

Ragged Left

JUNE 2001

Vol. 15, No. 6

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

BERKELEY CHAPTER

You CAN Demystify the Index

For our June meeting, we welcome our newly elected Sponsor-Director for our own Region 8, Bonni Graham, who will present "Indexing with a Vengeance". Bonni is a senior member of the San Diego branch of STC and, as CEO of her own company, Manual Labour, Inc., she develops documentation for her clients as well as providing educational presentations on a number of topics that are professionally pertinent to tech writers.

An index is more than a list of terms at the back of a book. Thought and planning must go into its development. A well-designed index will be useful to the serious reader – it won't tease them with promises of help that it doesn't deliver. Bonni will discuss the benefits of approaching your task by seeing yourself in the place of a user so that you can do better than merely preparing an index that frustrates the serious user.

Indexing is a big task. Bonni will show us how to plan our approach, different ways to get the job done, how to handle formatting issues, and will discuss indexing online.

Bonni Graham has spent 11 years as a practicing technical documentor. In 1994, she started Manual Labour, a technical documentation outsource provider, whose business has increased approximately 30% per year. She has created manuals for clients like Sony, Kenwood USA, Nissan North America

(with Technical Standards), Hewlett-Packard, Tadpole-RDI, eDigital Corporation (for Lanier Worldwide), and many others. Bonni also works extensively with STC. A senior member, she has been involved in nearly every Region 8 conference, has been a deputy chair for the Annual Conference and for the 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference, has served as a local and international level publications competition judge and manager, and has served as chapter president and newsletter editor. In May 2001, she joined the International STC Board of Directors as Region 8 Director-Sponsor. In her copious free time, she performs improvisational comedy with the Creative Urges.

Join us on Wednesday, June 13th to learn more about this important technical writing specialty.

Meeting details appear on page 2. You can reserve by check or make a reservation online at www.stc-berkeley.org.

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Ragged Left

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About the STC

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.



STC has more than 20,000 members and 144 chapters worldwide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, photographers, audiovisual specialists,

managers, supervisors, educators, students, employees, and consultants.

STC strives to:

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication.
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

Membership

Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is \$110/year, with an additional \$15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is \$45/year.

To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email:

- Call our chapter voicemail number 510-466-5464 and leave a message.
- Send email to bkymbrs@stc.org.
- Send mail to STC-Berkeley, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007.

Advertising Rates

Page \$70, 2/3 page \$50, 1/2 page \$40, 1/3 page \$30, 1/6 page \$20, business card \$10. STC members receive 20% off. Ad deadline is the fifteenth of the month prior to publication.

Submissions

Ragged Left publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please contact the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

Deadline for unsolicited submissions is the 21st of the month preceding publication. Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

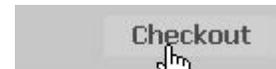
STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

Next meeting: Wednesday, June 13.

The Silver Dragon Restaurant serves STC-Berkeley members delicious Chinese food. The meeting begins at 6 P.M. with networking and conversation, and dinner at 6:30 P.M. Chapter business and announcements are made around 7:15 P.M., followed by the speaker.

If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and *must* be received (by Ruth) no later than 12:00 NOON the Monday before the meeting (June 11). Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do *not* contact the restaurant.

Send checks to Ruth Wright, 586 Vernon Street, Oakland, CA 94610.



RSVP online: Use your credit card to order meeting reservations via the chapter Web site, www.stc-berkeley.org.

With a reservation, the meeting fee with food for members is \$20, for student members is \$17, and for nonmembers is \$23; if you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 P.M., the fee is \$12 for members and non-members (\$10 for students). If you are not eating, payments may be made at the door.

Résumé or Portfolio Review

Does your résumé or portfolio present your qualifications in the best light? If you're new to the field, or just concerned that your résumé or portfolio may not be up to snuff, sign up for a free 30-minute review. We have a cadre of seasoned tech writers with hiring experience who can review your material and give you expert feedback.

To sign up for a review, email employment@stc-berkeley.org by the Thursday before the monthly meeting.

State your name and the meeting at which you're hoping to have the review.

Be sure to write *resume review* or *portfolio review* in the subject heading of the email message. If it's for a résumé, paste your résumé into the body of the message. If it's a portfolio review, bring your portfolio to the appointment.

After you've sent the email, look for a reply from the Employment Manager, confirming that you are booked for a review. The message will also specify your review time (6 or 6:30) and who your reviewer will be. Reviews are booked on a first-come, first-served basis. Since our reviewers are volunteers, the number of slots available varies for each meeting.

Recap of the May Program

Blue Skies, No Candy: Pros and Cons of Freelancing

BY KELLY PARKINSON

The freelance life has always had a kind of shimmer. What could be better than slouching around the home office naked, scheduling three-week vacations, making cheese snacks, and writing personal e-mails? Still, your sensible side needs to know the logistics. How do you do your taxes? How much do you charge? What if you can't find work? How do you know you're not making some irreversible mistake?

Five veterans of technical communications detailed the pros and cons of freelancing and permanent employment at the May 9th STC meeting. Outgoing president Sara Lee Hauslinger led panelists Richard Mateosian, Judith Herr, Thomas Albert, and Marla Wilson in a lively, informal discussion peppered with anecdotes. Audience Q&A followed. Here is a quick overview of what we learned.

What's Cool About Freelancing?

- Controlling when, where, and how much you work.
- Spending more time at home.
- The little-known delights of being a small business owner. (Chamber-of-commerce socials are more fun than you think.)
- Letting go of a project when you finish it.
- Using your connections.
- Forgetting what rush-hour traffic is like.
- Devoting as much time as you need to do a project right.
- Juggling a variety of clients.

What Keeps Freelancers Up at Night?

- Feeling isolated.
- Getting an incomplete picture of the organization.
- Being paid irregularly or sometimes not at all.
- Managing other activities—such as volunteer and creative writing—while maintaining a full workload.
- Paying for own healthcare, sick days, and vacations.
- Taking on too many projects at once.

What's Cool About Captivity?

- Seeing the results of your work over time.

- Developing meaningful relationships.
- Having a steady and dependable income.
- Focusing on writing rather than on self-marketing.
- Getting health benefits and stock options.
- Seeing how the pieces of an organization fit together

What Keeps Captives Up at Night?

- Can't work naked or take that last-minute trip to Tahiti.
- Overloaded resources leading to conflicting demands and reduced quality of work.
- Limited number of problems and solutions.
- Being locked into a fixed set of tools.
- Hand-delivered—rather than hand-picked—assignments.

Before you make a decision, it's important to assess your own feelings and attitudes toward the options. How do you feel about change and uncertainty? What about set schedules and rules? Conditions in which some people thrive invariably drive others crazy. You need to know what works for you. Still, once you've made your decision, try not to worry about it. Persistence, a good attitude, and—yes—appropriate clothing—will help you surmount most obstacles.

Workshops on Freelancing

Editorial Opportunities in the Bay Area

A one-day workshop offered by Editcetera, and sometimes jointly by Editcetera and UC Extension. Three speakers (book publishing, corporate, and technical) discuss in-house and freelance work for proofreaders and editors. Offered once or twice a year. The Editcetera version is held in downtown Berkeley; the Editcetera-UC Extension version is held in San Francisco at UC Extension's Laguna St. campus.

The Business of Freelancing

Also a one-day workshop, team-taught by a tax accountant and a veteran freelancer. Topics include finances (such as taxes and record keeping) and business practices (finding freelance work, setting rates, and estimates). Offered once or twice a year, in downtown Berkeley.

For more about Editcetera workshops: www.editcetera.com. To receive Editcetera's biannual workshop brochures send a request to info@editcetera.com.



Resource Corner

Each month rotating guest writers offer resources that benefit the technical writing industry.

If there is a topic you would like to cover for a future edition, email newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

Javadoc: a Tool for Creating API Docs

BY JOHN WENZLER

At the Chapter meeting in April, Jim Bisso of Bit-zone.com enticed many of us by describing the potentially lucrative world of API documentation. According to Bisso, writers who document software interfaces for programmers are well paid and always in demand. See the May issue of the *Ragged Left* for a summary of Bisso's presentation.

For anyone interested in pursuing this field, javadoc is an important tool that is relatively easy to learn. Javadoc is a program that creates HTML documents from comments included in Java source code files. Sun Microsystems, which created both Java and javadoc, uses javadoc to produce API documentation for the standard packages of the Java class library. You can get a good feeling for javadoc by exploring this documentation at java.sun.com/j2se/1.3/docs/api/index.html.

Other companies that write Java APIs also use javadoc because Java developers, who frequently refer to Sun's documentation, already know the interface that javadoc creates. Javadoc automatically formats HTML pages with the same look and feel as Sun's documentation, so that API writers who use javadoc can concentrate on the content of their comments. As Java becomes an increasingly popular computer language, writers who know how to use javadoc will become increasingly valuable to software companies.

For most technical writers, the greatest obstacle to learning javadoc is learning how to read and interpret Java source code. Although you do not need to be a programmer to use javadoc, you do need to understand common programming terms such as "package," "class," "object," "parameter," and "return type." You also need to know where classes and methods begin and end in a source code file. If you put comments in the wrong place, javadoc will not find them. Even worse, when you are working in a source code file, you can "break" a program by deleting or adding a single symbol at the wrong place.

However, learning about Java does not require years of study. Any good introductory course in Java or an introductory text such as Walter Savitch's *Java: An Introduction to Computer Science & Programming* should

give you the programming background that you need to use javadoc. You also can request my manual, *An Introduction to Java for Technical Writers*, which contains a brief description of Java and explains how to use javadoc, at jwenzler@california.net.

Once you have become familiar with Java code, you can find everything else that you need to learn javadoc at Sun's web site. First, you can download javadoc as part of the free Java Development Kit (JDK) at java.sun.com/j2se/1.3/index.html. Then, you can find several manuals explaining how to use javadoc at the javadoc home page java.sun.com/j2se/java-doc/index.html. These manuals tell you how to format javadoc comments. They explain how to create links to different Java methods and how to fine tune the display of API documents by using HTML tags. They also explain Sun's philosophy about what information should and should not be included in API documentation.

With a little bit of study and practice, you should be ready to create your own Java documentation and add an important skill to your resume.

Biotech Column

The Berkeley Biotech SIG is taking a hiatus. In lieu of meetings, STC Berkeley offers this monthly column.

The Life of a Cell

The Life Sciences and Biotechnology Examined

BY RUTH WRIGHT

The pure academic study of anything can often be made to look like a pointless indulgence engaged in by people who don't want to work for a living like the rest of us. This is true for biologists as much as anyone else. But the things science does for us in medicine is increasingly built on the foundation of research into the structure of things and of how they work. An example is penicillin, which works because it stops the synthesis of new cell walls in bacteria that have them. The differences between the bacteria's cell and ours is exploited in a way that hurts the bacteria without hurting us, a defense we couldn't make use of if we didn't know a great deal about both their cells and our own.

Look at a bacterium under a light microscope and you'll see a general shape, but that doesn't get you very far in identifying exactly what it is. Much of what's done to identify infectious bacteria in a hospital laboratory, or in a more difficult case, in a public health department lab, happens by looking for shadows, or footprints. A lab technician or scientist will grow a bacteria in a culture that provides certain things for food but not others - if it thrives, it eats that. If it doesn't grow, you still learn something. A dye added to the mix that changes color when certain

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food items are digested by the bacteria tells you more. Numbers of tests exist to look for biologic processes that are unique to a particular bug, and microbiologists regularly develop new media to grow organisms that were previously unknown or unnoticed.

And then there are the clinical clues to look at. Where are the bacteria growing? What symptoms is the infection causing in the person who has it? This information narrows our search.

Viruses, being a great deal smaller, present even more problems. They aren't really quite living beings in our sense of what that means. Outside a cell, they are inanimate particles that don't eat, respire or reproduce. If they can't cause disease or perform any life functions at all outside a cell, they can't really be identified or studied outside a cell either. Like bacteria, they tend to have preferences for particular species of animals, or specific organ systems or types of cells – they won't grow just anywhere.

One way around this pickiness has been the use of undifferentiated cells for use in culture. That means that the cell is just a cell, not a skin cell or a kidney cell, not a heart muscle cell. Cells like that come from two places. Cells from very new embryos, called fibroblasts, at divisions of not over 32 cells, are at that point just cells. One reason why expectant mothers are advised to be especially careful in the earliest months of pregnancy is that damage to a cell at this stage compromises much more than damage to the cell of a fetus close to term that has millions of cells that have differentiated into nerve cells and bone cells. It is easier to grow viruses in culture in this type of cell because the cells' nutritional requirements are so simple, it is easier to accommodate the virus being studied, and a uniform study can be performed. Bone marrow cells are also simple, undifferentiated cells, although their harvest tends to be used more in clinical settings than in pure laboratory work.

The other source of undifferentiated cells is from cancer. The uncontrolled cell growth associated with cancer produces a cell that in a sense has gone backward in terms of its complexity. It is less likely to produce insulin or bind oxygen and more likely to just grow and divide, again and again. In fact, it has a lot in common with the fetal fibroblast cell in that it grows rapidly and doesn't have a set life span like normal cells do. Normal cells are genetically programmed to grow and divide a set number of times and then die. This function has been blocked or destroyed in cancer cells, making them in a sense immortal, and therefore an ideal vessel in which to study viruses.

The symptoms of the illnesses viruses cause relate to some aspect of their life cycle, and what methods we have of controlling them are found there as well. Herpes simplex cold sores occur during a specific part of the life cycle of the HSV Type 1 virus and are a direct result of its life cycle. The virus has manufactured

copies of its genetic material and formed new viral particles. At this point, the new viruses burst out of the host cells, destroying them and creating the lesion that we see. Part of the difficulty in developing antiviral drugs has been in trying to develop agents that could reach viruses inside cells without hurting the cells. Currently available antivirals work by inhibiting some phase of viral replication while it occurs within the cell but they aren't yet able to kill the viruses directly. Advances in our ability to study genes has helped immeasurably in this area – reading gene sequences means that we can observe the specifics of viral infection at the cellular level, how the virus insinuates its gene into the host cell genes, how the added information is reproduced, and how the process varies with different viruses.

Returning to the notion of pointless academic study, one example comes to mind that dramatically points out the problems with the public making quick assumptions about the value of an avenue of research. If you read in the paper tomorrow morning about scientists studying armadillos, you might be inclined to think about how much the word armadillo sounds like peccadillo, and wonder to yourself how this particular peccadillo managed to get funded by anyone. As it happens, this avenue of research allowed researchers to learn that armadillos actually were carriers of the bacterium that causes leprosy. Leprosy, or Hansen's disease, is difficult to study in humans since it can have an incubation period of 30 years before symptoms begin to show up. Attempts to grow the organism in pure culture were unsuccessful, leaving scientists with little to work with in their efforts to better understand the disease.

And it gets better. Armadillos carry the same strain of the bacterium that causes disease in humans, and the organism multiplies in armadillo tissue much faster than in human tissue. Studying the organism in the armadillo host allowed us to learn more about leprosy, as well as showing us that armadillos in the southwest U.S., Texas and Louisiana harbor the disease and are reservoirs capable of transferring the disease to humans.

I hope you've noticed that, while examining some pretty basic aspects of microbiology, we've nevertheless managed to skirt the edges of some hot-button issues that are definitely up for debate—among them the value of research, laboratory testing using animal fetal tissue, an example of immortality, at the cellular level at least, and the uses and presumed benefits of the government-funded public health service. Science is all around us. Broadening our understanding of it can only benefit us, helping us to see ourselves and the world more clearly.

Comments, questions and additional information about this or any other relevant topic are all welcome. Please direct them to programs@stc-berkeley.org.

It's a Wrap

As the STC year draws to a close, I find myself feeling both a bit nostalgic for what has gone by and excited at what lies ahead. June's meeting will be my last as Berkeley STC President. It's been a good run. When I took office two years ago, there was much work to be done to bring the chapter into a strong and healthy state. I spent my first term building the leadership needed to undertake several ambitious chapter projects that we began during my second term, including the Education Initiative and the Employment Center (which is being built in gradual phases on our Web site even as we speak).

Now it is time for me to hand the reins over to our new leadership, and support the new President and chapter Board while we continue the projects we began during my tenure and develop yet more resources to aid you, our members. The following officers were elected at our chapter meeting of May 11, and will take the helm as of July 1:

President: Kathryn Munn president@stc-berkeley.org

VP of Programs: Ruth Wright programs@stc-berkeley.org

VP of Membership: Paul Sinasohn membership@stc-berkeley.org

Secretary: David McCoard secretary@stc-berkeley.org

Treasurer: Susan Marchionna treasurer@stc-berkeley.org

Additionally, all of our committee managers will be continuing in their prior roles:

Employment Manager: Madeleine Adkins employment@stc-berkeley.org

Education Manager: Karen Hill education@stc-berkeley.org

Internet Manager: David Alt internet@stc-berkeley.org

Newsletter Editor: Jessica Livingston newsletter@stc-berkeley.org

I will also be working with STC at the regional and Society levels. I've taken on the role of Programs Manager for the 2001 Region 8 Conference, and will once again be submitting presentation proposals for the May 2002 STC Annual Conference in Nashville. I'm also pleased to announce that in September of next year, for the first time in our history, the Berkeley chapter will be hosting the 2002 Region 8 Conference.

So as you can see, my excitement is well founded. There's a lot going on at Berkeley STC, and I am very happy to have had the opportunity to serve you as your President.

Thanks again,

SARAH LEE HAUSLINGER

Whatis.Com

An Online IT Encyclopedia

BY MADELEINE ADKINS

Where does a tech writer go to get IT definitions, history and weblinks? My recommendation for a book-mark-worthy, all-purpose IT reference site is [whatis.com](http://whatis.techtarget.com) (<http://whatis.techtarget.com>). A user-friendly, informative site with over 3,000 definitions, whatis.com is an excellent place to start when you need to research the latest buzzword, acronym or concept.

Need to find out what "1170" refers to? Want to know what "The Browserless Web" is? Want to read up on all the DVD formats for data back-up? Wondering what "The Open Group" does? Curious about TIFFs? You can search for a specific term, browse alphabetically or categorically, or even check out whatis.com's Top 20 Words of the Week.

The definitions are well written and easy to understand. Most of the definitions are thorough. A few, however, are so pithy as to be uninformative. Many entries include historical information, which can be helpful when you don't know the background and evolution of a technology. Some entries have links to other websites, which can be extremely useful. The links connect to all kinds of articles, white papers, marketing sites—anything—that offers further information on the topic. Entries are dated, so you know just how old the information is when you read it. Overall, whatis.com is a great place to start when in search of IT information.

Freelance Editors' Rate Survey Results

Curious about what other editors are earning for contract work? Be curious no more. Plan to attend the June 21st Bay Area Editors' Forum, when David Featherstone, Bonnie Britt, and the rest of the 2000 Freelance Rate Survey Committee will reveal detailed results of the questionnaire mailed in February. The Bay Area Editors' Forum includes 300 members, both staff and freelance. The response to this survey from our freelance members was high (more than one third of the membership) and the committee believes the tabulation will interest everyone.

The meeting is in back at Borders Union Square, 3rd floor, Post & Powell, San Francisco. We'll gather at 6:30 P.M. for tea, coffee, and cookies. Meeting runs from 7:00 to 9:00. Come early to get a seat; it was packed last time! For more information, visit <http://www.editorsforum.org/>.

STC Sacramento Chapter

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH
LANCE GELEIN'S HOUSE (THIS MEETING ONLY)
6:15 P.M.
DETAILS: CHECK WEB SITE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 6, 2001

Su e Se a

Rather than the usual monthly meeting at the Hilton, STC Sacramento will be having a Hawaiian theme party, complete with authentic Hawaiian and Samoan dancing. Lance Gelein is graciously hosting our celebration. See Website for directions and registration information. Upon arrival, you will be granted a Hawaiian passport that entitles you to food and drink, games and prizes, and a special island surprise. Last meeting until fall.

STC East Bay Chapter

SECOND THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH
TONY ROMA'S IN DANVILLE
5:30 P.M. - NETWORKING
6:30 P.M. - DINNER
7:30 P.M. - CHAPTER BUSINESS/PROGRAM
RSVP IN WRITING, TWO DAYS IN ADVANCE
DETAILS: [HTTP://WWW.EBSTC.ORG/](http://www.ebstc.org/)
THURSDAY, JUNE 14TH, 2001

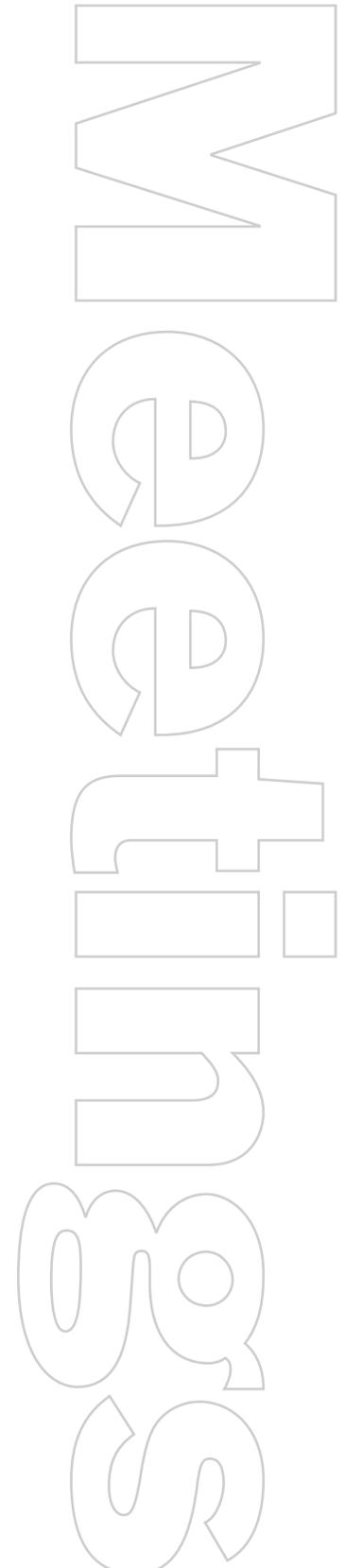
*e St uctu e Be t e a , t
e y | atc e*

While the usability standards for paper-based documents have become fairly well-defined, the criteria for web-based and online document usability continue to be ambiguous. Issues of online document usability become more important everyday as the creation and distribution of these documents has become faster and more affordable due to recent advances in applicable technologies.

Meryl Natchez is CEO of TechProse. With offices in Sacramento, SF, San Jose, and Lafayette, TechProse specializes in information technology (IT) solutions for clients in both the corporate and public sectors. TechProse focuses on technical writing, training, and the full range of IT consulting. TechProse provides complete, out sourced projects or individual consultants as needed.

STC San Francisco Chapter

THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH



WWW.STC-BERKELEY.ORG

Ragged Left

Next Meeting:

Wednesday

June 13

You CAN Demystify the Index

WITH BONNI GRAHAM

Meal reservations required by Monday, June 11.

See page 2 for costs and meeting details.

RSVP online: Credit cards accepted at stc-berkeley.org.

Silver Dragon Chinese Restaurant:

835 Webster Street (at 8th) in Oakland

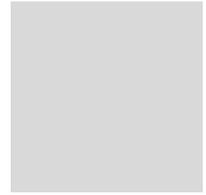
Dinner 6:30 - 7:30

Announcements and Program 7:30 - 9:00

Please do not call the restaurant!

P.O. Box 1007
Berkeley, CA
94701

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STC-BERKELEY MEETING DIRECTIONS

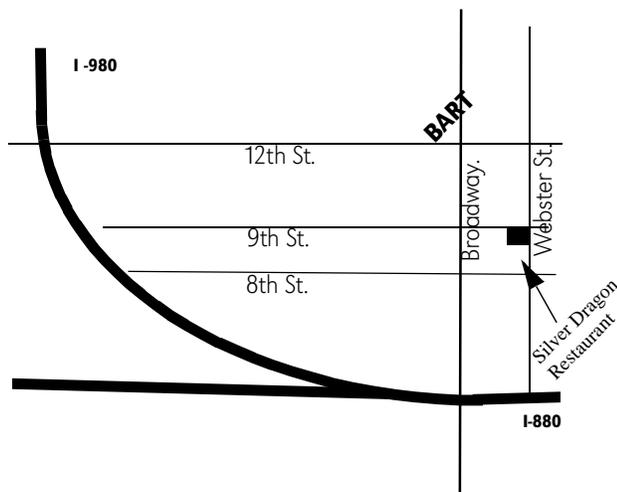
From north of Oakland: Take the I-880 North. Merge onto the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

From south of Oakland: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Take the Oak Street exit towards Lakeside Dr. Turn right onto Oak St. Turn left onto 8th St. Turn right onto Harrison St. Turn left onto 10th St. Turn left onto Webster St.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, take the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland (CA-24)/Hayward-Stockton. Merge onto I-580 E. Take I-980 West ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel. Highway 24 west becomes I-980 west. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

EAST



Join us in our New Meeting Location in Oakland

By BART: Exit the 12th Street Oakland station. Walk south for two blocks, to Webster St. Turn right and walk west to 835 Webster St.