



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

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July Meeting Program: Tour of the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis

by Alison Masilak

On Monday, July 12, at 6 p.m., the Mid-South chapter of STC will continue its summer tradition of venturing afield by visiting what Shelby County Mayor AC Wharton, Jr., dubbed the “starship of research in Tennessee,” the new FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis. This tour will allow us to envision the future of teaching, research, and academic-corporate-community partnerships.

The Institute, which opened in November 2003, is a partnership between business, government, and academe that houses major research centers, technology-enriched meeting facilities, and

wireless classrooms. Its three major research entities are the Institute for Intelligent Systems, the Center for Supply Chain Management, and the Advanced Learning Center. Two members of the Advanced Learning Center staff will serve as our tour guides.

In addition to intellectual capital, the Institute provides a building with spaces like The Zone, a 190-seat, crescent-shaped auditorium featuring a personal response system at each seat, and the Presentation Theater, a 60-seat immersion theater. These spaces are truly revolutionary and are probably unlike anything you’ve seen outside of a *Star Wars* movie.

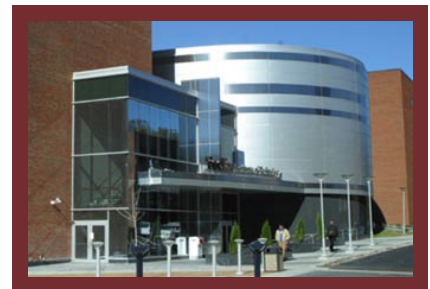


Photo by Michael Spikes courtesy of the University of Memphis.

The FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis houses cutting-edge laboratories, classrooms, and meeting rooms. To sneak a peak before our tour, visit <http://fedex.memphis.edu>.

We hope you’ll join us for this tour to see where some of the most innovative, technology-rich research is being conducted in the region. For directions, see page 6. ♦

STC 2005 Conference: Call for Proposals

Do you want to prepare for presentations to clients and employers, raise your visibility within the profession, or lower your STC annual conference fee? Then you should present at the 52nd annual conference, which will be held May 8–11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. The first step to becoming a presenter is to submit a proposal by July 30, 2004.

Submitting a proposal will be easy with two invaluable resources:

- At the Mid-South chapter website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>), you can download a presentation on how to submit a good proposal. This presentation was created by members of the Metro Baltimore chapter, which hosted the 2004 conference.
- Mid-South chapter member and STC fellow Leanne Logan (901.489.6473) has volunteered to coach and review proposals from local technical communicators. Leanne has amazing qualifications: she has presented at workshops, on panels, and in progressions during several conferences as well as reviewed many proposals as a conference stem manager.

For more guidelines or to submit your proposal online, go to <http://www.stc.org/52ndConf/Proposal>. But don’t delay!

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From the Editor

by Apryl Cox

One of the most noticeable and beneficial services of the Mid-South chapter is our monthly program meeting. Once a month, members and nonmembers alike have the opportunity to make and maintain contacts with others in the profession and expand our knowledge.

The program committee has been hard at work in the past month to

develop engaging and relevant programs. See the article below about their vision for this year. For details on upcoming programs, check out the front and last pages of *Newsbrief* each month.

On July 12, don't miss the chance to tour the innovative FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis. And invite a friend to this free meeting! ♦

2004–2005 Program Year: Exploring the Future of Technical Communication

by the Mid-South Chapter Program Committee

Do you ever think about your next job? Do you even worry about it? Do you think you'll be working for your current employer for the next 15 years, because everything is going well? Have you done essentially the same thing for 20 years and think you'll be doing it for the next 20?

Unless you're an academic with tenure (and even *that's* no longer a guarantee), you'd better think again. According to Department of Labor statistics, most workers today change jobs 7 to 10 times during their working years (Life advice about changing your job, www.pueblo.gsa.gov/cic_text/employ/change-jobs/changjob.htm, accessed July 7, 2004).

One of the most striking attributes of technical communicators is our adaptability and willingness to take on new tasks and responsibilities. Look at the members of the STC Mid-South chapter: We've written software and hardware documentation, prepared instructional materials, produced videos, written hotel guides, edited scientific journals, documented the inside of jets and elevators, taught budding technical

communicators, produced product catalogs and newsletters, prepared environmental impact statements, consulted with small and large companies, developed online materials, and overseen organizational websites. And these jobs just hit the surface of what we do.

This year, the theme of our programs is "Exploring the Future of Technical Communication." The program committee is developing a series of monthly programs that we hope will intrigue you and the broader Mid-South community alike. In the past, program speakers have included a mix of members and nonmembers—that tradition will continue, with an emphasis this year on nonmember speakers. Our hope is that everyone will have (and take) the opportunity to learn something new.

This year's programs are about your professional development—learning something that isn't in your realm of experience, something that is new, something that challenges you, something that might be the focus of your

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*Creating and supporting a forum for
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Newsbrief

<http://www.stc-midsouth.org>

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization.

Twelve issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year. We create the publication to

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional development and service.
- Foster a sense of community among chapter members and visitors.
- Provide a link between professors and students at local universities.
- Promote the benefits of chapter membership to attract new members.

Submissions

If you would like to contribute an article to *Newsbrief*, submit

- The text portion of the article as a text (TXT), rich text (RTF), or Microsoft Word (DOC) file or as text incorporated within the body of an email.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF. If you choose to use a TIFF, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

Please send all submissions to the editor of *Newsbrief* by the 10th of the month to be considered for the next month's issue.

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Advertising

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Full page.....	\$60
Half page.....	\$40
Quarter page.....	\$20
Business card	\$10

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next job, something that you never dreamed about learning 5 or 25 years ago.

Try a Midyear Resolution: "I'm going to expand my horizons and learn something new that I can do as a technical communicator so that my next job will be even more interesting than my current one."

The program committee (Alison Masilak, Mike Albers, David Arm-

bruster, Elizabeth Boone, Becky Derych, Loel Kim, and Leanne Logan) invites and encourages you to attend the chapter meetings this year, to learn some new concepts, to challenge your brain cells, to stretch toward your future, and to support your colleagues as they do the same.

See you in July (and every month thereafter). ♦

Bring in used cell phones!

After our successful drive last year, the Mid-South chapter is once again collecting used cell phones, batteries, and chargers. These items will be given to Cell Phones for Life, Inc., a nonprofit organization that reprograms phones to call only 911 and distributes them to shut-ins and victims of domestic violence. Help us reach our goal of 50 phones and chargers by May 2005!

June Meeting Notes

by Brian Emerick

At the program meeting on Monday, June 7, Mid-South chapter members Alison Masilak, Apryl Cox, Mike Albers, and Leanne Logan shared their experiences from attending the 51st annual STC conference, held in Baltimore in May. The 10 audience members at the June meeting heard about how this year's conference, "Navigating the Future of Technical Communications," explored new and emerging trends in the field, such as information architecture, e-learning, and single sourcing.

Changes in STC and Information Architecture

Alison, the electronic communications coordinator at University of Memphis, opened the evening's discussion by talking about changes that STC will undergo in the near future, which were reported to members at the conference. For

example, in the next couple of years, the Society plans to provide different levels of membership that may bring down membership dues. Alison, who currently serves as vice president of the Mid-South chapter, also noted that the chapter will be doing a lot to add more value for members. "We hope to see these changes bring in new STC members," she said.

Next, Alison talked about a conference session she attended on the importance of information architecture in creating a website or a simple document. Information architecture sets the organizational goals of a website's page content. She stressed that as the ink and fiber age is progressively moving to the electronic age, it is important for businesses to adopt information

Meeting Notes continued on p. 4

architecture as part of their company's curriculum.

The Expanding Role of Technical Communicators and E-Learning

Apryl, project manager at Physicians Postgraduate Press, shared with the audience what she learned from the conference. She said that a message prevalent at the conference was that technical communicators are no longer expected to perform only one main task, such as writing or editing, but a wide range of tasks. Furthermore, Apryl discussed sessions she attended on e-learning and how creating e-learning projects requires a broad skill set but provides many advantages to the audience. She noted that e-learning can benefit all types of learners (visual, auditory, and tactile), provide instant feedback, and allow users to learn at their own pace.

Trends in Technology

Mike, an associate professor of English at the University of

Memphis, spoke about trends he noticed at the conference. He said that Extensible Markup Language (XML) and single sourcing are fast becoming the preferred methods of many writers, editors, and software developers for streamlining the creation of a variety of technical documents. He explained that, therefore, becoming familiar with these resources could benefit all technical communicators.

Learning and Networking Outside Technical Sessions

Leanne, a usability professional at Quarry Integrated Communications, also recounted her thoughts on this year's STC conference. She reiterated Apryl's discussion about employers expecting more of their employees, especially during the aftermath of corporate layoffs. Leanne added that what she likes best about attending the annual conference is experiencing the diversity of STC and having the opportunity to learn about things outside her comfort zone.

She listed the many benefits the conference provides in addition to technical sessions. For example, she said, "The STC bookstore was a great place to pick up books written by other STC members and to read up on other technical communication areas that I wasn't familiar with before. The trade show booths sold a lot of globalization tools and other software products that are helpful in technical communications." In addition, Leanne mentioned the networking opportunities available at conference, especially at the employment booth, where prospective employees can interview for some positions on the spot.

Leanne also related how after the conference was done for the day, she enjoyed going out with old and new friends to explore the landmarks and food of Baltimore. As she said, "To sum it up, the STC conference represents a global economy with local participation." ♦

Mid-South Member Profile: Leanne Logan, Newly Elected STC Fellow

by Apryl Cox

On Tuesday, May 11, Leanne Logan was honored as a new STC fellow. To become a fellow, Leanne had to be recognized by the nominating committee of fellows and two thirds of the Society board as "worthy of being singled out as one of the select few who have distinguished the Society and the profession." I asked Leanne to share some of her wisdom and experience with the rest of us.

Q: How long have you been a technical communicator?

A: I have been honing my skills as a technical communicator since

1984—that's a long time now. (I hope this kind readership is better at writing than at math and will not figure out how long that translates to.)

Q: How long have you been active in STC?

A: I joined STC in 1991, just as I was graduating with my Master's in Professional Communication, recognizing that STC was both a powerful network to help me become gainfully employed and a great resource for continuing to learn more about this broad and continually expanding field. I've

since learned that the members are also a great world-wide peer group; they help me find solutions to challenges in the field, and many have become life-long friends.

I've volunteered a lot at the chapter level with the Southwestern Ontario chapter, Toronto chapter, and Mid-South chapter; at the national level as leader of the Canadian Issues Committee; and at the international level as a technical publications competition judge, annual conference presenter, and conference stem manager. "Why?"

Member Profile continued on p. 5

you ask. To continue to learn, to share what I know with others, and to work with great leaders and peers.

Q: How much difference is there between the skills you used in your first job as a technical communicator and those you use in your current job?

A: My first job as a technical communicator was as a co-op student (basically, a paid intern) at the University of Waterloo's Arts Computing Office. My role was threefold: to design and offer classes to teach faculty, staff, and students how to use the computer, to offer consulting services on an individual basis, and to prepare technical documents and training materials that supported both these purposes.

Twenty years later (okay, I too have improved my math skills over the years), the things that charge me up are much the same, though the breadth of my skills and subject matter expertise has grown. This profession touches a broad range of industries, enables me to use a large variety of skills, and draws people who are like-minded.

I have taken on a variety of positions as a technical communicator now in 4 countries (Switzerland, Denmark, Canada, and the United States), moving through roles as writer, editor, illustrator (okay, I admit I need help here), designer, trainer, project manager, usability tester, team leader, office manager, client service manager, and account manager.

For the last 7 years, I have been privileged to work as a consultant for many clients (including Hewlett-Packard, Philips Analytical, SunLife, and FedEx). I continue to use many of the skills I did in my first job: as a consultant, I actively

listen and ask the right questions to identify the gaps, determine needs, and recommend a solution; as an instructor/teacher/trainer, I share my knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm with others; and as a communicator, I meet with people and/or prepare documents targeted for the audience.

Q: Do you have any advice for other technical communicators who would like to become more involved and make their mark on the profession?

A: Every community is different. In the Mid-South, I see the employment base as being primarily in healthcare, at FedEx, and in academe. In Waterloo, it was composed of software, pharmacy, and academe, while in Denmark the focus was shared between medical and academe. In the Mid-South, I've observed technical communicators in roles as editors, writers, project managers, and web developers, with less focus on usability, digital design, software or hardware development than in other places I've been. I see more full-time employment opportunities locally, though STC is made up of approximately 50% inde-



During awards night at the annual conference in May, Leanne Logan proudly displays the plaque she received for being named an STC fellow. Her plaque reads "For leadership and vision at the local, regional, and society level; and for advancing the technical communication profession as writer, editor, teacher, usability expert and customer advocate."

pendent consultants, who exercise their freedoms to work at home, work interesting hours, and gain a broad skill set across clients. I think the breadth of subject matter areas, skills, and knowledge that the technical communication profession offers us is exciting. I'm looking forward to my next foray into a new career as a technical communicator, as I'm sure it will open yet one more door into the profession. ♦

August Meeting: Read Up and Speak Out

Join us in August for a new kind of meeting for our chapter—we will discuss 3 recent articles from STC publications in a book club/progression format. We'll use each article to jump-start conversation on a current topic in technical communication.

Working from home/telecommuting/remote teams

"When No One's Home: Being a Writer on Remote Project Teams," Nancy E. Larbi and Susan Springfield, *Technical Communication*, February 2004, pages 102–108

Writing for the web

"Writing for the Web Versus Writing for Print: Are They Really So Different?" Judy Gregory, *Technical Communication*, May 2004, pages 276–285

Editing on-screen

"Implementing On-screen Editing," Geoffrey J.S. Hart, *Intercom*, May 2004, pages 36–37

Each topic will have its own table and moderator; after 20 minutes at a table, you'll be able to move on to share ideas on a different issue. Even if you haven't read the articles, we encourage you to come and participate in the lively discussions!

Upcoming Meetings

Please plan to attend the following upcoming events of the Mid-South chapter.

Unless otherwise noted, meetings cost \$10 (\$5 for students with a valid ID), and cash is requested.

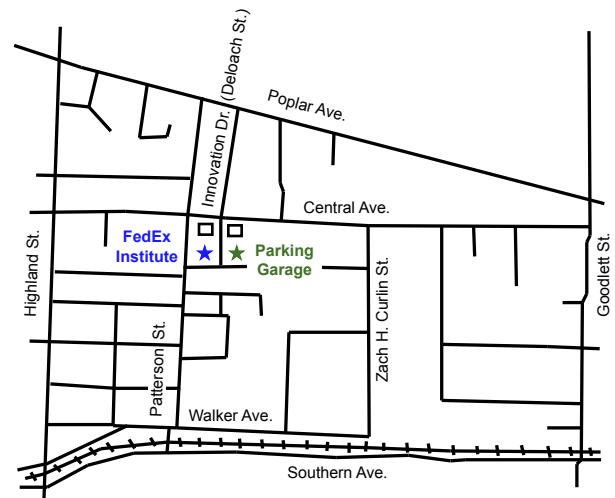
Monday, July 12, 6:00–7:30

Program: Tour of the FedEx Institute of Technology at the University of Memphis

Location: The lobby of the FedEx Institute of Technology, located at 365 Innovation Dr. (formerly Deloach St.), which is off Central Ave. and one street east of Patterson St. (See map.) Note that parking is on your own; however, there is a garage on Innovation Dr. that costs \$1/hour.

Cost: FREE (except for small parking fee)

More information: Note that this meeting is the **second** Monday in July because of the July 4 holiday.



Monday, August 2, 6:00–8:00

Topic: Current topics in technical communication: discussion of recent articles from the STC magazine, *Intercom*, and the journal, *Technical Communication*

Location: The Cottage at the Four Seasons, located at 4930 Park Ave.

More information: To find out which articles will be discussed and more about the format of this meeting, see page 5. Also, check for updates on the meetings page of our website (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/meetings.html>).

Contact Alison Masilak for additional details (ajoyner@memphis.edu or 901.274.0215). ◆



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