out about the latest techniques and processes in the field, and ways that technical communicators are making an impact in new areas.
4. Solve your current technical communication quagmires—or at least get some options you may not have thought of before! Even if you don't find a session that specifically addresses your current challenges, you're bound to find someone who can help.
5. Looking for work? Looking to hire? Most regional conferences have job-related areas. Many include resume books, interview areas, and other resources. I've even seen interviews conducted on the spot!
6. The smaller scale of the regional conferences lets you get to know the other attendees and the presenters on a more personal level than you would at larger events.
7. Because it is a regional conference, it is likely to be closer to your home than other events. This not only reduces your travel expenses, it also means it will be easier to follow up with all the new, local contacts you'll make.
8. Meet the STC leadership, from your own region and often from other regions as well. Your Director is your link to the STC Board, and they want to hear what you have to say.
9. Product demonstrations allow you to easily compare vendor products. Because there are fewer attendees than at the big annual conference, you'll get more time with exhibitors to really try out the products and ask questions.
10. Expand your horizons by visiting a new city. As a bonus, the conference comes with built-in hosts from the local chapter who can tell you exactly where to find the best cup of coffee in the morning, the perfect after-dinner drink, or anything in between.

The Intermountain Chapter STC will host the 2004 STC Region 5 Conference at the Wyndham Hotel in Salt Lake City, Utah October 21-24, 2004. The conference theme is "Ascending the Summit: A Technical Communication Expedition." For more information, please contact Marj Hermansen-Eldard at meldard@legato.com, or visit www.intermountain-stc.org.

If you cannot attend, Bob Johnson and John Sitkar will provide comprehensive report in the next Tecolote issue.

Of Special Interest: Usability SIG

by Carrie McChesney

The STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are a great resource for chapter members. For a nominal extra fee (currently five dollars per SIG), you can join a special interest group to join STC colleagues who share your skills and interests. By joining a SIG, you stay abreast of the latest developments in your field, discuss the challenges and changes within your specialty, and make lasting connections across an international network of technical communicators. Whether you're a Canadian writer, an independent contractor, or an environmental specialist, STC has a SIG for you!

This issue profiles the Usability SIG, a special interest group dedicated to usability practices in technical communications. The Usability SIG membership boasts over 2500 global members, ranging from those who are just learning about usability techniques to those who are dedicated usability specialists in their workplace.

Usability SIG Webmaster Whitney Quesenberry presents her views on usability issues in the accompanying article, *The Importance of Document Design* (reprinted with permission from the June 2004 Intercom).

For more information on the STC SIGs, contact a SIG from the list (right), or visit www.stc.org/sig_info.asp. Contacts for the Information Design and the Online Information SIGs are unavailable at the time of this printing.

Kachina Website Redesign

by Jonathan Price

We're busy redoing our web site to bring it into this century. Robert Staudhammer, our webmaster, is axing out-of-date information, inserting new content, and reformatting the pages so they are brighter, easier to navigate, and more contemporary.

If you have a yen to adopt a section of the new site, taking charge of the content in that area, contact Jonathan Price, 898-4912 or jprice@swcp.com, or contact Robert Staudhammer, at 667-9449.

www.stc-nm-kachina.org

"We're the New Mexico outpost of the Society for Technical Communication, a group of writers, editors, managers, usability experts, and information designers focused on translating technical information for a wide range of audiences."

-Excerpt from the new website. Visit us soon at www.stc-nm-org.

STC SIGS & Contacts

AccessAbility
fabien.vais@videotron.ca

Canadian Issues
acampbell@rr.mb.ca

Consulting & Independent Contracting
lindag@techcomplus.com

Education & Research
pstanz@aol.com

Emerging Technologies
dan.charles@tyson.com

Environmental, Safety, & Health
hart@mail.utexas.edu

Illustrators & Visual Designers
bfollas@excomedia.com

Indexing
william.l.collins@usa.dupont.com

Instructional Design & Learning
ydegraw@ydegraw.com

International Tech Comm
cnagy@ncs-pubs.com

Lone Writer
sharigray@yahoo.com

Management
herrj@comcast.com

Marketing Communication
bagnew@agnew.com

Policies & Procedures
urgo@urgoconsulting.com

Quality
rupel@accessus.net

Scientific Communication
geoff-h@mtl.feric.ca

Single Sourcing
jshelton@metasolv.com

Technical Editing
diane@authorcraft.net

Usability
karen@seaconinc.com

Contacts for the Information Design and the Online Information SIGs are unavailable at the time of this printing.



The Importance of Document Design

by Whitney Quesenberry, Webmaster, STC Usability SIG

One definition of communication is “the transfer of information from one location to another so that meaning is understood.” In other words, communication is what happens when one person connects to another to share information. It’s easy to get caught up in our work as communicators and forget that the real goal of technical communication is to make these connections.

“Communication, especially technical communication, may use computers, Web sites, wireless devices, or even paper, but at the core it is something quite elegant and simple: the human-to-human interface.”

Karen Schriver’s definition of document design as “the field concerned with creating texts (broadly defined) that integrate words and pictures in ways that help people to achieve their specific goals for using texts at home, school or work” (from *Dynamics in Document Design*, Wiley, 1997) puts the user right in the center of the picture. As important as our tools, design, and editorial techniques are, they are only a means to an end: connecting someone who has information with someone who needs it.

And sharing information is much easier when you understand and work from the perspective of the reader. Schriver’s definition also reminds us that readers use our documents to reach specific goals. It echoes many of the definitions of usability. For example, in *A Practical Guide to Usability Testing* (Intellect Books, 1999), Janice C. (Ginny) Redish and Joseph S. Dumas say that “usability means that the people who use the product can do so quickly and easily to accomplish their own tasks.”

The articles in this issue look at different aspects of document design: words, pictures, and people. Two look at specific groups of users and how we can meet them on their own terms, to be sure that they can use our communication effectively. Lory Hawkes considers how to design Web sites that are more responsive to people with disabilities; Kathryn Summers and Michael Summers focus on how to make the Web a more comfortable place for people with lower literacy. Patrick Hoffman and co-authors Tom Tullis and Stan Fleischman each consider the visual language of communication. What, for example, makes it easier for someone to read a large table of detailed data?

If your documents or Web sites include this sort of information, you know how difficult this task is. Another difficult task is reading complex medical information. Finally, Ginny Redish challenges some conventional writers’ wisdom about using words. Her article urges us to think about how people read technical communication, not just how we have been taught to write. Letting go of our own notions about what makes good writing may be the real test of our commitment to excellent document design and usability.

Each of the articles focuses on readers in some way, reminding us that they are the reason we create. Computer scientists and software designers talk about the user interface, or the humancomputer interface, as they look at how we use computer tools to meet our goals. Communication, especially technical communication, may use computers, Web sites, wireless devices, or even paper, but at the core it is something quite elegant and simple: the human-to-human interface.

This article is reprinted with permission from the June 2, 2004 issue of *Intercom*. Whitney Wuesenberry is the Webmaster of the STC Usability SIG and Senior Member of the Philadelphia Metro Chapter of the Society of Technical Communicators.

Kachina Calendar Fall & Winter

Communicating with Older Audiences	October 6th, 11:00-12:30 telephone seminar (call in site in Albuquerque, TBA)
Kachina Chapter Potluck	October 16th, 12:00-2:30 Albuquerque (location TBA)
An Indexing Primer	October 20th, 11:00-12:30 telephone seminar (call in sites in Los Alamos and Abq, TBA)
STC Region 5 Conference	October 21-24, Salt Lake City (www.intermountain-stc.org for more info)
Windows Longhorn Help I	November 10th, 11:00-12:30 telephone seminar (call in site in Albuquerque, TBA)
Creating Online Courses	December 4th 8:30 - 5:00 Albuquerque (location TBA)
Highlighting Hazards: Warnings and Errors	December 8th, 11:00-12:30 telephone seminar (call in site in Albuquerque, TBA)
Preemptive Project Planning	January 12, 11:00-12:30 telephone seminar (call in site in Albuquerque, TBA)

Telephone seminars are presented by the industry's leading experts on a variety of topics. The Kachina New Mexico STC chapter underwrites the cost of one call in site, which is typically \$99 each for members, \$149 for non-members. Interested members gather at the call in site and share information at no charge. Kachina members who have access to large conference rooms take turns hosting telephone seminars. Email jprice@swcp.com if you plan to attend so we can get a head count and prepare handouts prior to the seminar. You will receive email reminders and directions the week of the seminar. Please join us - this is a great way to fit professional development, camaraderie, and a chance to get out of the office into your busy schedule!

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 monthly 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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New Mexico Kachina Chapter
Society for Technical Communication
PO Box 25291
Albuquerque, NM 87125-5291