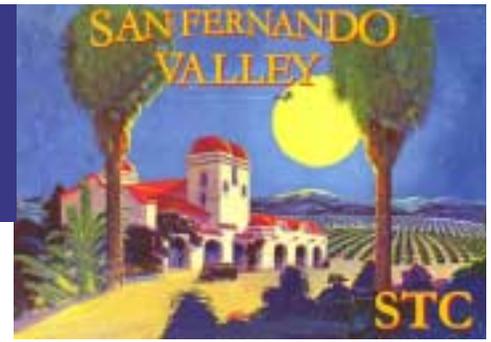


VIEWPOINT

Newsletter of the San Fernando Valley Chapter



Richard Lederer to Keynote Region 8 Conference 2001

Richard Lederer, celebrated linguist and author of scores of books and articles on the English language, will be the keynote speaker for the STC Region 8 Conference to be held at the Marriott Hotel in Irvine, California, November 1-3, 2001.

The most recent additions to Lederer's notable career are his post as Usage Editor of The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, Unabridged, and his regular guest slot on the radio show "All Things Considered," hosted by Lisa Simeone. He also writes a syndicated column, "Looking at Language"; hosts his own radio show, "A Way with Words"; and maintains a busy schedule of speaking engagements with various educational and corporate groups.

Lederer's career as a wordsmith began when, after earning the Master of Arts and Teaching at Harvard University, he became a teacher of English and media at St. Paul's School in Concord, New Hampshire. While he taught at St. Paul's, he earned the Ph.D. in English and Linguistics at the University of New Hampshire and began writing books about the English language. The success of his books, starting with "Anguished English," enabled him to explore other career opportunities. Since his days at St. Paul's, Lederer has written numerous additional books; contributed to such diverse publications as *Writer's Digest*, *Annals of Improbable Research*, *Mensa Bulletin*, and *Farmers' Almanac*; and appeared on numerous television and radio shows. For his speaking prowess, the San Diego Toastmasters awarded him the Leadership and Communications Award (1999) and the International Platform Association (the oldest speaking organization in the United States) awarded him first place among their showcase speakers (1994).

This year's STC Region 8 Conference has a timely and exciting theme, "The Guerrilla Conference." The conference will be packed with information to help you thrive professionally during the uncertain economic times ahead.

For more information about the Region 8 Conference--including conference pricing, conference registration, and hotel accommodations--visit the conference Web site at <http://www.stcregion8conference.org>. Be sure to return to the site frequently, as it will be updated regularly.

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Calendar

September 6 – Administrative Council Meeting at Nico's Family Restaurant, 7166 Shoup Avenue, Canoga Park, 6:30 p.m.

September 18 – Dinner Meeting – Andrea Ames, 2000-2001 Director-Sponsor for Region 8
More details on page 3

October 4 - Administrative Council Meeting - TBD

October 16 - Dinner Meeting - TBD

November 1-3 - Region 8 Conference
Irvine Marriott

DIVIDED BY A COMMON LANGUAGE

by Ronald A. Brown



We had been in the United States for less than a fortnight, when we met up with the person who was going to show us somewhere to live. Before we set off to see the flat, we asked the estate agent to put the pushchair in the boot of the car while we were still in the car park, so we could drive onto the road. Realizing we had been there for less than two weeks, the realtor gave a quizzical smile, picked up the stroller, put it in the trunk of the auto, drove out of the parking lot onto the pavement, and took us to the apartment.

For the first time I understood what George Bernard Shaw meant when he said that England and America are two countries divided by a common language.

-more-



This article is Part 1 of the promised expansion of the enlightening and useful presentation given by Ron Brown at our June 19, 2001 meeting. For the full text, in PDF format, please [click here](#).

Part II will be published at a later date.

About Ron Brown

Ron Brown, who has degrees from Brunel University and Imperial College, was born, lived and worked in London, England during the early part of his life. Since then, he has also lived and worked at Princeton in New Jersey, Lancaster in Pennsylvania, and the Netherlands. He is now in the U.S.A. for the second time, and is currently principal technical communicator at KBC Advanced Technologies, Inc. in Thousand Oaks, California. Until returning to the U.S.A., Ron was active in the STC UK Chapter and the Institute for Scientific and Technical Communicators. He writes mainly in English (U.S.), but occasionally still uses English (U.K.).

September Chapter Meeting Location

San Fernando Valley Chapter's September meeting will be held **September 18, 2001** at the **94th Aero Squadron Restaurant Hotel**, 16320 Raymer Street, Van Nuys, in the Nieuport Room. **Telephone:** (818) 994-7437. **Time:** 6:30 p.m. until about 9:00 p.m.

Menu Choices: Sirloin steak marinated in herbs and spices, or breast of chicken with sauteed mushrooms in a Dijon mustard sauce, or vegetarian pasta. Served with caesar salad, fresh baked rolls and butter, parsley roasted red potatoes, New York cheesecake, choice of coffee, tea, decaf or iced tea. **Cost:** \$20 for members and \$23 for non-members.

RSVP to Janie McKinney by September 13 at janiemckinney@earthlink.net or (818) 707-1003 and indicate your menu choice. As always, if you make a reservation, you are responsible for the cost, whether or not you attend. Please also keep your own record of your reservation.

Driving directions: From Roscoe Boulevard, go south on Woodley past the railroad crossing. Raymer is the first street on the right. The restaurant is at the end of the Raymer cul-de-sac. Freeway: **405** to Roscoe, go west. **118** - exit Balboa, south to Roscoe, east to Woodley. **101** - exit Balboa, north to Roscoe, east to Woodley



USABILITY ON A SHOESTRING

Andrea L. Ames

Your organization doesn't have the time or the resources to practice a user-centered design process. You know your product is not as successful as it could be for that reason, because you've had to explain (again and again) in your documentation parts of the user interface that make little sense to your users. You've tried to propose that your company adopt a more usability-oriented attitude, but you hear the same old things. Now you need some quick-and-easy, no- or low-cost usability strategies you can implement, anyway.

Join Andrea L. Ames as she provides strategies for every phase of the usability process that require very little time and few resources to implement...things you can do "in your spare time" to begin in your company the typically slow process of change to a usability culture. She'll provide strategies for analyzing your audience and developing profile information (and helping to justify site visits), designing your documentation (and possibly the product interface), and validating your design, as well as deliverables at other stages in the process.

This presentation is for beginning to advanced technical communicators who would like to lead or take part in an effort to change their company cultures and help their companies adopt a more user-centered design process.

Andrea L. Ames, M.S., is a technical communicator specializing in user-centered product interface and online information architecture and design, including audience analysis, information architecture and design, interaction design, usability, and user-centered design and development process. She has 17 years' experience designing, developing, and producing usable technical and scientific information for products, software user interfaces, multimedia and online information systems, and print documentation.

Andrea is the owner of Ucentrics, a consulting firm that specializes in user-centered information architecture and design, interaction design, and usability. She is a member of the STC international board of directors; coordinator for two University of California Extension technical communication certificates; and a published author and freelance writer. She teaches at the university level and speaks internationally at professional conferences.

President's Message

from

Cathy N. Mills



Hello,

My name is **Cathy Neel Mills**, and I'm very excited about being your new President. I've been a technical communicator for over 10 years. Prior to my technical writing days, I was a Human Factors Engineer (who did a lot of writing). My specialty is GUI design, and software documentation, but I love and will take on almost any challenge. For the last 6 years, I've been running my own company, called TechCom 2000 — "Technical Communication Services for the Year 2000 and Beyond."

Okay, enough about me! What about our chapter? I believe that we have a great council this year that will do their best to make the chapter what you want! So how do we know what you want? To kickoff the year, our VP of Programs, Janie McKinney, has prepared and sent a questionnaire to all members. The purpose of the questionnaire is to find out what you are interested in learning about, and how well (or poorly) you think the chapter is doing. **Please complete the questionnaire and return it to Janie.** It only takes a few minutes! Janie will provide an article about the results in the November newsletter. Thanks, Janie!

In closing, I want to thank you all for your confidence and support, and I look forward to a great year with all of you!

CHANGES IN CHAPTER OFFICERS

Yes, circumstances already have brought about the following changes since our May elections! To avoid the additional work and expense of holding a second election, these new appointments were approved at the Chapter Council Transitional Meeting held on July 26.

Janie McKinney is no longer part of the newsletter team. She has volunteered to be the **Vice President, Programs**.

Arthur Ringwalt and **Tom Berryman** are no longer co-chairing the Programs activity. **Tom** will remain as **Vice President, Membership** and **Arthur** has volunteered to be the **Education Liaison**.

Dennis Wilson will remain as **Secretary/Treasurer**, adding **Public Relations** responsibilities as they are required.

Other elected and appointed chapter officers remain as announced in our June newsletter.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

by Tom Berryman, Membership Vice President

Please join me in extending a warm welcome to the following technical communicators who have joined San Fernando Valley Chapter in the past few months, as brand new members of STC:

Nick DeBenedetto (address not provided)
We apologize to Nick for having his surname spelled incorrectly in the June newsletter.

Susan Connor Audrain of **West Hills**
Christie A. Cooper-Smith of **Northridge**
Michele Rosenberg of **Woodland Hills**

Also, please welcome the following transfers in from other chapters:

Lisa H. Gottlieb of **Topanga**
Judith Harlan of **Ventura**
Joseph M. Thomas of **Thousand Oaks**

Touchstone 2001 Technical Communication Competition Seeks Entries, Volunteers

By Patrick Lufkin

Touchstone 2001, the California technical communication competition, is seeking both entries and volunteers. Sponsored by the Northern California STC chapters, the competition is expected to draw several hundred entries. Over the coming months, dozens of volunteers will be needed to process and judge entries, and to perform the many other tasks needed to make the competition a success.

Touchstone takes its name from a technique used in mineral assaying. Ores are scratched against a fine-grained stone, and judged by the color of the streak they left. "Touchstone" has come to mean a criterion used to assess value.

Each year Touchstone works to promote the profession, foster excellence in technical communication, and ensure that outstanding work gets the recognition it deserves. In past years, Touchstone has been primarily a Northern California competition, but this year covers the entire state.

Entries will be judged in the fall, and awards will be announced in a celebration to be held in March 2002. Distinguished winners from Touchstone are automatically entered in the international competition, which presents its awards at the international STC conference in May.

Entries sought

The competition is open to all those who strive to make technical information understandable regardless of how the communication is delivered. The competition seeks entries in 24 print and online categories—computer manuals, training materials, magazines and newsletters, technical and annual reports, online help systems and more.

Experienced technical communication professionals evaluate and provide written feedback for every entry. Winning entries earn awards and professional recognition.

Entrants need not be STC members. The deadline for entries is September 21, 2001.

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Volunteers needed

Touchstone also needs experienced professionals to help judge entries.

Judges receive training and work in teams under a lead judge to evaluate entries, make awards, and provide feedback to entrants.

Judges see some of the best work being produced, hone their skills, add to their résumés, and meet and work with many of the leaders in the profession.

Proceeds from Touchstone support the Ken Gordon technical communication scholarships.

To volunteer

To volunteer call Richard Mateosian at 510-540-7745 or send email to xrm@pacbell.net.

Additional information about how to enter or volunteer is available on the Touchstone Website at <http://www.stc-touchstone.org>.

Patrick Lufkin is a senior judge for the competition, and a past president of the San Francisco chapter of STC.

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FUN FACTS - Punctuation, please

From THE JOY OF TRIVIA

Some people think that the stage musical *Les Miserables* runs a bit long, but it's a mere flash in time compared with one of the sentences in the novel on which it is based. Supposedly to make it easy to read, that 3-page, 823-word sentence is divided by 93 commas, 51 semicolons and 4 dashes. Rumor has it that someone suffocated from lack of oxygen in the 1940s just short of the 73rd comma while giving a dramatic reading from the work.

FLASH FUNNIES - Motivational Messages

Follow your dream! Unless it's the one where you're at work in your underwear during a fire drill.

On the keyboard of life, always keep one finger on the escape key.

Don't be irreplaceable; if you can't be replaced, you can't be promoted.

Do not walk behind me, for I may not lead. Do not walk in front of me, for I may not follow. Do not walk beside me...in fact, just get away from me and leave me alone!

(Reprinted from *ForeFront FLASH*, August 2001. Used with permission.)

SURFER'S ADVISORY

by Shirley Parker

Janice Carlson of Carlson Online Information Design, Las Vegas, Nevada has written a new book, *Mastering RoboHelp Office 9*, an online manual that assists the technical writer or Help developer in making the most of eHelp Corporation's popular Help authoring software. **Please note the book is available in the increasingly popular format of an e-manual, only.** I have not yet had a chance to review the book, but the following information may be of help (no pun intended) to those who have been battling version 9 of RoboHELP® Office and are ready to throw up their hands and go to straight PDFs for their online manual. My employer had to make just such a decision when we could not get WebHelp in version 7 and then version 8, to work on UNIX machines. Be aware, though, that there is no Acrobat® Reader™ for SCO UNIX. Your developers and customers will have to struggle with **xpdf**, which takes an eternity to open a single page. (And before your speedy little fingers all e-mail me at once to tell me there was no version 8 of RoboHELP Office, there was; it's called RoboHELP Office 2000. And yes, I've heard that two divisions of The Santa Cruz Operation were purchased by Caldera, Inc. They haven't yet answered my inquiry to confirm that or clarify trademark registration.)

But I digressed too much. The intent of Carlson's manual is that by working through the fast-paced tutorials contained in the book, readers will understand the best uses of WinHelp and HTML-based Help formats, learn about designing and writing for online communication, and create their own, full-featured RoboHelp and RoboHelp HTML systems "in no time". The 186-page manual is provided in a bookmarked and indexed .PDF format that can be reprinted whenever necessary. *Mastering RoboHelp Office 9* can be purchased online for \$15.99 at www.amazon.com/paypage/P2UCHBNWBEROU2. Credit card payments for the manual are secured through an arrangement with Amazon.com.

Janice, the owner of Carlson Online Information Design, is a Past President of the Southern Nevada Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Her articles on online Help have appeared in *Intercom* and *Oracle Developer*. She has also won regional and national awards from the Society for Technical Communication.





Bonni Graham



Image courtesy of Art Center College of Design <www.artcenter.edu>

Director-Sponsor Message from Bonni Graham, 2001-2002 Director-Sponsor, Region 8

bgraham@manuallabour.com

(From the Spring 2001 Board Meeting)

Grants, Loans, Scholarships, and Fellowships

Where do our dues go? As you may know, a good portion of them are returned to your chapter to supply the capital for it to provide educational programs and seminars, maintain chapter communication devices such as listserves, web pages, and good old-fashioned newsletters, and support all the other chapter activities that help you learn and grow in your chosen profession of technical communication.

But what happens to the money that doesn't come back to the chapters? Some of it funds the Society office, which provides a variety of services to support chapter, regional, and societal leadership in their quest to serve the members fully and effectively.

Some of it, however, is available directly to chapters and individuals in the form of merit grants, special needs grants, academic research grants, special opportunities grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships.

Interested in a grant or loan? Check out the application at http://www.stc.org/admin_docs.html on the society web site; scroll down to "Guidelines for STC Programs, Grants, and Loans." There you can find information to help you determine exactly what type of grant or loan you or your chapter is qualified to receive. Chapters can receive up to \$3000 in loans per program year, or up to \$6000 per year to support multi-chapter events. If you are interested in any of these grants, complete the application and submit it to your Director-Sponsor. For Region 8, that would be me, Bonni Graham: bgraham@manuallabour.com.

Merit grants fund one-time activities that will not generate income. A chapter or group of chapters may request a merit grant to support any activity (with the exception of hosting an STC annual conference) that they consider worthwhile and that advances the stated goals of STC.

Financial recovery/special needs grants help our various chapters recover from unforeseen or unusual financial difficulties.

Loans support activities that generate income for the chapter. Chapters may request interest-free loans to support any activity that they deem worthwhile, with the exception of hosting an STC annual conference.

(Continued on page 8)

Continued from page 7

Research Grants support academic research that benefits the Society membership. Grantees are expected to prepare a paper worthy of publication in Technical Communication by the end of that one-year period. Supported research must be a controlled activity through which grantees can learn and communicate new information to the STC membership at large and contribute to the general body of knowledge surrounding the profession of technical communication.

Special Opportunities Grants also support research that benefits the Society membership. These grantees are also expected to prepare a suitable paper for Technical Communication. Proposals may be submitted by student members, regular members (except voting members of the STC board of directors), and nonmembers of the Society. A special opportunity must be a controlled activity that can develop and communicate new information to the STC membership. Therefore, the development of proprietary curricula or proprietary information, while important and valuable, would not qualify for an STC special opportunities grant. However, developing new curricula, a pilot program, or innovative teaching methods that could be shared could qualify for an STC special opportunities grant.

Faculty Internships provide funding for academic faculty to hold internship positions in industry, strengthening the industry-academe connection. An internship is paid full-time short-term employment for novice professionals. The STC Faculty Internship Program is designed to provide grant stipend support to enable full-time technical communication faculty with limited industry experience to accept internship positions in the technical communication industry.

Teaching Fellowships for Practicing Professionals serves the opposite side of this coin: these stipends enable practicing professionals in the field of technical communication to serve as adjunct or visiting faculty in colleges or universities. A fellowship is a short-term teaching assignment (a minimum of an academic quarter or semester) for practicing professionals. The STC teaching fellowship program is designed to provide grant stipends to encourage employed technical communicators to accept adjunct teaching positions in their areas of specialization.

STC Scholarships in Technical Communication award scholarships annually to deserving students--training new generations of technical communicators and fostering the growth of our profession. Undergraduates or graduates in a technical communications program at an accredited university are eligible to apply.

This spring, the Board awarded one special needs grant, five merit grants, one special opportunities grant, and a teaching fellowship. One of the merit grants funded the resumption of a Washington DC scholarship program. These expenditures demonstrate the Society's commitment to supporting chapters and members and furthering the development of theory and practice of technical communication.

TIP

Frustrated with MS Office? Wondering what's new with Windows? Woody Leonhard, Certified Office Victim, will help you keep up with the latest on bugs and workarounds, as well as new features
<http://woodyswatch.com>
 You can also subscribe to various free newsletters.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"I am a bomb disposal expert. If you see me running, try to keep up."

*Contributed by John Posada,
Senior Technical Writer*

NEIGHBORHOOD EVENTS

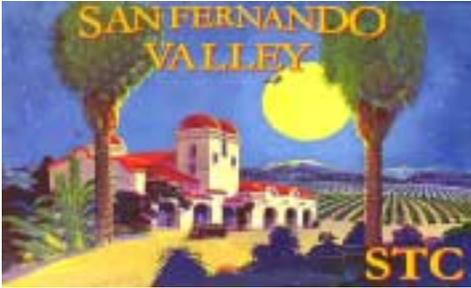
STC - San Gabriel Chapter's September meeting will be held **September 24, 2001** at the Four Points Hotel, Monrovia 700 West Huntington Avenue, (across from CompUSA), Monrovia, CA 91016. Telephone: 626.357.5211. Visit the website, www.stcsgv.org for driving directions.

Doors open at 6:00 p.m., with dinner served at 6:15 p.m. and the presentation at 7:30 p.m.

Cost: STCSGV members only - no charge for the September meeting. (Future meetings are \$14.) STC members (Non-STCSGV) - \$14. Non-STC Member - \$16

Your meeting reservation is needed by September 20, 2001. Monies are payable at the door in the form of a check or cash. To reserve your space, email your name and chapter affiliation to Maria Christophel at: maispeco@aol.com

Presentation: Zen and the Art of Online Help by **Mark H. Bloom**, AOL, Creative Services Manager, Immediate Past President of Orange County STC.



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Webmaster – Al Needell
aneedell@nortelnetworks.com

Our Website –
<http://www.stcsfv.org>

Region 8 Website information –
<http://www.stc.org/region8/www/index.htm>

Our STC Neighbors (In alphabetical order)

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— ohlig@bohdotech.com

Los Angeles chapter — Betsy Suttle,
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bsuttle615@aol.com
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Orange County chapter — Mark Bloom
mhbloom@aol.com
<http://www.ocstc.org/main.asp>

San Diego chapter — Kris Oden,
President koden@invitrogen.com
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San Gabriel Valley chapter — Kathy Broman, President (818) 951-7301,
kabroman@aol.com —
<http://www.stcsgv.org>

San Luis Obispo chapter — Regina Brown, President (805) 546-8671
castano@fix.net, or Jan Grammer,
Secretary jkdaley@thegrid.net

Santa Barbara chapter — LeeAnne Kryder, President
kryder@humanitas.ucsb.edu
<http://www.sbstc.org>

Twain = Technology without an interesting name

Viewpoint

Viewpoint is published **bimonthly** September through June by the San Fernando Valley chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC-SFV).

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