



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

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Seminar on November 10: The Future of Online Help

Are you ever frustrated when using online help and wonder what the people who created it were thinking? Are you an online help author who is looking for ways to improve your customers' experience? Take the opportunity to learn about Microsoft's latest approach to authoring online help and improvements that are on the horizon as Char James-Tanny presents "Introducing Windows 'Longhorn' Help" on Wednesday, November 10, from noon to 1:30 p.m.

During this web-telephone seminar and luncheon, Char will describe the help environment for the upcoming Windows operating system code-named "Longhorn." She will address the language used to create the help program, the new viewer and navigation systems the user will experience, how help will solve customers' problems, and how the developments made in Longhorn will influence the future of online help.

As part of the STC remote seminar series, this event allows people around the country to listen live as Char gives her presentation over the telephone and to view her accompanying slides over the web. The Mid-South chapter is the local host.

For our inaugural STC web-telephone seminar, registration cost, which includes lunch, is \$10 for members and \$20 for nonmembers who register by Tuesday, November 9 at 10 a.m. and \$15 for members and \$25 for nonmembers thereafter. To guarantee that you save money and get the lunch option you want, register today at <http://www.stc-midsouth.org>.

This meeting will be held at the Conference Center at Lenox Corporate Park (3175 Lenox Park Blvd., Suite 201). For directions and a map, go to <http://www.stc-midsouth.org>. Check-in, networking, and lunch will begin at 11:30 a.m. The seminar and Q&A with Char will last from noon to 1:30 p.m. After the seminar, you can chat with other attendees until 2:00 p.m. We look forward to seeing you next Wednesday! ♦

Member News

The Mid-South chapter would like to welcome our new members. Anna Acerra, Shana Bramblett, Dianna Crosby, Melissa Faber, and Monika Smyczek are graduate students at the University of Memphis. Paula Kim recently transferred to the Mid-South chapter. Cathy Palmer, a new member, and Jennifer Walker, a former member who recently rejoined, work at Sedgwick Claim Management Service. Take the opportunity to introduce yourself to our new members at the next meeting.

Looking for a Job? Know of One?

Check out the listings of local jobs in technical communication at <http://www.stc-midsouth.org/jobs.html>, or contact the Mid-South chapter employment manager, Paige Marshall, at 901.263.2557 or paige.marshall@fedex.com.

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From the Editor

by Apryl Cox

Throughout this issue of *Newsbrief*, there are articles addressing how the Society and the chapter are looking to improve the value of membership. Below, chapter treasurer Tracy Burgess explains how much money we get from your dues and how we use them. In her meeting notes on page 4, chapter secretary Gail Spake highlights Region 3 Director-Sponsor Beth Tanner's presentation on the transformation of STC. On page 6, Region 1 Director-Sponsor Jonathan Baker asks what STC can do to help you find a job. And on page 7, we've published the results of the Mid-South chapter meeting survey and some of the things the administrative council plans to do in response.

After reading what others have to say, please let members of the administrative council (who are listed to the right) know of any ideas you have for improving the value of STC and chapter membership for yourself and for others.

And I hope see you at our first lunchtime web-telephone seminar on Wednesday, November 10! ♦

You Can Help

Don't forget to bring any working cell phones you no longer use to the next chapter meeting. The Mid-South chapter continues to collect cell phones for Phones for Life, which reprograms the phones to dial only 911 and then distributes them to persons in need. We have about 20 turned in so far, and we need your help to meet our goal of 50 phones by May.

How Membership Dues and Services Affect the Mid-South Chapter Treasury

by Tracy Burgess, Mid-South Chapter Treasurer

Transformation is the buzzword this year in STC, and the administrative council of the Mid-South chapter is working to keep you informed of what the changes caused by transformation mean to you and to our chapter. One of the goals of transformation is to offer members more value for their dues (see "October Meeting Notes" on page 4). I would like to explain how much of your dues the chapter gets, how we spend them, why we generally charge for chapter events, and one of our ideas for providing members greater value.

The major source of chapter funds is the amount of the rebate we get from the Society, that is, the portion of your dues that STC gives the chapter each year. This fiscal year, our chapter is receiving only \$24.00 of the \$145.00 membership cost for each of our regular and senior members and \$10.80 of the \$56 membership cost for each of our student members. Therefore, we will receive about \$1800, which is down from the \$2400 we received last year.

The amount of money the chapter gets from the Society may also be affected by the new membership categories, one of the major changes that comes along with transformation. Starting with your dues renewal in November, you

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Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication

<http://www.stc.org>

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A sharing community creating opportunity

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Newsbrief

Newsbrief is the monthly newsletter of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. We create the newsletter 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.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF (for TIFF, file resolution \geq 150 dots per inch (dpi)).

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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Reprints

Articles published by *Newsbrief* may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter and a copy of the reprint is sent to the *Newsbrief* editor.

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To receive *Newsbrief* (for free) every month, give your email address to the editor.

Advertising

Newsbrief accepts advertisements relevant to technical communicators. Base prices are listed below, and discounts will be given for ads that run in at least two consecutive issues. For more information on how you can reach the more than 100 readers of *Newsbrief*, contact the editor.

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

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will be able to choose which, if any, chapters you belong to. (For more information, go to <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article9.asp>.) Therefore, you could choose to be a member of STC without being a member of our Mid-South chapter. If we have fewer members, we will receive less money from the Society.

Unfortunately, even if the number of our members doesn't decline, we will never receive enough money from Society dues to fully fund all the activities we hold and services we provide throughout the year. For example, we currently spend \$200 each month to rent the Cottage and provide food for our chapter meetings. We have explored many other options but have yet to find a feasible less-expensive venue. Occasionally we like to hold special events that cost even more, like the STC 50th anniversary party we held at the Pink Palace last fall. Our annual career night in April, which is free to attendees, is also expensive to hold, and we pay about \$200 a year for our internet domain registration. Because we are receiving only \$1800 from your dues this year, there is no way that we could afford to hold all our meetings, continue to give each speaker a \$20 honorarium, pay for miscellaneous supplies, and have a website. Therefore, we have been charging \$5 for student admission and \$10 for non-student admission at chapter meetings. On rare occasions, we make a profit; at some meetings, we break even; and at others, we take a loss.

With all this in mind, the administrative council has been brainstorming many options for providing chapter members more value without exceeding our budget. Our first step is to try a change in pricing structure for chapter meetings. At the December meeting, we plan to charge \$5 for student members, \$10 for student non-members, \$10 for non-student members, and \$15 for non-student non-members. After we see how this new pricing structure works, we might have to adjust it to keep our expenses down and your membership value up.

As always, we appreciate your support of the Mid-South chapter and appreciate any feedback you might have. ◆

Share Your Gifts

The holidays are drawing closer, and the Mid-South chapter is planning to celebrate with a gift exchange at our December meeting! We're not talking mugs, tote bags, books, and pens here—we're talking tools and tips. Do you know a great timesaving tip for Microsoft Word? Do you have a killer piece of freeware you stumbled upon that helps you every day? Is there a reference book that you find absolutely indispensable? Are there any websites you frequent that help make you a better technical communicator? If so, we invite you to share this gift with the chapter at the December meeting.

From now until Wednesday, December 1, send your gifts to Apryl Cox at ammcox@yahoo.com. Include the name of your gift, a brief statement about how you use it and why it's so great, and information people will need to retrieve it, such as a URL or publisher and publication date. We'll pool everyone's responses to create a master list for meeting attendees. In addition, you'll have a few minutes to present your gift to the chapter.

Other chapters have compiled similar lists and found them to be a gold mine of great information. We hope this gift exchange will prove just as fruitful for the Mid-South chapter, so send in your favorite tool or tip today!

October Meeting Notes

by Gail Spake, Mid-South Chapter Secretary

On Monday, October 11, 2004, 17 STC members and 2 nonmembers attended our free member appreciation night at the Central branch of the Memphis/Shelby County public library. Beth Tanner, STC Region 3 Director-Sponsor, and Thea Teich, STC Immediate Past President, presented "STC Transformation: What It Means to the Society, the Mid-South Chapter, and You."

Beth opened the meeting by introducing her tradition of taking a gift from one chapter to another to encourage communication among the members of our region. Tracy Burgess won the drawing for a gift bag with books and items related to the space industry from the Huntsville Chapter. Our chapter gave Beth Memphis memorabilia, including Dancing Pigs barbecue sauce, to take to the next chapter she visits.

Next, Beth gave a brief overview of how technical communication has evolved in the past few decades. She noted that when she began her career more than 20 years ago, technical communication was unknown to most professionals. Now people do know about technical communication and widely accept that everyone needs help living with information and technology and that technical communication is fundamental to business. She said that technical communication professionals enjoy more visibility and as a result, are given more high-profile opportunities, and are routinely invited into decision-making forums.

Beth explained that STC's transformation initiative began when leaders realized that our professional society needs to catch up with how our jobs and roles have changed. For example, business and economic models are evolving, and our work world is now global. The society's new vision is to become a community of communities in order to promote the value provided by the many different fields of technical communication. The Society will focus on the goals of maintaining financial stability, increasing value of services to members, promoting membership growth, and being an advocate for members.

The first impact of transformation on the Mid-South chapter and individual members will be expanded membership choices, which are offered on the dues renewal form being mailed in November. Members will be able to choose which, if any, chapters and special interest groups (SIGs) they want to join. They will also be given the option of getting paper or print copies of the Society publications. (For more information, go to <http://www.stc.org/transformation/article9.asp>.)

Each community in STC will also be required to recharter in the next year. Communities, that is, chapters and SIGs, will need to revisit what they want to accomplish and what their mission and focus will be. Rechartering is an opportunity for the community to present how it will offer membership value.

In the near future, STC plans to have a broader range of communities. Currently, only geographic communities (chapters) and SIGs exist, and they receive unequal support from the Society. The goal for the future is to encourage the formation of and provide more balanced support for evolving communities of practice. In addition to communities developed on the basis of where members live, they can also be created around industries we are in, the things we create, and the tools we use.

After Beth's presentation, she and Thea fielded audience questions. One member asked what benefits STC membership offers to students. Beth responded that by joining STC, students can be exposed to our professional community and have opportunities to practice what they are learning in their training programs. She said that a community created specifically for students

might also be organized if

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Glenn Sanders and Beth Tanner wait for the meeting to begin.



Beverly Henderson and Thea Teich discuss life as technical communicators at the October's meeting.

the problem of instable leadership caused by high student turnover could be fixed.

The new requirement of full-time enrollment for student membership was brought up because many students in local academic programs are enrolled part time. Beth explained that an exception process is being developed so that faculty can write letters to the Society on the behalf of part-time students who cannot afford the non-student membership rate.

The value of SIGs was also discussed. Beth and Thea acknowledged what some members have observed: some SIGs are obviously vibrant and valuable, and others are not. As SIGs are required to recharter, Society leaders and other SIG members will be able to identify which SIGs work and which may need to be eliminated. The Society hopes to have summaries of the mission and services of each SIG so that potential members can determine which ones will support their interests. ♦

STC SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication.

Four awards of \$1,000 each will be granted for academic year 2005–2006. The application deadline is February 15, 2005.

Application forms and instructions are available from the STC office:

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203–1822

703.522.4114

<http://www.stc.org/scholarshipinfo.asp>

Highlights of the 2004 Conference of the American Medical Writers Association

by Apryl Cox

From Thursday to Saturday, October 21 to 23, I joined members of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) and others interested in the profession in St. Louis to network and learn. Although I had never been to an AMWA conference, I saw many familiar faces. Several former and current members of the Mid-South chapter of STC and others who frequent our STC chapter meetings were in St. Louis for the AMWA conference. Some locals were also conference presenters. Meg Waters of Physicians Postgraduate Press did her annual workshop on editing the spoken word, and Donald Samulack and Janet Davies of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital presented an open session on how to determine return on investment for scientific editing services.

The keynote address also had a Memphis connection. AMWA president Flo Witte, who formerly worked in the scientific editing department at St. Jude, welcomed conference attendees. Then Dr. Robert G. Webster, a researcher at St. Jude, spoke about "Bird Flu and SARS: The Importance of Scientific Communication." Dr. Webster enlightened, entertained, and somewhat frightened the audience with his presentation on the potential for pandemic influenza. He explained how flu strains continue to evolve and are transferred from wild aquatic birds to domestic poultry and pigs to humans. Then he noted that researchers are behind in developing vaccines, many countries are behind in implementing laws that will prevent the spread of flu from birds to pigs and humans, and the United States is behind in producing vaccines that are already available. Dr. Webster concluded by saying that scientific communicators are integral in resolving these problems because they help researchers clearly convey the need for action to the public and lawmakers.

One of the best features of the AMWA conference is the variety of sessions offered to attendees, and our cost for the conference depends on how much we choose to do. On Thursday and Friday morning, there were more than 30 breakfast roundtables to choose from, with topics ranging from improving proofreading skills to balancing careers in creative and medical writing. I picked up some helpful tips during a roundtable on adapting your style to your audience and another on writing press releases.

On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, attendees could participate in the workshops for which they had pre-registered. Less experienced medical communicators can take eight core workshops (only three can be taken per year) and earn a core certificate in one of five areas: editing/writing, education, freelance, pharmaceutical, or public relations/advertising/marketing. Individuals who have earned a core curriculum certificate or worked for at least 5 years in a relevant field can take eight advanced courses and earn an advanced certificate. This year, I took core courses on organizing the biomedical paper, epidemiology, and anatomy and physiology. I found that instructors were unable to delve as deeply into the topics they were presenting during the 3-hour workshops as I had hoped, but the homework I was required to

AMWA Highlights continued on p. 6

complete before the conference and the materials instructors handed out during workshops alleviated my disappointment.

When we weren't in workshops, we attendees joined in other aspects of the conference. Open sessions gave us the chance to listen to presentations on topics relevant to medical communicators without having to do any work other than listen. Some of the many topics were "How to Get Documents Translated," "Drugs Across Borders: the Basis of the Controversy," and "How to Cope with Stress and Presentation Anxiety." We also had the chance to wander through the poster presentations, booths of vendors, and displays of books written by AMWA members. Outside the conference hotel, we could go on guided tours of St. Louis landmarks, including the Anheuser-Busch Brewery and Forest Park, the site of the 2004 World's Fair.

After experiencing the many facets of the AMWA conference, I think it is a worthwhile experience for medical writers, especially those who don't have a company full of peers like I do at Physicians Postgraduate Press. If you're interested in AMWA and next year's conference, check out <http://www.amwa.org>. And feel free to ask me questions at an STC chapter meeting or via email at ammcox@yahoo.com. ♦

Jobs or Lack Thereof

By Jonathan W. Baker, STC Region 1 Director-Sponsor

Over the years, I've asked and been asked, "Why doesn't STC do more for its members who need jobs?" To which the usual answer has been, "Well, we have chapter and Society job banks, plus chapters often put on résumé-writing programs, job-search programs, and so on." And these are all true. STC provides, through the chapters and special interest groups (SIGs), places to network and to develop leadership skills. And people really do find jobs through STC. I'm certainly one who has.

But I think that this answer misses the point. So try this, "STC is an educational/professional organization. STC is not in the placement business." Still, that doesn't really answer the question either. I think that the real question is, "Can you help me find companies that will buy my services?" And the answer to that question is, "Probably not." But I am not sure I understand why not.

I talked at length with a recruiter once, when times were good, asking about how they found technical communication positions. In those days, it was easy. The jobs found them, like the jobs found many of us. After further poking and questioning, I did come to understand that most of the placement people had people on staff who did nothing but call the companies asking if they had any openings. Basic cold calling stuff. Over time, the placement firms would develop contacts inside companies, who could provide them with meaningful information about any openings.

I was also informed that, because companies come and go so quickly in high tech, that the contact information gets stale quite quickly. In fact, the contact information could go stale in as little as three months. And remember that most placement firms are local, not national or international. If the local placement companies couldn't keep up even with full-time staff, imagine the difficulty of trying to do this at a national level.

Now, mix in the bad times and the downsizing of most human resources departments. All those contacts disappear into the woodwork. People who could be counted on for good information about a company's hiring plans are gone, and the company doesn't want to let on that it won't be hiring anyone in the foreseeable future. This scenario makes finding work doubly difficult.

So, now that I have framed the pain, let me ask, because I am trying to help, how can STC support you in your job searches? Do you need lists of local companies who might be potential customers? Would access to online business directories through STC's website be of value? Do you need training that STC could provide, beyond the type a chapter might provide? Would skills development, like marketing and selling skills, help? Do you see some other ways in which STC can add value? Please let me (jbaker2525@earthlink.net), or any of the other Director-Sponsors, know what we can do in this area that would add value. ♦

Editor's Note: The Mid-South chapter's director-sponsor is Beth Tanner, who can be reached at ds3@stc.org.

Mid-South Chapter Meeting Survey: Results and Responses

Recently, the administrative council asked individuals who read *Newsbrief* and/or attend meetings to complete a survey about our chapter meetings. Twenty-six people responded, and the number who gave each answer and sample comments are outlined below. (Some respondents did not answer some questions, and some chose multiple answers to a single question.) Below each question is a brief response from the administrative council. Thanks to all of you who participated! Although we can't please everyone all of the time, we hope that as we incorporate your suggestions, we'll be able to offer everyone more value for the membership and meeting cost.

1. What time would you prefer to have chapter meetings?

- 15 6 p.m.
- 6 5:30 p.m.
- 4 7 p.m.

Response: For now, we will continue the current schedule: networking from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. and the program from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m.

2. Would you like to continue to have food at meetings?

- 13 Yes
- 10 Doesn't matter
- 2 No

Response: For now, we will continue to offer hors d'oeuvres at meetings held at the Cottage, and we will try to offer a more varied menu.

3. Where would you prefer to meet?

- 12 Doesn't matter
- 7 Other private meeting facility
- 6 Restaurant
- 4 Cottage at the Four Seasons

Response: A little over a year ago, the restaurant at which we had been meeting decided to start requiring that a minimum number of attendees buy meals and instituted a sports night that made the restaurant noisy. After investigating many venues, we began meeting at the Cottage because it is quiet, centrally located, and less expensive than many other locations. We always investigate other options when they are suggested, but we have yet to find any that are centrally located and cost less or about as much as the Cottage. For example, most restaurants require a minimum dollar amount for food and/or gratuity, so we would have to increase the meeting cost.

4. If you do not regularly attend meetings, what is the primary reason?

- 6 Can not make it to evening meetings
 - 6 Other
- Sample comments:
- Mondays tend to be long, hectic work days.
 - I usually work late.

- 3 Topics do not interest me
- 3 Meeting cost

5. If you do not regularly attend meetings, what would entice you to come?

- 6 Better meeting topics
- Sample comments:
- Freelancing
 - Writing grants and journal articles
 - Ethics and etiquette for editors
 - Use of graphics
 - Project management
 - Software tips and/or workshops
 - The range of jobs available for those with professional/technical writing degrees

- 6 Lunch meetings
- 4 Other

Sample comments:

- Transportation
- Better food
- 4 Meetings at a different time of month

Sample comments:

- The rest of the week is not as onerous as Mondays are.
- I usually can't make it at 6:00.
- 2 Reduced cost of meetings

Response: Many of the suggested meeting topics are already scheduled for this program year. For example, in April, we will hold our annual career night, when local technical communicators discuss their jobs. In January or March, the meeting will be on using graphics on the web and in print. The program committee will also refer to the list of suggested topics as they plan future meetings. We hope to offer more workshops, and we would like suggestions for workshop leaders. We are working to have occasional lunch meetings. The chapter will host a web-telephone seminar from noon to 1:30 p.m. on November 10. If that meeting goes well, we might host a daytime seminar on project management in January. However, we need more volunteers to help plan and run daytime meetings because most council members can not make lunch meetings. ♦

Upcoming Chapter Meetings

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

Wednesday, November 10, Noon to 1:30 p.m.

Topic: Introducing Windows “Longhorn” Help

Speaker: Char James-Tanny

Format: Luncheon and web-telephone seminar

Location: Conference Center at Lenox Corporate Park, 3175 Lenox Park Blvd., Suite 201. Lenox Corporate Park is near Kirby Pkwy. and Mt. Moriah Rd. Extd., just off Bill Morris Pkwy. Free parking is available all around the building.

Cost: \$10 for members, \$20 for nonmembers until Tuesday, November 9 at 10 a.m.; \$15 for members and \$25 for nonmembers thereafter

Monday, December 6, 5:30–8:00

Topic: Tools and Tips Gift Exchange

Speakers: Alison Masilak and anyone who brings a tool and/or tip to share

Format: Show and tell

Location: Cottage at the Four Seasons, 4930 Park Ave. The Four Seasons is next door to the Buntyn Cafe and across Park Ave. from Marquette Park. A free parking lot and the entrance are in back.

Cost: \$5 for student members, \$10 for non-student members, \$10 for student non-members, \$15 for non-student non-members

If you would like additional details, visit <http://www.stc-midsouth.org>. If you have ideas for future meeting topics and speakers, contact Alison Masilak (ajoyner@memphis.edu or 901.274.0215). ◆

STC Seeks Competition Submissions and Judges

STC invites you to enter or apply to serve as a judge for one of its international competitions (technical publications, technical art, or online communication), which will be held Saturday, March 12, 2005, in Arlington, Virginia.

The first step to entering an international competition is to enter a chapter competition. Check out <http://www.stc.org/internationalCompetitions.asp> for professional competitions and <http://www.stc.org/studentCompetitions.asp> for student competitions.

As a judge, you will have the chance to get a sneak preview of what your colleagues are doing and an opportunity to network with interesting people. For qualifications and an application, go to http://www.stc.org/internationalCompetitions_JAF.asp. Note that applications must arrive at the STC office by November 30, 2004.

Other Meetings of Interest to Technical Communicators

The Mid-South chapter has received notices about the following events.

November 16–18, 2004

The Memphis Chapter of Project Management International will hold a 3-day preparation course for those taking the Project Management Professional exam. The course will be held at the Hampton Inn Southwind/Hacks Cross. For more information, contact Gertrude Moeller at gmoeller1@fedex.com or go to <http://www.pmimemphis.org>.

November 17, 2004

The Scientific Editors’ Roundtable will hold a meeting on “Conflicts and Ethical Dilemmas in Scientific Publication: Lessons Learned from the CSE Retreat.” The free event will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. at the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science, 9190 Crestwyn Hills Dr., Memphis. For more information, contact Don Samulack at 901.495.2162.

February 25–26, 2005

Currents 2005, the STC Atlanta chapter’s annual conference, will be held at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University. Registration is ongoing, and the deadline for submitting a proposal for a presentation is November 22. For more information, contact conference manager Rachel Grimes at rgrimes@checkfree.com or Leigh Richardson at lrichardson@intellisync.com or 678.802.1226. Complete conference information, is posted at <http://www.stcatlanta.org>.

May 8–11, 2005

The 52nd annual conference of STC, Experiencing Technical Communication, will be held in Seattle, Washington. For more information, go to <http://www.stc.org/conference.asp>. ◆