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Ragged Left

July-August 2004
Volume 18 No. 4

The Monthly Newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

In this issue

Next Meeting

Beau Cain will explain how to build books using Microsoft Word. This presentation is aimed at experienced users of Word who want to learn more sophisticated functions.

Since Beau is also our new Region 8 Director-Sponsor, this might be a chance to ask him about STC doings outside the Berkeley chapter.

Upcoming Meetings

In August, Jack Molisani will be back to talk about the most common mistakes that technical writers make when they are job-hunting. Jack was our June speaker, when he talked about portfolios.

Our September speaker will be Joe McKinney of ECM. He will educate us about both the technical and business aspects of data storage technology. This may be an area where chapter members can seek new employers or clients.

News & Reviews

Help make our chapter events more helpful for our members. Read chapter president Joe Devney's monthly column.

A new STC Special Interest Group related to offshore outsourcing has been proposed.

The region 8 conference is local this year. Mark your calendar for July 25-27, and join us in *Charting a Bold Course* at UC Davis. Full details, including the extension on the call for papers, can be found at the conference website.

What are your fellow chapter members doing? Read the Member News to find out. And learn about new members by reading their biographies. (If you have your own news to share, send it to

President's Message

STC Berkeley *update* chapter
Executive Committee

July/August 2004
Our Special Event

In June, the Berkeley STC chapter had an evening gathering in addition to our regular monthly meeting. Shlomo Perets, founder of the consulting company MicroType, gave a presentation about publishing with Adobe Acrobat. His presentation was well-attended and well-received. We saw many people who don't normally come to chapter meetings, and I have been wondering why.

The Acrobat training session was different from the regular meeting in several ways. For one thing, it followed a different schedule. We held it on a different day of the week. We started later, and did not include a meal. There was a single price for everyone, members and non-members, and of course no distinction between those who came for dinner and those who came for the meeting only.

And as far as I know, Perets was our first guest speaker to be a visitor from another country.

We also publicized the event differently. We called it a "special event." We have two mailing lists, and the announcement went to both of them. (There is overlap between the lists, so I apologize to those people who received all my messages twice.) We passed the word to the Region 8 Director-Sponsor and also to the other five Northern California chapters. We put a notice prominently on the chapter's Web site.

The subject matter--Adobe Acrobat--is a tool that is used by most tech writers, so there was no need to introduce the product. Instead, Shlomo could address more technical issues related to Acrobat.

Three dozen people attended the June event, at least twice the number we have had at regular monthly meetings this year. What made the difference.

If you were one of the attendees--or if you wanted to go but couldn't make it--what drew you? Was the schedule more convenient for you? Did you know Shlomo by reputation? Did you receive the publicity, whereas you don't usually hear about the Berkeley chapter's monthly meetings? Was the topic itself or the expert-level information a deciding factor?

The Berkeley chapter's leadership is trying to find ways to get more members aware of and involved in chapter activities, even as attendees. The answers to these questions will help us make the events we put on of more use to more people. Please e-mail me if you have thoughts to share on the matter.

Joe Devney
President

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Executive Committee

Calling Interested Participants for a Group on Global Issues

By Eunice Malley, Senior Member

As part of STC's Transformation Initiative, the national office wants to determine if there is interest in forming a group on global issues that affect our profession, including the offshoring of technical communication jobs.

Linda Oestreich (Region 5 Director Sponsor) is leading a group of people who are developing criteria for new communities in STC as part of the transformation initiative. These criteria will be tested, and hopes that a global issues/offshoring group, similar to a SIG, action group, or project team, will be a new "charter community." She hopes to have the criteria in a form to be tested by September.

Eunice Malley, Senior Member of the STC Berkeley Chapter, is looking for people from Bay Area chapters to participate in this group, including determining its specific purpose and focus. If you are interested, please contact her at eunicezrm@sbcglobal.net. She is also looking for someone who is willing to help establish and lead the group with Linda Oestreich's help.

The Silicon Valley's website is a great source of offshoring information as it relates to our field. See www.stc-siliconvalley.org. Click on "More Resources" on the left side of the screen, and then "Offshoring".

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Member News

Bruce Balfour has joined the staff of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory as a senior technical writer/editor. In addition, his most recent novel, *Prometheus Road*, will be available on October 26 (available in good bookstores everywhere).

Jerry Franklin was recently awarded an Honorable Mention in the annual Bitpipe White Paper Awards (www.bitpipe.com). Jerry's paper -- "What Your R&D Tax Credit is Really Costing You" -- was one of only three white papers cited in the Software category. Jerry will be speaking at the upcoming Region 8 conference in Davis on an unrelated but no less arcane topic: Concurrent Version Control (CVS) for Technical Writers.

Rob Peterson writes: "I recently completed my first batch of biodiesel, an alternative fuel made form waste fry oil. I collected about 40 gallons of waste oil from restaurants, which I might add they were glad to give me for free, and added methanol and potassium hydroxide. The end result was 30 gallons of usable fuel at roughly $0.60 per gallon. Though initial set up is rather time consuming, I look forward to processing my next batch in a few weeks. Aside from that, I am still employed and excited about my new and inexpensive hobby."

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New Members

Caroline Scharf is a recent addition to the Berkeley chapter of STC. A native of Oakland and a Chico State graduate with a degree in English and a Certificate in Technical Writing, she's been a technical writer for various Bay Area companies for more than eight years. She recently began a new chapter in her career as a freelance technical writer.

Steve Schaefer is a senior technical writer at Oracle, where he produces user documentation, implementation guides, and online help for sales and marketing products. In previous positions, he founded and edited the Golden State Warriors' season ticket holder magazine and sold antiquarian books. Steve has written a weekly automotive test column for newspapers and Web sites for more than 12 years. Ah, the life of an English major.

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