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Equality of Access

Putting the Content of the Internet within the Grasp of the Disabled

by Kim Weathersby

The great irony is that the Internet represents one of the greatest possible solutions for individuals with disabilities. When the materials reside in a digital format (such as HTML) on the Internet, the potential exists for nearly complete equality of access. Knowing the potential of the Internet only exacerbates the frustration of those who cannot access its content. The good news is that the solutions are not as difficult as they might seem.

-Paul Bohman
Universal Design and Disability Access to the Web

Imagine you are viewing a Web site that uses lots of cool graphics and image maps, and that these graphics help you understand and navigate the site. Or that you are viewing a software demonstration with video and audio. Or that you are in a hurry looking for information on a Web site and that you use your mouse to quickly click through the necessary links and make your selections.

If you are not disabled, chances are that you take your access to information on the Web for granted.

If you are not disabled, chances are you take your abilities to view, hear, navigate, and comprehend information on the Web for granted. For many disabled people, though, the Internet promised access to information that had previously been difficult for them to get. That is, until the Internet became so graphically oriented. The same graphics that help most people navigate the Web can substantially hinder those with disabilities. For example, a screen reader is a software utility that reads online

documents, including Web sites, out loud (Heim, J. [2000] "Locking Out the Disabled." [Online]). This software greatly helps people who are blind or who have poor vision, but it cannot interpret graphics. However, Web site designers can

employ certain techniques to make their sites more disabled-user friendly. The World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has developed a set of 14 guidelines, each containing specific checkpoints, for making sites accessible; it has also prioritized the checkpoints so designers know which checkpoints will have the most impact for those with disabilities. Web pages conforming to the guidelines can display a conformance icon provided by the W3C.

The following Quick Tips were developed by the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (W3C/WAI) Education and Outreach Working Group to help

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# Technicalities

EDITORIAL

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*Technicalities* is published bi-monthly by the Rocky Mountain Chapter (RMC) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and is distributed to chapter members, editors of other STC newsletters, and officers of the Society. It is available on request to anyone interested in technical communication. Other STC chapters and publications may reprint material if credit is given.

Readers are encouraged to submit material on subjects of interest to Society and chapter members. Please credit repeated material and send a copy of the original material to the editor, Stephen Wertzbaugher, c/o IMR, 6025 S. Quebec, Suite 260, Englewood, CO 80111.

The editor can be reached during the day at 303.689.0022, via fax at 303.689.0055, and by e-mail at [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org). Please submit electronic files in ASCII text format and include a telephone number where you can be reached. To fax articles or artwork, please call the editor. The deadline for article submission is one month prior to issue release (first of the month, every other month).

The *Technicalities* staff reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length; substantive editing of feature articles will be reviewed with the author prior to publication.

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303.458.0401 ext. 302  
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Job listings are posted on the  
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## From the Editor

# And Web Accessibility for All

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

In a recent landmark decision, the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission ordered the Sydney Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (SOCOG) to pay Bruce Maguire, a vision-impaired businessman, \$20,000 for violating Australia's Disability Discrimination Act. It seems that Mr. Maguire's screen reader was unable to read the SOCOG site. But SOCOG was not fined immediately. In fact, they were given several opportunities to "fix" their Web site. Only after SOCOG failed to comply with the Commission's numerous requests were they fined. Why didn't SOCOG comply with the Commission's requests to make their Web site accessible to disabled individuals?

This case brings up a very good point: when we design Web sites, or any online content, how many of us actually think about making our material accessible to disabled individuals? I know I don't. It's not because I'm callous or thoughtless; it's because I'm unaware of the problem. Ignorance is no excuse, but if you're not intimately familiar with a situation, how often are you going to think about it? After this, I know that I'm going to think about it constantly. How about you?

But thinking about Web site accessibility and doing something about it are like theory and practice — worlds apart and never the twain shall meet. If you're as unfamiliar with the problem as I am, where do you begin?

Start by reading this issue's feature article, "Equality of Access." As the article explains, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) has a solution in progress called the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI). In coordination with other international organizations, the WAI promotes Web accessibility through technology, guidelines, tools, education and outreach, and research and development.

"Equality of Access" outlines the WAI guidelines and Quick Tips for site accessibility. These tips merely introduce key concepts for accessible Web design and are not comprehensive guidelines. To truly understand these concepts and how to implement them, Web designers should read and familiarize themselves with the W3C Recommended Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0, which can be accessed at [www.w3.org/wai](http://www.w3.org/wai).

Web site accessibility: If the World Wide Web is truly the universal information delivery platform, then those of us involved in Web site design must diligently pursue universal accessibility. It's the human thing to do. **RMC**

*When we design Web sites, or any online content, how many of us think about making our material accessible to disabled individuals?*



**A reminder —  
don't forget to renew  
your STC membership!**



## President's Corner

# Who Are We?

by Linda Gallagher

I've had several conversations recently with people who want to become technical communicators. In reciting my litany about making the transition to the field, I've realized that while technical communicators specialize as writers, or editors, or web designers, or any of a zillion other things, we have many similar characteristics. I usually find that I'm telling people about numerous things they need to learn, and many skills and traits they should possess. All this makes me think that we are very versatile!

*What traits make a good technical communicator? Tell us what you think. Join our e-mail discussion!*

In my book, good technical communicators are:

- ▶ **Well-organized** — We have to be organized in our work, and we have to organize information logically for our audience. The information we receive from others may not reflect how the user of the product thinks. We are responsible for that translation.
- ▶ **Fast learners** — We must constantly learn about the products we document and new tools and technology for information creation.
- ▶ **Personable** — We have to work well with all types of people, from marketing to technical. And we can't learn all we need to know without frequent interaction.
- ▶ **Computer savvy** — It's difficult to work in our field without computers. I had a conversation with a gentleman who kept asking if he could "just use Windows 95 to write the content and have someone else do the rest." I strongly suggested that he find some local computer classes!
- ▶ **Flexible** — This trait is critical. The project that I was hired to do recently has been changed so many times I've lost count. (The client will remain nameless!)
- ▶ **User-oriented** — We have to think like our users. Many software developers want to tell users about each product detail, but users have specific tasks to perform. We must learn what those tasks are and write documentation that helps users function effectively.

Do you have additional traits you would mention, or do you disagree with the ones I've chosen? This would be a great discussion topic for our e-mail list. You can sign up by going to the home page of our Web site at [www.stcrmc.org](http://www.stcrmc.org) and sending a message to our list administrator.

Turning from traits to skills, knowledge, and tools, I'll start by saying that I don't like to emphasize tools, but people need to know at least a few basics.

Essential skills, knowledge, and tools for technical communicators include:

- ▶ **Good writing** — People wanting to enter the field need to be able to write well-formed, grammatical sentences. In addition, they need to learn what constitutes good technical communication, which may differ from the journalistic, academic, scientific, or creative writing they've done in the past.
- ▶ **Basic page layout and design** — Most of us are expected not only to write content, but to create information in final form for printed distribution or online use. This means we need to know the basics of page layout, font usage, online design, and more to create readable, usable information.
- ▶ **Media use** — We have so many choices today that knowing when to use print, CD, or other online media is critical.
- ▶ **Graphic formats** — Often, we don't have a graphic artist available — and even if we do, we still need to capture screens and plan other necessary graphics. We may have to create flow charts and other simple graphics ourselves or be able to manipulate graphics at the last minute.
- ▶ **Interviewing** — We usually interact with various subject matter experts (SMEs) to learn about our topic. Some SMEs are easier to work with than others, so we need multiple interviewing strategies.
- ▶ **Domain knowledge** — While it may not be necessary to be an expert in the domain in which you are working (software, insurance, medical, financial, manufacturing, or e-commerce), it can be helpful to target areas of prior knowledge and experience.
- ▶ **Tools** — I think of tools like a Chinese restaurant menu. If you want to write software or hardware documentation, you need to know at least one tool from column A (word processing/page layout tools — Word and FrameMaker are the most common) and one each from columns B and C (online and graphics tools, respectively):

#### Column A

Microsoft Word  
FrameMaker  
Quark  
PageMaker  
InDesign  
WordPerfect

#### Column B

RoboHelp  
ForeHelp  
Doc-To-Help  
Acrobat  
WebWorks Publisher

#### Column C

Paint Shop Pro  
PhotoShop  
Illustrator

These are the traits, skills, knowledge, and tools that I think we possess — and that are imperative for technical communicator wannabes. There are surely others, so I look forward to a lively e-mail discussion! **STC**



## Chapter News

# Annual Awards Reception in March; Mentoring and Membership Goodies in April

by Gail S. Bernstein

The entries have been judged, the votes have been tallied, and the results are in! (And no recounts were needed!) So it's time for the annual STC RMC Competition Awards Reception. Join us in March and see the award-winning entries. And mark your calendars for the April meeting on mentoring, where you'll have a chance to win valuable goodies!

## STC RMC Calendar

See the RMC Web site for more information about any of these activities.

### March 2001



**Thursday, 3/1** —  
*STC RMC Council meeting*



**Wednesdays, 3/7 & 3/14** —  
*STC Phone Seminar:  
Usability Testing*



**Thursday, 3/15** —  
*Chapter meeting: STC RMC  
Competition Awards Reception*

### April 2001



**Monday, 4/2** —  
*Deadline for submitting articles for  
May/June issue of Technicalities*



**Thursday, 4/5** —  
*STC RMC Council meeting*



**Thursday, 4/19** —  
*Chapter meeting and  
Online SIG meeting*

### May 2001



**Thursday, 5/3** —  
*STC RMC Council meeting*



**Sunday - Wednesday,  
5/13 - 5/16** —  
*STC International Conference,  
Chicago, IL*



**Thursday, 5/17** —  
*Chapter meeting*

### March

*Thursday, March 15*

*Annual STC RMC Competition Awards Reception*

Our March chapter meeting will be the annual STC RMC Competition Awards Reception on Thursday, March 15, 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m., with the awards ceremony to be held at 7:00. Once again our hosts are the folks at Zoa Techmedia at 2401 15th Street, Suite 300. We'll be able to admire the winning entries from this year's Competition, including the online winners, and food will be provided by Red Walrus Catering, the same group that served up such great food last year. Don't miss this yearly celebration of the best work STC RMC members have produced. See the STC RMC Web site for details.

### April

*Thursday, April 19*

*Mentoring; Frame Users SIG*

Come to the Thursday, April 19 chapter meeting at J.D. Edwards and earn a chance to win a free, fully licensed version of RoboHelp Office 9.0, an \$899 value! All members who attend will get one entry in a drawing for wonderful prizes. And if you bring a prospective chapter member with you, you get two entries. Members who have joined within the last year will also be entered in a special "New Members" drawing. This will be a great opportunity to contribute to chapter growth and win prizes. We keep coming in second to the Puget Sound chapter in membership, but we're closing the gap — we need only a 2% growth in our membership to beat them. The meeting will open with both a new/prospective member orientation and a meeting of the Frame Users SIG at 5:45 p.m. Then we'll move to a presentation on mentoring. Check the chapter Web site ([www.stcmmc.org](http://www.stcmmc.org)) for information and directions. **RMC**

## Become a Meeting Buddy!

**R**emember what it was like to walk into your first meeting and not know a soul? Would it have helped to have a chapter member introduce you to people and show you the ropes? You can provide that help for newcomers by responding to the Membership Committee's call for "Meeting Buddies." You can volunteer for just one meeting or a series of meetings (for example, only those at StorageTek), or become a friend forever. To volunteer or for more information, contact Carol Claton at [CClaton@neonsoft.com](mailto:CClaton@neonsoft.com). **RMC**

# January Chapter Meeting

## Informative Discussion on Multimedia Development

by Jacque L. Fryday

January's chapter meeting was held in a new place — Jeppesen Sanderson in the Denver Tech Center area. Chapter president Linda Gallagher opened the meeting with thanks to our host for allowing us to meet at their site, and for providing refreshments. She followed with some brief announcements about membership and program needs before introducing the key speakers from Jeppesen Sanderson.

### International Competition display

On display was a traveling exhibit of the winning entries from the 1999-2000 International Technical Publications Competition. Best of Show went to the book *Wild Orchids of Texas* by Joe Liggio and Ana Orto-Liggio, published by University of Texas Press. In addition to this fine work, there were 22 winners of the Distinguished Award, 35 winners of the Excellence Award, and three winners of the Merit Award. Links and information about STC competitions can be found on the Web at <http://www.stc-va.org/comp.html>.



### Jeppesen Sanderson presentation

Dick Snyder's presentation covered a wealth of information, beginning with the

histories of Jeppesen and Sanderson and awards earned. Mr. Snyder explained the technical aspects of how his company went from paper and wax layouts to electronic media. Some of the basic steps for this migration are:

1. Evaluating all sorts of textbooks.
2. Brainstorming new ideas.
3. Producing a sample chapter that was sent to prospective clients for evaluation, which generated a market for a product that:
  - a. Focused on information retention through a graphically driven interface
  - b. Incorporated a simple writing style
  - c. Included FAA testing materials
  - d. Inserted Discovery boxes within text for outside interests
4. Looking beyond their own organization to what others were doing.
5. Using planning documents:
  - a. Laid out flow sheets to show all steps in the development process
  - b. Collected results from sample chapter surveys
  - c. Held pre-production meetings

- d. Distributed operations memos
6. Conducting usability testing (inside and outside).
7. Hiring people with strong project management skills.

Dawn Stevens's presentation covered the human elements of migration from paper and wax layouts to electronic media:

1. Breaking loose from the "we've always done it this way" syndrome:
  - a. Noticed competition moving to online delivery
  - b. Realized multimedia is not always the answer — the audience must be taken into consideration
  - c. Started small and worked up
  - d. Understood that Web-based products are not the same as CD products
2. Creating and meeting design objectives:
  - a. Put content and navigation into the users' hands
  - b. Provided users with plenty of opportunities to prove what they had learned: pretest, practice, exercises, and tests
  - c. Used video, animations, and audio to redirect or recapture users' attention
  - d. Made the interface a tool, rather than an obstacle
3. Hiring experts and defining roles:
  - a. Project managers
  - b. Writers
  - c. Instructional designers
  - d. Multimedia specialists
  - e. Web programmers
4. Establishing the Quality process:
  - a. Planning documents
    - i. Training plans
    - ii. Interface designs
    - iii. Programming specifications
  - b. Prototyping
    - i. Sample lesson
    - ii. Usability testing
    - iii. Redesign before proceeding
  - c. Usability testing
    - i. SME (subject matter experts) edits
    - ii. QA (quality assurance) testing
    - iii. Performance testing (on different equipment)
    - iv. Usability testing
  - d. Maintenance

A copy of the PowerPoint presentations can be downloaded from the STC RMC Web site, [www.stcrmc.org/news\\_events/news.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/news_events/news.htm).

The presentations were followed by a brief demo and a question and answer period that included some input from Carla King of Jeppesen Sanderson. When asked for his advice on managing "creative" people, Dick Snyder replied, "it's just like herding cats!" **RMC**

# From Your Director-Sponsor

by Ellen Fenwick, Snake River Chapter

The winter STC Board of Directors meeting was held January 18-20, 2001, in San Diego, California. San Diego is warmer than anyplace in Region 7 in January, that's for sure!

## Actions Taken at the Meeting

**New chapters** — The formation of three new chapters was approved, bringing the total number of chapters worldwide to 153 (120 regular chapters and 33 student chapters). The new chapters are:

- ▶ Australia chapter, with a \$350 start-up grant (Region 5)
- ▶ Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute student chapter (Troy, New York), with a \$150 start-up grant (Region 1)
- ▶ Hill Country student chapter (San Marcos, Texas), with a \$150 start-up grant (Region 5)

**Committee appointments** — The following appointments to Society-level committees were approved: Kathryn M. Poe (Manager, STC Public Relations Competition Committee) and Paula Stanzioni (Manager, Education & Research Special Interest Group).

**Budget** — Fiscal year 2001 income and expenses as of 31 October 2000 were reviewed and approved. Income and expenses are well within budget. STC will be returning about two-thirds of a million dollars to chapters to support their fiscal year 2001 programs and activities.

**Merit grant** — A merit grant of \$3,000 was awarded to the Mercer University student chapter for its scholarship fund.

**Research grant** — A research grant of \$10,000 was awarded to Eva R. Brumberger for a study entitled "The Rhetoric of Typography: A Study Investigating Typeface Personality and Its Impact on the Reading Process."

## Honors Bestowed

The Board of Directors winter gathering is especially enjoyable, because it is at this meeting that the year's Fellow, Associate Fellow, and Sigma Tau Chi student fraternity honors are bestowed. Join me in congratulating Region 7's newest additions to these honorary ranks:

- ▶ **Associate Fellow** — Kate K. Harper and John V. Hedtke from the Puget Sound Chapter
- ▶ **Sigma Tau Chi** — Rebecca J. Bryson and Karen E. Kasonic from the University of Washington, and Mark C. Nelson from Utah State University

## Other Items of Interest

**New STC logo** — A graphic toolkit and templates for STC materials will be made available to chapters (presidents, newsletter editors, and webmasters), Society-level committees, and Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and

placed on the STC Web site in March. These tools will help guide groups in implementing the new look. Work is underway to redesign the STC Web site. Watch for the first official use of the new logo in the Preliminary Annual Conference Program — out soon!


**Elections** — This year, the balloting process will include an option to vote online. The 2001 election material will contain information necessary to ensure secure online voting. Voting online will be optional — members may still vote by mail.

**Membership** — STC continues to grow at a steady rate, and membership now stands at 23,553. Total membership is projected to reach 26,000 by the end of March. Current distribution of membership: U.S. 87.2%, Canada 8.6%, other countries 4.1%. STC's annualized 10-year growth rate is 4.6%, with growth rates as follows: U.S. 3.9%, Canada 10.8%, other countries 11.7% (the greatest area of growth).

**Membership directory** — The STC membership directory has been placed online. It allows members to search on members' first and last names. The results display the member's name, address, phone, fax, e-mail, chapter, grade, and date joined.

**Annual conference** — Preparations for the 48th Annual Conference in Chicago, Illinois, in May 2001 are well underway. The conference program committee reviewed nearly 400 proposals and selected some 440 speakers for 256 sessions. About 41 booths have already been contracted for the vendor exhibit.

**Technical Communication journal** — Abstracts and PDFs of the 1996 and 1997 issues have now been posted on the *Technical Communication Online* Web site ([www.techcomm-online.org](http://www.techcomm-online.org)). Recommendations from usability studies performed by graduate students at Mercer University have been incorporated. Check it out!

**STC governance** — This year, the STC Board of Directors is conducting a series of workshops at its regular meetings to evaluate governance. This activity is an outgrowth of STC's new mission statement: "Designing the future of technical communication." What model of governance would most effectively lead STC into that future? Aspects being evaluated include the structure of representation, the decision-making process, the balance of volunteer and office staff workloads, and communication patterns. A clear picture of leadership dominated the workshops: one that focuses on trends, vision, strategy, and best practices; that embraces outside influences; and that concentrates on setting policy rather than on operational details. A concluding workshop in May will set short- and long-term goals for meeting those objectives. 

## A New Crop of Senior Members

**A**s a gardener loves to watch her plants bloom after months of work, so the STC loves to watch its members grow. This is especially true for our humble chapter. If our student members are the seeds and our regular members are the shoots and stalks, then our senior members are surely the blossoms of our chapter plants. It is with great pleasure that we announce our new senior chapter members, who have achieved this status after five years of continuous membership in STC.

Kristy Lantz Astry  
Cheryl L. Ford  
Lynda M. Lester  
Ted L. Penberthy

Daniel C. Bell  
Dennis K. Hardman  
Deborah K. Lockwood  
William D. Sanders

Lane G. Eskew  
Anne Hughes  
William Christian Lynch  
Eileen M. Thournir

Linda L. Evans  
Jane C.H. Jackson  
Amalia H. Mayfield

## The 2001 George E. Hoerter Scholarship Awards

**T**he Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication seeks applicants for the George E. Hoerter scholarships for the year 2001. Each year the Chapter provides up to two \$1000 scholarships for undergraduate or graduate students to help them pursue careers in technical communication.

The scholarships can be used for

- ▶ Tuition and fees.
- ▶ Books and class materials.

- ▶ STC regional and annual conferences.
- ▶ Technical communications seminars.

Applications must be postmarked by March 30, 2001.

For application guidelines and form, check the RMC Web site ([www.stcrmc.org](http://www.stcrmc.org)) or contact Don Zimmerman or Joy Yunker:

- ▶ Don Zimmerman: [don.zimmerman@colostate.edu](mailto:don.zimmerman@colostate.edu), 970-491-5674.
- ▶ Joy Yunker: [yunkerj@mscd.edu](mailto:yunkerj@mscd.edu), 303-556-3364. **RMC**

## Technicasualties

by Ted L. Penberthy



"Hey, you're using passive voice."

## Volunteers Needed

STC RMC needs volunteers for the *Technicalities* staff in the following areas:

- ▶ Ad manager
- ▶ Coordinator for the Colorado Connections column

If you are interested, contact Steve Wertzbaugher, *Technicalities* Editor, at [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org). **RMC**

## Vote, Vote, Vote!

**I**t's almost time for STC elections, both for the International Society and the RMC. Be sure to vote in both elections. Look for the Society ballot in your mail box. RMC will be using e-mail balloting for this year's chapter elections.

To ensure that you receive your ballots, update your contact information, including your e-mail address, when you renew your membership. Or, you can update it online at the STC Web site, [www.stc-va.org/fmbr\\_menu.htm](http://www.stc-va.org/fmbr_menu.htm). **RMC**

## We've Moved

**T**he STC RMC business office moved to a new location in February. Please update your records. The new office phone number is (720) 932-8028 and the new fax number is (720) 932-8100. The new mailing address is:

STC Rocky Mountain Chapter  
1400 Sixteenth Street, Suite 400  
Denver, CO 80202 **RMC**



**P**rinted manuals have never been considered a security risk (perhaps because nobody read them anyway).

Windows Help files had the potential to become security risks, but only at the hands of rogue Help authors who understood WinHelp and DLLs. However, HTML Help, and the Internet in general, set the stage for any hacker to use the Help system to do malicious things to any PC.

In WinHelp, a macro called ExecFile runs PDF viewers, plays video files, and links to Web pages. When moving to HTML Help, ForeFront produced an ActiveX control to do the same thing, figuring that people would ship the control with their compiled HTML Help systems. What they didn't know, or didn't say, was that once the ActiveX control is installed and properly registered on your box, any Web page can use it to run programs on your computer (yes, even "format c:").

ForeFront is not the only offender — other authoring tools offer similar functionality, and even Microsoft's HTML Help ActiveX control will let you trigger programs, although only from local CHM (compiled HTML Help) files. But even this can be worked around: as Tom Loya, a technical writer in England, has proven, it is possible to send CHM files to a user's machine without their knowing it.

One of the drawbacks of running HTML Help files over a network is that the entire CHM file must download before the user can access a single topic. In addition, the user will always get the message asking if they want to save the file locally or just run it. Tom Loya has come up with a way to make this transparent to the user.

The technique involves placing the CHM file inside of a CAB file (Microsoft's equivalent of a ZIP, but with more brains). HTML code in a Web page can cause this CAB file to be downloaded without asking the user, and then decompressed. At this point, the Web page can trigger the CHM file, which is inherently insecure. The CHM file could then wreak all sorts of havoc, with the user powerless to prevent it.

So...even though Help authors are generally a benign group, the tools available to us allow us to be security risks. You could, of course, blame this all on Microsoft, as it is their software that's at fault, but that doesn't remove the risks. In the meantime, Tom's hack does solve a problem — that of providing good help for Web applications. You can learn more about it by downloading CHMINCAB.ZIP and looking at Tom's explanation of how it was done, and why. This file is available on the HATT list as well as at [www.logicsmith.com](http://www.logicsmith.com), in the Files section. **TMC**

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## Equality of Access

*continued from page 1*

designers remember some of the main ideas of accessible design:

- ▶ **Images and animations** — Use the *alt* attribute to describe the function of each visual.
- ▶ **Image maps** — Use client-side MAP and text for hotspots.
- ▶ **Multimedia** — Provide captioning and transcripts of audio, and descriptions of video.
- ▶ **Hypertext links** — Use text that makes sense when read out of context. For example, avoid "click here."
- ▶ **Page organization** — Use headings, lists, and consistent structure. Use CSS for layout and style where possible.
- ▶ **Graphs and charts** — Summarize or use the *longdesc* attribute.
- ▶ **Scripts, applets, and plug-ins** — Provide alternative content in case active features are inaccessible or unsupported.
- ▶ **Frames** — Use NOFRAMES and meaningful titles.
- ▶ **Tables** — Make line-by-line reading sensible. Summarize.
- ▶ **Check your work** — Validate. Use the tools, checklist, and guidelines at [www.w3.org/TR/WCAG](http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG).

Feeling overwhelmed? Usability guru Jakob Nielsen recommends taking a pragmatic approach to accessible design. If you've already designed your site and will have to retrofit it to make it accessible, Nielsen recommends starting by making your home page and other high-traffic pages conform to the W3C Priority 1 checkpoints. When designing new pages, make sure to meet the Priority 1 and 2 checkpoints. Then upgrade your medium-traffic pages according to the Priority 1 checkpoints. You might be able to leave low-traffic old pages as they are unless they contain content of significant interest to those with disabilities.

There are many resources to help you make your site accessible. If you're ready to get beyond the concepts and start coding, the following Web sites provide good instructions, and some even provide code samples:

- ▶ [www.w3.org/WAI/](http://www.w3.org/WAI/) — This is the accessibility epicenter. W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative provides accessibility guidelines, techniques, and technical references for making your site accessible, as well as background information.

*continued on page 9*



Imagine Garrett Morris in his Saturday Night Live Cuban baseball player persona. But instead of sitting behind the sports desk, he is bent over a computer banging out the latest and greatest version of a software manual muttering, “Technical writing been very, very good to me.”

I feel a little like that character from Saturday Night Live that kept me laughing for all those years. You see, I never intended to become a technical writer. Oh, I have writing talent and I really enjoy writing, but I never had the desire or the opportunity to become a technical writer. That is, until my family and I moved to Colorado.

The job I was recruited to Colorado for five years ago didn’t work out, and I found myself ungainfully unemployed. With no immediate local prospects in my calling as a sterilization microbiologist, I decided to do what any rational individual would do: become an independent technical writer. With no financial backup, no real experience except for writing experimental protocols and project reports, and no local contacts, I hung out my shingle as a technical writer.

Things were slow, to say the least. I had no software or hardware documentation experience, and clients stayed away in droves. Still, I managed to fool enough people to keep my family in rent and grocery money. Then it happened: I heard about the STC. A writing friend and I attended a meeting of the Rocky Mountain Chapter and

that was all it took. As soon as I could scrape up enough pennies, I joined. The STC RMC was the best thing that could have happened to my technical writing career and to me. As I got to know others in this profession, I became more confident in my abilities and learned “how” to be a technical writer. The people resources were and still are astounding!

A couple of years later, I realized I just couldn’t figure out the marketing end of being an independent technical writer, and so I decided to get a “real” job. I applied for a technical writing position with a Denver software firm. Two days after the interview, the company made me an offer for more money than I had originally expected. But they didn’t hire me because of my software documentation knowledge, which was still sparse; they hired me because of my confidence in my abilities as a writer and as a quick learner, confidence that I learned from other members of the STC RMC.

That was sixteen months, two pay raises, and one big promotion ago. All I can say is that without the support of the members of the STC RMC, I probably would not have landed my current position, nor would I have had the confidence even to go out and try again. I can say, with confidence, that “Technical writing been very, very good to me.” **RMC**

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## Equality of Access

continued from page 8

- ▶ [aware.hwg.org](http://aware.hwg.org) — This is the Accessible Web Authoring Resources and Education (AWARE) Center sponsored by the HTML Writers Guild. It contains information about accessibility and authoring resources.
- ▶ [www.microsoft.com/enable/dev/Web/default.htm](http://www.microsoft.com/enable/dev/Web/default.htm) — Microsoft’s Web accessibility site provides how-to instructions, information about Internet Explorer and accessibility, and code samples.
- ▶ [www.builder.com/Authoring/Accessibility/?tag=st.bl.3881.dir2.Accessibility](http://www.builder.com/Authoring/Accessibility/?tag=st.bl.3881.dir2.Accessibility) — CNET builder.com also provides information about accessible design, including using cascading style sheets to make your site more accessible.
- ▶ [www.Webaim.org](http://www.Webaim.org) — Web Accessibility in Mind (WebAIM) provides information and offers courses and tutorials about accessible design.
- ▶ [www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov) — The Federal IT Accessibility Initiative site provides information about Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- ▶ [www.cast.org/Bobby/](http://www.cast.org/Bobby/) — This site provides information about Bobby, an accessibility validation tool.

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## Professional Development

# Microsoft Webmaster Group — A Great Local Resource

by Ruth Gaulke

Colorado presents many opportunities for technical writers to learn and share ideas. Here's one worth considering: the Microsoft Webmaster Group. This group meets on the third Friday of each month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. at Microsoft's Denver office to learn about the latest Internet-related technologies. The group's goal, according to founder Lee Hopkins, is to plug the local community into new developments at Microsoft.

Originally called the Webmaster's Breakfast Club, the group formed in April 1997 when Hopkins brought together professionals from local leading Internet companies. Today, seasoned Internet technical people comprise much of the audience — speakers rarely slow down to explain acronyms. Past topics have included streaming media, security, Commerce Server, BizTalk Server, and SQL Server.

The January meeting featured Brad Bossio, Business

Development Manager of Microsoft's Corporate UNIX Interop/Migration team, speaking on Windows 2000 and UNIX interoperability tools and technologies. As appropriate for this highly technical topic, the audience consisted primarily of IT professionals and developers hoping to simplify UNIX and Windows coexistence.

An important point to mention: the meetings are free! Time moves quickly and the three hours go by in a blink. Lunch is always provided, and giveaways are sometimes included. Meetings are typically held at Microsoft's office in the Denver Tech Center, 4643 S. Ulster St., Suite 700.

If you are intrigued, log on to <http://mswg.listbot.com> and sign up. You'll receive an e-mail announcement long before the next meeting that describes the upcoming topic, the targeted audience, and how to register. Check out this great local resource! **RMC**

## Online Instruction — Arapahoe Community College

by Ruth Gaulke

While waiting for a pizza one Sunday afternoon, I came across the Arapahoe Community College education program listing. The section on online classes caught my eye. The extensive list contains classes in a variety of areas — business, project management, computer hardware and software, Web pages, and financial planning.

As a Web Content Editor, yet another slant on the technical writing field, I am always looking for new opportunities to learn more about Web sites. Interestingly enough, both a JavaScript and Java class were offered — for only \$79 each. I had never taken an online class before so this aspect also sparked my curiosity.

Each class may have different formats as well as instructors, but to give you an idea of what a class is like, I'll focus on my interest, the JavaScript class.

The class requires some HTML experience and access to either Netscape or Internet Explorer, and lasts six weeks.

Each week two lessons are assigned, which you access via the online classroom. After finishing a lesson, you must also take a multiple-choice quiz. In addition, assignments that help solidify the understanding of the material accompany

some of the lessons. After the final lesson, each student must complete a final exam.

During this process you have contact with the instructor and other classmates through a discussion area. The lessons are written clearly and you can print the material for future reference. It is a very organized and well-structured way to learn the material for a much lower cost than traditional classroom training.

If this at all sounds interesting, check out the Web site — [www.ed2go.com/arapahoecomed](http://www.ed2go.com/arapahoecomed) — for the full selection of online classes. **RMC**



## Volunteer for the Mentoring Program

The Mentoring Committee is seeking both mentors and "mentorees" for the program. The committee will connect mentorees with mentors who have the necessary skills to meet their needs. More information is located on the Web at [www.stcrmc.org/news\\_events/news.htm#mentoring](http://www.stcrmc.org/news_events/news.htm#mentoring). **RMC**



## Volunteer Spotlight

# Support Your Local (International) Volunteer

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

Just in case you haven't heard yet because you've been out of the solar system recently, Mary Jo Stark, esteemed Rocky Mountain Chapter treasurer, is running for treasurer at the International level. Woo hoo!

And in case you don't really know who Mary Jo is:

Mary Jo Stark is a senior member of STC and a member of Sigma Tau Chi, and currently serves as treasurer for the Rocky Mountain Chapter. She has presented papers at the Toronto and Orlando annual conferences. Mary Jo has worked in the User Education department at Landmark Graphics for over six years, and writes for their geophysical suite of products. She previously worked for 22 years in the oil industry as a geophysicist.

I know that many people don't vote in society elections because they don't think that their votes count. I was like that, too. Was I ever wrong! Voting is the best way to make sure that your voice is heard at the International level of STC. If you don't vote, the International Council won't know in which direction you want STC to move, or which issues are most important to you. And because our chapter is one of the largest in STC, we have an opportunity to make a real difference.

So when you receive your ballot in the mail, read the enclosed information, fill it out, and send it back. And while you're voting, make sure to give Mary Jo your vote for International STC Treasurer. **RMC**

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## Volunteer Opportunities Abound!

by Linda Gallagher

The STC RMC has volunteer opportunities for you this year — consider helping out! Volunteering with the Chapter is a fun and rewarding way to meet people and serve our community.

Below is a list of committees that need a manager and members. Remember that you will not need to perform all of the activities listed — the committee manager and a committee of two to four people decide which activities to undertake and divide the work.

If you are interested in these positions, contact Helen Tuttle, our Volunteer Coordinator, at [a1newwoman@hotmail.com](mailto:a1newwoman@hotmail.com).

### Membership Committee

**Purpose:** To increase membership and distribute STC information to chapter members and potential members.

**Activities:**

- ▶ Contact and welcome new Chapter members.
- ▶ Submit membership news to the newsletter editor and to the person who maintains the chapter's temporary mailing list (currently Patty Gillespie).
- ▶ Submit names and addresses of people interested in receiving STC mailings to the person who maintains the chapter's temporary mailing list.
- ▶ Have application forms and STC brochures at each meeting and greet everyone, especially new members.

### Program Committee

**Purpose:** To schedule and coordinate monthly chapter membership programs.

**Activities:**

- ▶ Develop programs and recruit speakers.

- ▶ Prepare the program budget, and work with the Treasurer on expenditures.
- ▶ Schedule meeting dates, times, and locations (usually the third Thursday of each month, with no meetings in July, August, and December).
- ▶ Reserve meeting sites and arrange for room setup, refreshments, and equipment.
- ▶ Provide information on the monthly chapter meeting and program each month to the newsletter and Web site.
- ▶ Coordinate meetings with Council members and SIG managers.
- ▶ Write thank-you notes to speakers and sponsors.
- ▶ Attend Council meetings or provide a monthly program status report.

### Workshops/Seminars Committee

**Purpose:** To provide members with an opportunity to learn new skills and concepts, and to present workshops and seminars at a reasonable cost.

**Activities:**

- ▶ Devise the year's schedule of workshops and seminars, and recruit teachers.
- ▶ Coordinate event arrangements, including schedule, workshop content, workshop materials, audio/visual equipment, refreshments, fees, and expenses.
- ▶ Publicize the event.
- ▶ Arrange for an event site.
- ▶ Manage the workshop and seminar budget.
- ▶ Receive registrations and email confirmations.
- ▶ Attend the event as host. **RMC**



The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

For the latest chapter news, visit our Web site at [www.stcrmc.org](http://www.stcrmc.org).

## Upcoming STC RMC Chapter Meetings

### March

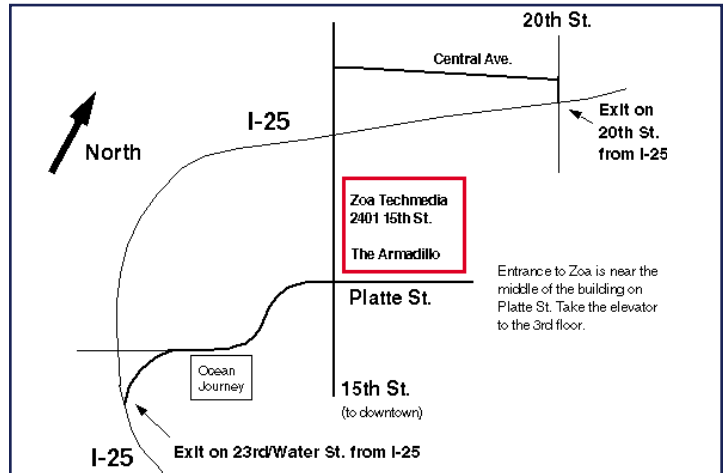
For more information about chapter meetings, see the article on page 4 and the STC RMC Web site.

#### STC RMC Competition Awards Reception

When: Thursday, March 15  
 Where: Zoa Techmedia  
 2401 15th Street, Suite 300  
 Denver  
 Cost: Members \$5  
 Non-members \$8  
 Students free

Agenda:  
 6:00 - 8:00 p.m. Reception  
 7:00 p.m. Award ceremony

Note: The outside building doors lock automatically at 7:00 p.m. Please arrive before then.

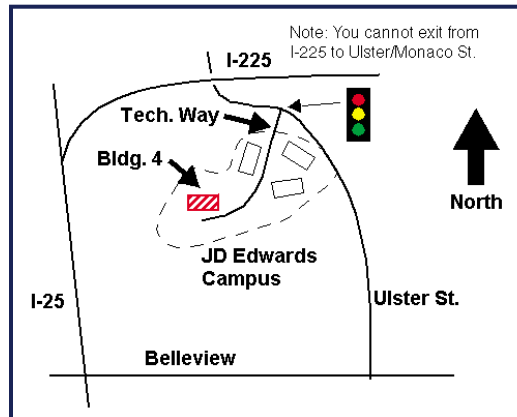


### April

#### Mentoring

When: Thursday, April 19  
 Where: J.D. Edwards  
 One Technology Way  
 Denver  
 Cost: Members \$5  
 Non-members \$8  
 Students free

Agenda:  
 5:45 - 6:45 p.m. Frame Users SIG meeting  
 5:45 - 7:15 p.m. Snacks and networking  
 7:15 - 9:00 p.m. Announcements and program



# Technicalities

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 Society for Technical Communication  
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 Denver, CO 80202

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