



# Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

## Creating Information from a Single Source

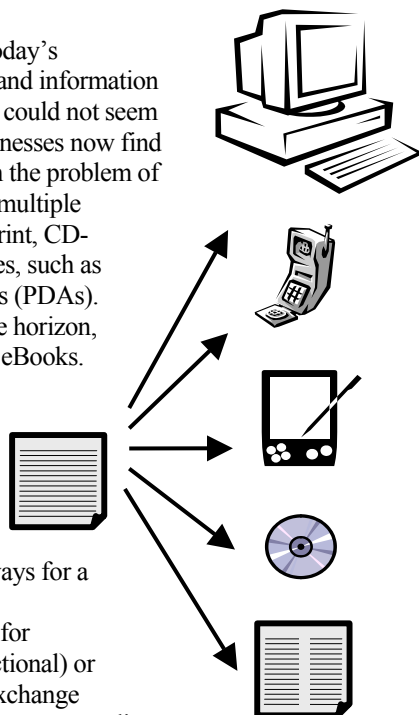
by Scott Thompson

Until the late 1980's, businesses for the most part delivered information to their customers in print. Whether the information consisted of product catalogs, data sheets, operating manuals, training materials, service guides, or reference publications, print was the dominant medium. Electronic information was a topic of science fiction.

From the perspective of today's communication channels and information requirements, the contrast could not seem greater. In fact, most businesses now find themselves grappling with the problem of delivering information to multiple types of media — Web, print, CD-ROM, and wireless devices, such as Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs). And, there are more on the horizon, including cell phones and eBooks.

E-business is enhancing interactions between buyers and sellers across all industries. With respect to the Internet, there are two prevailing ways for a business to use a Web site nowadays: either as a site for product exchange (transactional) or as a site for information exchange (informational). Businesses are spending millions to build e-business infrastructure with the goals of increasing market share by improving customer interactions, and reducing their costs by integrating disparate business systems, both internally and across their supply chains.

Much of the focus of e-business investment has been on automating the flow of transactions, such as inventory checks, price checks, purchases, and sales. Many businesses have pretty much disregarded the challenge of automating the flow of information. And, ironically, the exchange of information in many instances has driven new purchases, repeat purchases as



well as the resolution of post-purchase challenges, such as learning, operating, and servicing the products sold.

Furthermore, the Web experience has rapidly increased consumers' expectations of information quality — accuracy, freshness, and usability. Consumers now demand instant gratification: they are too impatient to dig through a glut of irrelevant content only to find information that's out of date, incomplete or simply inaccurate. For businesses seeking to become e-businesses, the implications of failing to meet customers' informational needs have become paramount.

Join the Mid-South chapter as we welcome Jim Green, District Sales Manager for Arbortext, Inc., on Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road. During our meeting, Mr. Green will discuss the opportunities and challenges of creating a single source of information that automates the personalization and delivery of relevant, meaningful information to all audiences on all media (i.e., not just the Internet).

The meeting will begin at 6:00 p.m. A barbecue buffet dinner will be offered at a cost of \$10.00/person, which includes tax and gratuity.

## Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

It's no secret that medical practices and health insurance companies don't always agree. Sometimes, written correspondence can play a role in resolving these conflicts.

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Susan Popham, assistant professor of English at the University of Memphis, has studied correspondence between medical offices and insurance companies.



During our November meeting, she shared her findings with the 23 attendees. What Popham discovered is that in order for the correspondence to be effective, the writer must reach beyond the one-dimensional model for writing — prewrite, write, revise, and edit.

She illustrated the ineffectiveness of the one-dimensional model by showing a letter from a medical office that was effective in reversing an insurance company decision. The letter was filled with grammatical and spelling errors that would curl a technical communicator's toes, but it was still effective. Errors in writing, Popham found, did not keep the letters from being effective — no amount of revision would have changed the outcome.

According to Popham, effective letters were ones that reached beyond the one-dimensional model in which writing is a process, and that considered the audience, speaking persuasively to that audience. In the successful cases, writing as a process took a back seat to the message the letters conveyed to the insurance companies.

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## From the President's Chair

by Nell Johnson

This is the first in a series of articles that will explain the various positions that make up the Mid-South chapter's

administrative council. These articles are intended to aid our membership in understanding the role that the council plays in the organization, the community, and the STC at large. As I approach the mid-point of my term in office, this is also a good time for me to renew my "vows" to the organization in addition to making my responsibilities known.

The president heads the administrative council and directs all the operations of the chapter. This sounds like a huge responsibility, but with the right people working together, it has not been difficult.

The president also ensures that the chapter:

- has regularly scheduled program meetings for the membership — at least five per year. The Mid-South chapter has nine dinner meetings, and that number will increase to twelve during the 2002 calendar year.
- recruits new members. At our meetings and in our professional lives, the Mid-South chapter encourages communicators to consider membership.
- has regular meetings of the administrative council to handle the chapter's business. Our council meets monthly at a restaurant or a council member's home. We recently decided to hold these meetings two weeks before the program meeting. In the past, the meetings have been held the week before.

- has fiscal controls by means of approved budgets and expenditures, and fiscal operations in accordance with STC guidelines. The administrative council must approve all expenditures.
- submits annual activity reports to the director-sponsor and annual fiscal reports to the Society treasurer. I keep our director-sponsor apprised of our activities every 4 months.
- complies with IRS requirements regarding annual information returns. Our finances are impeccable.
- appoints a nominating committee to hold the annual election of chapter officers. These occur every year in April and May.

In addition, the president:

- assigns duties to other officers soon after their election.
- suggests schedules for ongoing chapter programs — both within the Society and in collaboration with other professional groups.
- explores topics for the coming year's meetings with the vice president and other officers.
- appoints special assistants or committees for specific tasks not easily managed by standing committees.

**The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication — it is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.**

**Membership in STC offers opportunities to learn new job skills, network with other technical communicators, and broaden your professional horizons. To learn more about what the STC has to offer, visit:**

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

- applies and maintains controls for budgets, expenditures, and other fiscal activities, and, together with the treasurer, signs all chapter checks.
- reviews the content of the chapter newsletter before publication.
- writes articles and monthly columns for the chapter newsletter.
- leads the formulation of goals and policies for the chapter.
- contacts committee managers periodically to obtain status/activity reports for submission to the chapter officers.

According to the Society, personal qualities that the president should have include enthusiasm, energy, responsiveness, graciousness, and good problem-solving and listening abilities. I try to maintain these qualities, but I'm sure that, at times, I have not measured up. Fortunately, the other officers and managers have stepped in with help and advice at just the right time.

And finally, as the *STC Chapter Handbook* states, the president must have a vision for the chapter. My vision is to build a solid — yet adaptable — basis for steady growth of the Mid-South chapter, with utmost respect for each individual member and the profession. I expect to accomplish this in these three ways.

**Dinner Program Meetings.** To provide stability and predictability, we're only offering dinner program meetings, which occur at the same time and place, opening the meeting up to the many members who cannot possibly attend lunch meetings. Last year, I found that I couldn't get away for lunch meetings on a regular basis and knew that there were others in the same situation. Anyone in our geographic area can attend an evening meeting if the STC is a high priority, which makes it the most democratic option in my opinion.

**Positive Communications and Recognition.** I promote positive communications within our administrative council and committees. Collectively, we need to support each other and recognize our efforts. Make pats on the back frequent and well deserved. Confront issues, not people.

**Stability through Diversity.** We must adapt to changing trends in our membership and profession without reacting haphazardly to short-term fluctuations. To keep our organization vital and durable, we need to continuously reach out to members and potential members in a wide variety of technical writing areas, such as software, medicine, and academia. We cannot cater to only one type of Mid-South communicator or employer and forget that we have a broad constituency with untapped potential.

At this point in my term in office, I'd have to say that serving as the president of our organization has been a lot easier and more satisfying than I ever would have thought. The professionalism, teamwork, and dedication of our officers and managers inspire me, and I am highly complimented that you have chosen me to lead you this year.

Thanks, and hope to see you at the next program meeting!

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## An Eavesdropping Editor Attempts to Rescue Language

by Rebecca Marsh

As writers, we pay attention to how words sound to both our eye and our ear. Does this word make sense in this particular context? What is being left unsaid that we think others want to hear?



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

*Designing the future of technical communication*

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*A sharing community creating opportunity*

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As editors, we are much more critical with language. Has the writer been clear enough to allow anyone, regardless of familiarity, to understand the topic? Has the unsaid portion left too many holes for the audience to put together the rest of the story? Have all the bases been covered, the i's dotted, and the ambiguities cleared up? With oral and written communication, we as technical communicators have a say in how words affect the audience.



One of my favorite activities in the midst of a business meeting, when everyone is being serious and is focused on the updates given from each department, involves recording statements that leave out some vital piece of information. When asked when one particular book order would arrive at its destination, one woman said, "The week of the 18th through the 28th." Did we know what she meant? Of course. Is that really how she wanted to convey that information, by insinuating that some weeks consist of ten days instead of seven? Let's hope not!

When one listens with a critical ear, one notices that statements like "Orlando should be on the West Coast" are taken at face value and not called into question. We can talk about our favorite restaurants at lunch, and declarations like "I've eaten most of the menu" do not phase the rest of the table. When we put our eavesdropping machine to work, we hear such confessions as "It rolls off me like water on a duck" and still understand what the speaker means without having to analyze her particular choice of words. We've grown comfortable with allowing the context of the conversation to fill in the gaps.

While there are some things for which we forgive speakers because of the rapid nature of conversation and thought processes, there is no room in written language for these same sorts of errors and a comparably forgiving audience. When a client modifies a statement with "the entire New England region, which comprises eight offices in Boston, upstate New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Utah," we start to look askance. When companies mark out the phrase "non-organized business" and change it to "un-organized business," we as editors have to laugh at today's readers who really think that the two prefixes mean the same thing regardless of context. Do writers really know what is going on with our language? When we can say things like "He wants to go to Oklahoma and Texas and shoot American Indians," are we allowing the discourse community to dictate what words are appropriate in regards to some subjects (in this case, photography) that would be thrown out in others? The power of language is still the same, and we need to remember that when we speak and write and read.

Educated people always have the most interesting things to say, if one is willing to listen to more than just their words. What is

being said and the context in which it is being said are important, and we as amateur and professional communicators alike have learned to rely more heavily on context to get us through our conversations that we ought to. When one can say something like "They depend on us to cross our i's," we know that language, our most important means of communicating, has been pushed to its limits.

As I continue my quest to record just such off-the-cuff statements, I find that my worst enemy is public knowledge. Since not all speakers can watch their words as diligently as I can watch their words, I am safe in my quest to show that linguistic faux pas will be alive as long as eavesdroppers and language enthusiasts can maintain their course. And write down those comments that are just plain funny.

*[Editor's note: Rebecca's maiden name is Farabough, and she's one of our chapter's newest members. See "Welcome New Members!" in last month's issue of Newsbrief (Volume 19, Number 8).]*

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## Letters to the Editor

The following message was posted to the Mid-South chapter's Web site (<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>) on November 14, 2001.

Please pass along a compliment for me to your newsletter volunteers. I have been surfing STC chapter Web sites for a couple of days doing research for a best practices project I'm working on and came across your chapter's newsletter. I am very impressed. The content, layout, use of color, all around professionalism is a credit to your chapter and to the volunteers. Well done. I'll be back to read more next month!

Deb Lockwood  
STC Senior member  
Region 7, Rocky Mountain chapter

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## Editor's Note

*by Scott Thompson*

Print is perilous! Let me explain what I mean. Woodworkers have a saying, "measure twice, cut once." And, after my experience with last month's newsletter, I now think copy editors need to embrace a similar ethic; a statement that drives them to check and re-check spelling, grammar, and word usage alike. Something like, "Check your copy ad nauseam, print it once." (Well, okay, so word choice is not my forte.)

You see, as the *STC Chapter Handbook* states, "The newsletter editor...assumes joint responsibility [along with the chapter president] for the quality, accuracy, and content of the newsletter." And, last month, in my own article promoting the

Mid-South chapter's November program meeting, I improperly used the word "affect," marring my editorial integrity forever. The sentence read, "During our meeting, Ms. Popham will discuss her research into the *affect* that written communications between medical practitioners and health insurance companies has on patient care." And, call me indecisive, but earlier in the month, I had submitted another version of this same article to Joe Lakey to upload to the Meetings Section of the chapter's Web site. In this version, the sentence read, "During our meeting, Ms. Popham will discuss her research into the *effect* that written communications between medical practitioners and health insurance companies has on patient care." Likewise, I posted yet another version of the article to the chapter's YahooGroups site, which read, "During our meeting, Ms. Popham will discuss her research into the *influence* that written communications between medical practitioners and health insurance companies has on patient care."

Affect, effect or influence? Well, I know the answer to this question is somewhat subjective, but suffice it to say, "affect" is definitely incorrect, and that's the word I used in the newsletter. I'd love to blame the Spelling and Grammar function in Microsoft Word, but it's not programmed to handle such word-usage problems.

So, instead of boring you with further analyses of my mistake, let me just apologize, and offer you the following words of wisdom — the lesson that I learned from this experience: Web publishing is too forgiving. It has a tendency to make you let your editorial guard down. After all, if you publish a Web page that contains a mistake, all you have to do is correct the mistake and re-publish the page. I volunteered to edit *Newsbrief* this year for this very reason. I felt it would afford me the opportunity to do something that I don't do at work — to edit a print publication rather than a Web site. The opportunity to sharpen my editing skills. At the heart of STC lies the pursuit of professional development. And the irresistible virtue of doing things right. Print is perilous! It requires an editor to exercise far more discretion than the Web does. So, I profess, "Check your copy ad nauseam, print it once."

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## Contrasting Indexers with Technical Writers

by Bill Graham

Professional indexers often work alone and their projects begin after the book has gone through most of its editorial changes. Consequently, product changes, marketing decisions, and document edits are less likely to hamper them. The indexer's routine sets the rate of progress once the final drafts arrive.

Many technical writers collaborate with other professionals and write during the development cycle. Changes come down daily and the technical writer must react. Frequently, the technical writer is also the indexer of the documentation. Sometimes one writer authors the manual while another indexes it.

Initially, the indexer appears to have some advantages over the technical writer. The indexer, however, must work fast. Any extra time taken by the indexer holds up the project. The technical writer also has to work fast, but setbacks in other departments may furnish extra time for edits and improvements. The most challenging situation I've encountered is to index while another author edits the manual. You don't know what you might have to change after the other author's edit. Ideally, you index the manual after it reaches stability. If you don't assign projects, however, you have to optimize a chaotic situation. I don't have any perfect solutions, but I'll share my thoughts with you.

Wait until the manual is fairly stable before you attempt to index it. It's not practical to index early in the project. You may have to move, edit, or eliminate hundreds of

## Newsbrief

*Newsbrief* is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Nine issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year (September through May). We create the publication to:

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional development and service.
- Foster a sense of community amongst chapter members and visitors.
- Provide a link between professors and students at local universities and professionals within local industry.
- 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) or Microsoft Word (DOC) file, or as text incorporated within the body of an e-mail;
- Photos as Joint Photographer's Interest Group (JPEG) files; and
- Line art as Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) or Windows Meta-File (WMF) files.

Of course, we are more than willing to accept images (photos and line art alike) as Tagged Image File Format (TIFF) files, since these files are ideal for print. If you choose to submit a TIFF, however, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

To ensure that we publish articles within a timely fashion, we ask that you submit your articles by the tenth of each month for the coming month's issue. Send all submissions to the editor of *Newsbrief*.

### Copyright

*Newsbrief* invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Please note, however, that, by submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to *Newsbrief* to run your article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is nonetheless held by the writer. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

### Reprints

Articles published by *Newsbrief* may be reprinted in other STC publications if (1) credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter, and (2) a copy of the reprint is sent to the *Newsbrief* editor.

### Editor

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markers later. Conversely, you need to be practical about your indexing estimates. A three-day project for an indexer may be a two-week project for a technical writer.

Expect product and documentation changes to affect your index entries anyway. If you have to index early in the edit phase, go for a macroscopic rather than a microscopic approach. Look at higher-level topics to mark tasks and other pertinent information. In the initial release, consider producing an index that meets your minimal standards. In the next revision, make substantial improvements.

Develop a consistent way to handle indexing projects. If you work alone, you may need a set of procedures to defend your decisions. If you work in a department, you will need the procedures for the additional purposes of reducing maintenance and increasing consistency between several authors.

*[Editor's notes: Reprinted with permission of the Palm Beaches chapter STC. Bill Graham is a member of the Suncoast chapter STC, the American Society of Indexers, and Past Editor of the Upcoming Events in the A to Z Indexing SIG Newsletter.]*

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## Chapter Scholarship Continues to Grow Because of Members' Money, Time, and Effort

by Margaret Carbaugh

If it takes a whole village to raise a child, it certainly takes a whole chapter to raise funds for a scholarship. At least that has been my experience in the 10 years that I've been involved in the Mid-South chapter's efforts to fund a scholarship for students at the University of Memphis.

Efforts began almost a decade ago with the first of several chapter-supported seminars — a newsletter workshop for nonprofit groups, developed in 1993 by Bruce Speck and Mary Sue MacNealy, two

University of Memphis professors. Bruce is now Vice President for Academic Affairs at Austin Peay College, while Mary Sue is our chapter treasurer. Our profit from the seminar was generously supplemented by an anonymous STC member so the chapter could buy a certificate of deposit and start the scholarship fund, which grew to \$25,000 this year, when we were able to make our first award.

Additional early efforts included two successful professional development seminars, which also helped us gain valuable exposure in the local community and expand our membership. Based on these efforts, Mark Hanigan — our Region 3 Director-Sponsor at the time — nominated the Mid-South chapter for a Distinguished Chapter Award in 1996.

Thanks to Mary Sue MacNealy, who has served as our chapter treasurer for several years, we have the following details on the history of our scholarship: the scholarship was established in October 1999 with the \$17,000 generated by the CDs where we deposited the scholarship money after each fund-raising activity. From October 1999 to the spring of 2001, the chapter raised enough money and interest to increase the fund to \$25,000. The chapter awarded its first scholarship this year. Details on this coming year's scholarship are available on our Web site and in the last issue of *Newsbrief* (Volume 19, Number 8, November 2001).

This year, scholarship fund-raising efforts have included a document design workshop, presented by Dr. Karen Schriver, the author of *Dynamics in Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers* (The October 2001 issue of *Newsbrief* includes a detailed description of the workshop). Thanks to everyone who helped make the workshop a success. It was wonderful to have the support of the many chapter members and visitors who attended. The Mid-South chapter recognizes that many organizations did not underwrite their employees' participation this year, making attendance in the workshop even more of a personal investment in our chapter and its scholarship program.

### Timeline of Scholarship Fund-Raising Activities

1993	Newsletter Workshop
1995	Usability Workshop
1996	Online Documentation Workshop
1997	Designing User Interfaces Workshop
1998-1999	Publications Competition
1998-1999	Used Book Sales
1999	Book Signing, <i>Strategies for Empirical Research in Writing</i> , Dr. Mary Sue MacNealy
1999	Indexing Seminar
1999-2000	Individual Member Donations
2000	Countrywood Neighborhood Yard Sale
2001	Sale of Left-Over Yard Sale Items on eBay
1999-2000	STC Grants
2001	Document Design Workshop

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## Scholarships for Technical Communication

by Lenore S. Ridgway, Manager, STC Scholarship Committee, and Associate Fellow, Mid-Hudson Chapter

STC is now offering scholarships for the 2002-2003 academic year, and once again we are looking for qualified applicants. Please think about whether you might be eligible for a scholarship or whether you know someone who should be encouraged to apply for one. As the skills and knowledge needed in the field of technical communication continue to grow, the education of technical communicators becomes more important. For the future of STC

and the profession of technical communication, students must be encouraged to develop their abilities and expertise.

STC awards scholarships to students who are enrolled full-time in undergraduate or graduate technical communication programs and studying for an academic or industrial career in technical communication.

Technical communication includes graphical and online information presentation as well as written and oral communication. It may include "smart programs" or expert systems development, in which the candidate's concern is the presentation of information rather than computer programming. It does not include ordinary journalism, general broadcasting or fine arts.

For the 2002-2003 academic year, STC will award fourteen scholarships, seven to undergraduates and seven to graduate students enrolled in a full-time technical communication program. All scholarships are for the same amount (\$2,000), which is paid directly to the school. The scholarships may be used for tuition or other expenses that the school will pay.

Applicants need not be STC members. They must have completed one year of post-secondary education before fall 2002. Students completing an undergraduate degree are eligible to apply for their first year of graduate school.

Students will be evaluated on their potential for contributing to the technical communication profession, on their accomplishments as technical communicators, on their academic records, on the content of their application letters, and on recommendations of faculty members. Individual financial need is considered when applicants are judged comparable in the preceding areas. Usually, students are granted only one year of the scholarship, but those who have received the scholarship in the past are not disqualified from applying again.

To apply, students must submit a completed application package, including a description of their accomplishments and goals. Students can obtain application information from the STC Web site, the STC office in Arlington, Virginia, or they can contact me (addresses given below). The package must be received by February 15, 2002.

Please promote the use of STC scholarships by applying or encouraging others to do so. The scholarships are one of the ways we can continue to improve our profession.

Lenore S. Ridgway  
19 Johnston Avenue  
Kingston, NY 12401  
(845) 339-4927 (voice and fax)  
*leerichard@compuserve.com*

## Welcome New Members! (Well, Sort of...)

by Scott Thompson

On Thursday, November 1, 2001, Sarah Catherine Hollister was born to Brett and Amy Hollister — our very own vice president. Sarah weighed 8 pounds, 4 ounces, and was 20-inches long. The Mid-South chapter wishes to congratulate the Hollister family on a job well done!



## Treasurer's Report

by Mary Sue MacNealy

This financial report reflects the balance for our treasury as of November 30, 2001.

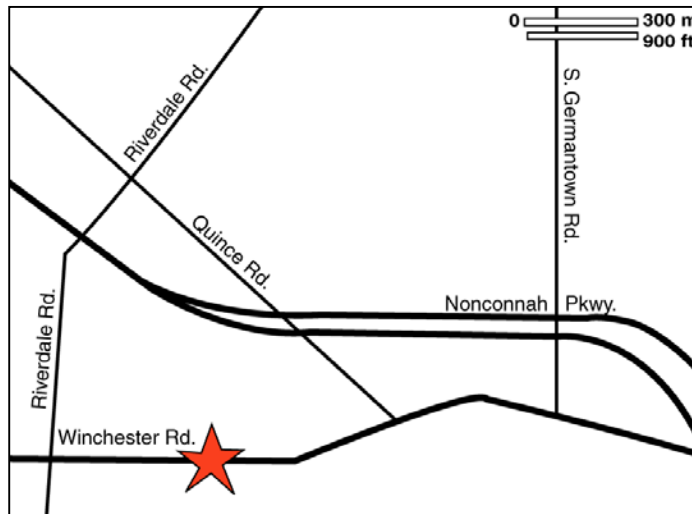


<b>Previous Cash Balance (As of October 29, 2001)</b> .....	<u>\$3,156.88</u>
<b>Income</b>	
Interest on account .....	\$0,003.49
Refund of design workshop deposit .....	\$0,510.50
<b>Total Income</b> .....	<u>\$0,513.99</u>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Expenses for design workshop .....	\$1,165.00
Fee for speaker .....	\$0,550.00
Scholarship donation .....	\$0,550.00
Graceland tickets .....	\$0,065.00
Dinner for three (3) guest speakers .....	\$0,030.00
<b>Total Expenses</b> .....	<u>\$1,195.00</u>
(Total income less total expenses) .....	\$0,681.01 (-)
<b>Current Cash Balance</b> .....	<u>\$2,475.87</u>

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## Meeting Reminder

**What:** December (Dinner) Meeting  
**When:** Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6:00 p.m.  
**Speaker:** Jim Green, District Sales Manager for Arbortext, Inc., "Creating Information from a Single Source"  
**Where:** Pig-N-Whistle  
7144 Winchester Road  
(901) 754-4400  
**Menu:** Barbecue buffet (not just barbecue!), dessert, and drink (tea and water)  
**Cost:** \$10.00, including tax and gratuity



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

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