



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Manuscript

December 2002

Vol. 15 No. 4

A Publication of the Society for Technical Communication—Manitoba Chapter

Wow . . . We're 50!

by Kathy Legg

It all started in 1953 when two organizations concerned with improving the practice of technical communication were founded on the East Coast: the Society of Technical Writers, and the Association of Technical Writers and Editors. These organizations merged in 1957 to form the Society of Technical Writers and Editors. Since then, the STC has grown to 150 chapters and 25,000 members worldwide and constitutes the world's largest organization for technical communicators.

The profession has changed remarkably since 1953. At that time, there were no office computers, let alone home computers. Nor were there bank machines, video games, or VCRs. While such devices were becoming commonplace, we have had to learn about plain language for lay users, user interface design, and information architecture. We have been both users of technology and interpreters of the technology for other users.

The society in which we live has changed too. In 1953, Canada did not have universal medical coverage—that was introduced in 1961. And we didn't have an official flag (1964), a National Anthem (1980), or a Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). CBC Television was celebrating its first birthday; and we were going to have to wait almost 20 years before Paul Henderson scored that winning goal. With regard to other parts of the world and solar system, the Korean War was just ending and there would be no footprints on the moon for another 16 years.

In anticipation of STC's 50th anniversary, we are beginning festivities on December 5. Join the celebration! That evening we will be hosting a panel of our STC Fellows who will share with us their experiences and their visions for the future as the STC.

Continued on page 5

INSIDE

Speaker Bios.....	2
From the President.....	3
Member Profile.....	4
Reader's Review.....	5
STC Board Report.....	6

December Dinner Meeting

50th Anniversary Celebration

Featuring our STC Fellows:

Ron Blicq

Alexa Campbell

Tony Rhodes-Marriott

Join us for a special 50th Anniversary kick-off as our STC Fellows share with us what STC has done for us and where it's taking us.

Enjoy a deluxe 50th anniversary buffet with a variety of festive platters as well as hot and vegetarian dishes. This is a perfect evening to bring a guest. Now is the time to make plans to join us.

Please bring a non-perishable food item or an unwrapped gift for the Christmas Cheer Board.

STC@50

Celebrating 50 Years 1953-2003

Thursday, December 5
Union Centre - 275 Broadway
5:45 pm

Members \$15 • Non-members \$20
\$15 Student non-members
\$10 Student members

Please RSVP by
Tuesday, December 3
to

Joanne Kusiak
at

786-4866

or e-mail

jkusiak@shaw.ca

SPEAKER BIOS

Our Society conferred the status of Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication on each of our three panel members as the conclusion of a two-phase process that took into account the depth and variety of their interests in technical communication and their contributions to the Society.

Alexa Campbell was the founding president of the current Manitoba Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a founding member of STC's Canadian Issues Committee, and the founding manager of the Canadian Issues SIG (special interest group), formed in 2000. She also managed the local Contractors and Independent Consultants SIG, and the international Scientific Communication SIG. Besides her involvement with STC, she has been actively involved in several community groups, including the Consumers' Association of Canada, the Manitoba Product Stewardship Board, and the Winnipeg Airports Authority Board. She is extremely proud of her latest

achievement, establishing a technical communication diploma program at Red River College.

Ron Blicq has over 40 years as both a technical communication practitioner and teacher. He has authored several books, and has written and produced six dramatized videotapes on the subject. Currently he serves as President of INTECOM—the International Council for Technical Communication, and also is a Fellow of the Association of Teachers of Technical Communication. Ron has been an STC member since 1958.

Tony Rhodes-Marriott has decades of experience in technical communication including several management roles, administrative positions in several STC chapters, and several awards in technical publication competitions. Tony was a founding member of an early manifestation of this chapter. ♦

FROM THE EDITORS

The 50th Anniversary celebrations for STC will kick off this month with a unique opportunity to hear from not one, not two, but three STC Fellows who call Manitoba home. We're very fortunate to have this kind of expertise in our midst and we urge you to make plans to bring a guest and join us for this unique sharing opportunity.

In January, the year long celebrations continue with the ever popular *Progressions Evening*. The term "progression," as used here, may be new to you. It refers to a meeting format for concurrently presenting or discussing different topics to subsets of the audience during the same meeting. A topic and its presenter or

facilitator remain at a location while members of the audience "progress" from location to location. In progressions conducted at our chapter meetings we generally divide the time into three segments with four sessions running concurrently at separate tables. At the end of a time segment, members of the audience move to another table for a different topic. We have some interesting topics and experts lined up for the January meeting, so we look forward to seeing you there, too.

Best wishes for a happy holiday season.

Andrew Quarry and Jamie Zukewich
Newsletter Co-editors

Manuscript is the official newsletter of STC Manitoba Chapter. It is published 10 times annually between September and June. The opinions expressed are those of the author. Submissions, news, reviews, and other items of interest are welcome. Contributions may be edited for length. Deadline is the 10th of the previous month. For example, the deadline for the January issue is December 10.

Submissions and ideas are welcome. Please make arrangements in advance with Andrew Quarry, Co-editor—Submissions. By submitting an article, you agree to its publication in *Manuscript* and other STC publications. Copyright is held by the writer. When submitting an article, please let Andrew know if it has been published or submitted elsewhere.

Andrew Quarry
Newsletter Co-editor
204-237-0747
aquarry@autobahn.mb.ca

Jamie Zukewich
Newsletter Co-editor
204-269-6419
zukewich@mts.net



Happy Holidays Everyone

For many of us, December holds the promise of renewing relationships with family and friends, observing ancient traditions, and (at least in Winnipeg) bracing ourselves for the long cold winter ahead.

We won't all be celebrating this season by the same name or with the same traditions, but that doesn't matter. Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Yule, and many other celebrations that fall in or around December offer a wonderful opportunity to learn from and enjoy a wealth of cultural and religious variety. For my family, this time of year means enjoying not just one, but many of these holidays. We wish a Happy Hanukkah to overseas friends and incorporate many Pagan and Christian traditions in our own celebrations.

Together with the customary observances surrounding these holidays, many families have also developed their own traditions regarding who will read *The Night Before Christmas*, carve the turkey, or light the Menorah. My family's favourite traditions from times gone by have been adapted to our modern life. For example, we've taken the "sleigh over the hills and through the snow to Grandma's house" tradition and reworked it into what we now lovingly refer to as the "drive around forever looking for that lone parking spot at the mall"

tradition. We must really like this one because it's repeated ad nauseam throughout the season.

Through the 15 years my family has lived in Winnipeg, we've also created some of our own traditions that don't stem from any religious upbringing or a Norman Rockwell painting but that commemorate the sign-posts of our year in a more personal way. At some point during December, for example, a member of the family will announce to everyone gathered around the Yule Log that the car has had to be plugged in for the first time this season. The always-solemn "car plugging in ceremony" symbolizes the fact that another deep, dark winter is upon us. And it is during this ceremony that my family renews its commitment to "Peace on Earth and goodwill toward men," because regardless of a person's religious beliefs or cultural background, we are all stuck in the snow and cold together. So, we may as well get along.

Whichever holiday your family observes and whatever traditions this may entail, on behalf of your Executive Committee, I wish you a very merry and safe holiday season.

Best Wishes,



*Kathy Legg, President 2002–2003
STC Manitoba Chapter*

Practical Suggestions From Experienced Professionals

by Leslie McKendry-Smith—STC Manitoba Chapter

On November 7th, 2002, we were given the rare opportunity to quiz two experienced publications managers. Andrea Gruber of Biomedical Communications at the Health Science Centre and Murray Lamontagne, Director, Documentation and Training of eZedia graciously shared with us their thoughts, opinions, experiences, and even some pet peeves.

The topic on most minds seemed to be hiring practices and our guests did not disappoint. They both advised that we keep our résumés short and proofread them very carefully. Busy hiring managers make snap decisions on first impressions and nothing stands out more than a typo on a résumé. They also agreed portfolio

samples should show a range of writing styles and experience.

Our guests gave some excellent advice on how to conduct ourselves during interviews. Let your personality show through and make sure that you connect with everyone on the interviewer's side of the table, not just the people asking the questions.

Towards the end of our time together, the audience asked more technical questions about writing for translation. Murray has a great deal of experience here and advised us to keep our writing simple, concise, and precise. We should use examples that apply to a global market and standardize phrasing. Following these suggestions, he says, will reduce translation costs. ♦

Member Profile: Lawrence Peters

by Autumn Robbie-Draward, Senior Member—STC Manitoba Chapter

“I have a hard time defining myself,” explains Lawrence Peters. And when one looks at his career, one can understand that statement. Lawrence has varied his focus over the years. Among other things, he has been a pastor and a high school teacher. Now he is a solution specialist with Ceridian where he problem solves for the organization by researching and documenting the procedures for solutions on a variety of issues.

Lawrence’s journey to a career in technical communication began while he was teaching high school in Winkler. He taught a technical communication course, which Ron Blicq created. After teaching for a number of years, he needed a change. “I took a big risk, resigning my teaching position and moving to Winnipeg. I didn’t have a job but I have always felt that if you follow your desires you’ll never get into a rut.” Having an affinity for the skills associated with technical communication led him to a term position with Ceridian in 1998, and he has been fortunate enough to remain with the company in a variety of positions. But he’s a man who keeps redefining himself. He sees the next step in the evolution of his career as one into knowledge management. “As a technical communicator, this is a natural progression. I understand how to keep information.”



Lawrence joined STC in 1998. “I felt that I needed to belong to a professional organization, and that I needed to have some credentials to show that I was serious about my new profession.” Lawrence further adds, “I’m generally satisfied with what the Manitoba Chapter has to offer its members but perhaps, as a group, we could do better at sharing our individual knowledge.” Lawrence puts his knowledge to work for the Chapter by maintaining the membership database.

Like many technical communicators, Lawrence is faced with the universal problem of having co-workers see the value of his work and, as a consequence, he doesn’t get information when he needs it. He deals with this by being proactive. “I do a lot of networking to find out what’s coming. Unless I ask, I won’t know.

Fortunately, I’m an outgoing person.”

When he is not working, he’s working! During evenings and weekends in the spring, summer and early fall, Lawrence gardens for others. He explains, “Since moving to Winnipeg, I have lived in an apartment and I found I missed doing yard work! I also get my exercise by roller blading.” Lawrence volunteers for the Winnipeg Writers’ Festival; and he’s a huge fan of the Winnipeg Fringe Festival and the Folk Festival. His quiet time is spent playing chess with his two sons and writing poetry. ♦ *Next issue: Cheri Frazer*

Texas—Site of Next STC Annual Conference

STC’s 50th Annual Conference will be held:

May 18-21, 2003

**Wyndham Anatole Hotel
Dallas, Texas**

Members can register for the conference using the form provided in the Preliminary Program, which will be mailed with the February issue of Intercom, or online at www.stc.org. Online registration will open in mid-February. The last day to register for the conference at the advance rate is May 2.

Rates:

	Advance	On-site (after May 2)
Member	\$420	\$495
Nonmember	\$560	\$635
Student/Retired	\$100	\$155



Reader's Review

with Andrew Quarry

*UnTechnical Writing:
How to Write About Technical Subjects and Products So Anyone Can Understand*
by Michael Bremer

To lay claim to the honour of being the guy who coined the term UnTechnical writing, Michael Bremer starts this book suggesting that technical writers either aren't normally writing for a nontechnical audience or aren't aware that they are. Bremer's own career, which includes several years writing for a company that made simulation games, may give him special rights regarding his understanding of nontechnical audiences, but I found his initial characterization of technical writers annoying.

However, once past this annoyance, I found a worthwhile book with a remarkable range of suggestions and well-balanced arguments. After declaring that his book won't cover the basics of writing, grammar, use of a word processor, or what he calls "standard technical writing" (for programmers, engineers, or scientists), Bremer discusses dozens of other topics.

These discussions will certainly be of use to new practitioners of technical communication; and points here and there will probably attract the interest of senior practitioners too.

I think that new practitioners, depending on the nature of their projects, will find a few of the many checklists and forms useful. They cover situations such as quick-starts for projects, editing, and graphics management. They will also benefit from the book, as a whole, as an indicator of what technical communication can be about. His decision to include a section

on "People and Politics" should benefit those still working under the illusion that they can hide behind their computers.

I suppose that the benefits of the book for senior practitioners will vary more according to their areas of specialization and whatever personal preferences they may be nurturing at the time. I liked Bremer's suggestion that we read good popular science books for clues on how to inject enthusiasm for a subject. His three-and-a-half page list of recommended reading expands on this category and several others. I also liked his discussion of humour (or, as he says, humor) in technical writing—first, in a section that includes five "humor caveats" and, again, in a section on internationalization where he recommends planning so that your material still works if you have to remove the funny bits.

In sum, I'm not inclined to recommend this book as a purchase, but I think you'll find it's worth your time checking it out from the library. ♦

"... a worthwhile book with a remarkable range of suggestions and well-balanced arguments."



Wow continued . . .

Throughout the remainder of the STC season we will continue to celebrate with special events including a commemorative competition, and interesting newsletter articles and dinner meeting displays.

We hope you can join us to mark this milestone event. Those of you wishing to volunteer your time to make our celebrations throughout the year even better are encouraged to contact your Executive Committee. In the meantime, we look forward to seeing you at the dinner meeting on December 5. ♦

January 2003 - Dinner Meeting
Progressions Evening: XML, Framemaker and more!!!
Make plans to join us Thursday, January 9, 2003.

STC Board Report

September 2002

On September 26–28, 2002, STC's board of directors met in Boston, Massachusetts, to discuss membership, budget, and member services.

Despite the current economic downturn, the board addressed ways to increase membership and improve the quality of member services. As part of that discussion, the board participated in a workshop facilitated by John Nardone, a world-renowned expert in marketing.

The following is a partial list of actions taken by the STC board of directors at its September 2002 board meeting.

- The dues prorating structure was redesigned. In the past, dues were prorated for members who join in October, November, and December of the year.

In 2003, dues for new members will be prorated each month.

- In the future, chapter rebates will be dispersed via a new system. Beginning next year, half of the rebate will be paid upon receipt and approval of the chapter's financial report and 990EZ (if applicable), and the remaining half will be paid the following January.
- The 2002-2007 strategic plan was approved.
- The chapter achievement award program was updated to increase the profile of membership activities in chapters of all sizes. These revisions apply to chapters submitting applications for the award in 2003. ♦

Announcements

- **Technical Communications Instructor**

For details on a Technical Communications Instructor position at Red River College, go to <http://www.rrc.mb.ca/hr/>. Competition closing date is December 6.

- **Technology Watch Newsletter and Web site**

If you have an interest in tracking technology in Manitoba, you should subscribe to *TECHNOLOGY WATCH: Manufacturing Information for Successful Companies*. You may see accumulated information from this newsletter as well as other resources at their web site: <http://www.itc.mb.ca/techwatch/index.html>.

- **Persistent Journal Club**

Alexa Campbell reported at the November Chapter meeting that attendance at the Journal Club meeting on October 30 was low and that no one was really prepared. It seems that those who did attend consoled themselves at length with wine and mouldy cheese and, then, decided to meet again on November 11. When they met on November 11, attendance was the same, the state of preparation was somewhat improved, and the need to consume wine and mouldy cheese persisted.

Contact Information

Society for Technical
Communication
Web site: www.stc.org



President

Kathy Legg
Kathy@littlebrownmouse.com

Vice-President

Dave Gustafson
1-204-857-8192
s.gust@shaw.ca

Immediate Past President

Amanda Goldrick-Jones
204-786-9848
a.goldrick-jones@uwinnipeg.ca

STC Manitoba Chapter
Message Line: 204-954-0011
Web site: www.stc-manitoba.org



Treasurer

Janet Fenn
204-474-4759
jfenn@hydro.mb.ca

Membership

Autumn Robbie-Draward
204-986-2746
arobbie@city.winnipeg.mb.ca

Program

Doreen Robertson
204-477-0591 x235
drobotson@nxtphase.com

Keep inTouch

Has your mailing address, e-mail address, or fax number changed? Update your information so we can keep in touch. Contact Lawrence Peters, the database administrator, at 204-895-7078 or rag@mb.sympatico.ca

