



SOCIETY FOR  
TECHNICAL  
COMMUNICATION

# Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

Volume 19, Number 6

September 2001

## Kicking Off The 2001-2002 STC Season

by Nell Johnson, President

We're getting ready to start another wonderful year for the Mid-South chapter. And, with your help, we can make this organization everything we need and want it to be: moral support, excellent advice, just-in-time information, professional and social contacts, continuing education, professional tips – even fun, food, and laughter! I'd like to outline some of our vital statistics and planned activities. Plan to join in as often as your schedule permits!



The Mid-South chapter has 70 active members in the Memphis area (roughly the same as Nashville), and frequently chalks up 25-plus attendees at our monthly meetings. After a summer hiatus, on September 10<sup>th</sup>, we will begin our regular monthly meetings at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road (See the back page of this newsletter for meeting specifics). For the 2001-2002 season, all the program meetings will be dinner meetings. I found that I could not get away for lunch meetings on a regular basis, and knew that there were others in the same situation. I hope that those of you who prefer the lunch meetings understand.

In the past, we have provided useful and entertaining programs and seminars, with guest speakers who not only inform, but also challenge us. And, the programs we've lined up for this season show just as much promise. Some of our speakers for the 2001-2002 season include:

- Scott Thompson, Web Content Developer for AutoZone Incorporated (our very own newsletter editor), will tell us about his company's efforts to provide the do-it-yourself market with what it takes to do the job right.
- Eric Keszler, Director of Communications for Ducks Unlimited, will discuss the role that technical communications plays in Ducks Unlimited's conservation efforts.
- Dr. Susan Popham from the University of Memphis will speak about medical writing.

- Dr. Karen Schriver, a well-known author and technical communicator, will offer a document design workshop in October (See page 4 for more details).
- Jim Green, District Sales Manager for Arbortext, will show us a software solution for publishing a single source of information to the Web, print, CD-ROM, wireless devices, and other delivery channels.

We also have a few surprises! A revival of the Show and Tell Program is underway for February or March, possibly. Attendees can bring in some of their favorite projects and explain how they were produced, why they were a success, problems they encountered while working on the projects, and so on.

The Mid-South chapter has several areas of activity that make up or support the brunt of what we do, which include:

- Fund Raising – Margaret Carbaugh, Chair
- Employment – Steve Gillespie, Coordinator
- Newsletter – Scott Thompson, Editor
- Scholarship – Mike Albers, Chair
- Web Site – Joe Lakey, Webmaster

Here's where you get involved with your local STC. You can help us in any of the areas that fit your schedule and abilities. You can even make a "stretch" into an area in which you'd like more experience. For example, if Web weaving is one of your strengths, or if you'd be willing to quickly learn, Joe Lakey would like to have some help with the Web site. Margaret Carbaugh has a lot going on with Fund Raising, where there are

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numerous opportunities for those who wish to help with one-time efforts. If you'd like to write an article for the newsletter, Scott Thompson would be more than happy to put your name in print. And, we need a Chair for our Hospitality Committee, a wonderful job for an out-going person who enjoys greeting and talking with newcomers. We also need a Chair for our Publicity Committee, which is an excellent opportunity for someone who wants to do, or learn to do, press releases and to promote the chapter within the local media. So, if any of these activities interest you, please let me, or any of the other chapter officers and organizers, know.

I encourage you to attend program meetings, join committees, and get involved! The Mid-South chapter is a friendly group of people who take their profession seriously. In over a decade of technical communication experience, I can say that involvement in the local STC has been my most professionally rewarding extra-curricular activity. I have gained new friends, perspectives, and overall enrichment. And sometimes, especially on a Monday, it feels really good to be with people who face the same problems you do, fight the same fights, see the same workplace ironies, "get" the same jokes, and know that we're adding value – through communication and understanding – in our own worlds.

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## Special Speakers, Settings Highlight STC's 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference

*by Ed Rutkowski (Photographs by  
John Nash)*

Featuring approximately 240 technical sessions, forty-seven vendor exhibits, and several receptions and professional luncheons, STC's 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference welcomed nearly 2,300 technical communicators from all over the world to Chicago, Illinois, May 13-16, 2001. The wide variety of technical sessions and exhibits, many devoted to the advanced technology that continues to transform the profession, reflected the promise of



**Mid-South Chapter 2001-2002 Officers (Left to Right) - Nell Johnson, President; Amy Hollister, Vice President; Alison Joyner Masilak, Secretary; and Mary Sue MacNealy, Treasurer.**

this year's theme, "2001: A Global Communication Odyssey."

In keeping with the cinematic allusion in the theme, familiar figures from popular science fiction, including Darth Vader and Chewbacca, greeted attendees at the conference Welcome Reception on Sunday, May 13. Billowing smoke reminiscent of sci-fi movies obscured the entrances to the Hyatt Hotel's Regency Ballroom, which was decorated with cardboard likenesses of characters from the Star Wars and Star Trek series. On center stage a blues band paid tribute to Chicago's musical heritage. Conference attendees soon crowded the dance floor. Senior member Barb Hermans of the Wisconsin chapter was one of many who enjoyed the festive atmosphere. "This is a new look for the conference," Hermans said. "It's a real party, a great way to start off a great week."

The conference officially began on Monday, May 14, when outgoing STC president Mark Hanigan addressed attendees at the Opening Session. Hanigan honored this year's president's award recipients, Elizabeth Babcock and Jeffrey L. Hibbard, by cueing a video collage of pictures encompassing their careers in technical communication. The president's award acknowledges persons or institutions that have made distinguished contributions to the profession or the Society. Babcock was cited for her years of service to STC in many capacities, and Hibbard for his roles on the STC board and as the

Society's ambassador to the International Council for Technical Communication (INTECOM).

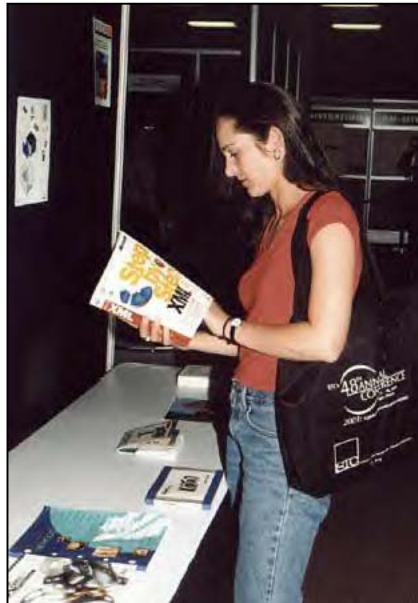
Following the presentation of the president's awards, Linda Oestreich, manager of the honorary fellow nominating committee, introduced this year's honorary fellow, David T. Suzuki. An award-winning environmentalist, scientist, and broadcaster, Suzuki is best known as host of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's *The Nature of Things*, a television show about human interaction, the natural and physical sciences, and the development of technology. Suzuki was filming in the Arctic and unable to attend the conference, but an excerpt from a video about his life gave attendees an understanding of his background and speaking prowess. In this presentation, Suzuki attributed much of his success to the dedication and coaching of his father, who had stressed the importance of discipline and practice when preparing a public address. "Being able to speak in public in a way that is passionate and powerful gives you enormous power," Suzuki said.

After the film, Oestreich yielded the stage to Michelle Ratcliffe, assistant to the president for competitions, who introduced the managers of this year's technical art, technical publications, and online competitions. Each manager presented a Best of Show award to the top winners of each competition. George Hayhoe, editor of *Technical*

Communication, announced the winner of this year's Frank R. Smith outstanding journal article award. Then Tony Caruso, manager of the conference program committee, introduced the opening session speaker, DeWitt Jones.

Jones, a professional photographer and speaker who had addressed attendees at STC's 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas, expressed his gratitude to "the STC family" for inviting him to return. Referring to his experiences as a filmmaker and long-time photographer for National Geographic, Jones discussed his approach to creativity and how to apply its lessons to everyday life. "Creativity is the moment when we look at the ordinary and see the extraordinary," he said, as he displayed slides of photographs he had taken for National Geographic. Describing the tremendous effort and dedication required to produce a single image, Jones counseled the audience to meet the challenges of work and home with similar dedication and passion, to approach problems as if they were opportunities, and to accept the philosophy that each problem has more than one right answer. "Life," he said, "is about continuously finding the next right answer." Jones' address struck a chord with conference attendees, who gave him a standing ovation. Yvonne E. de Bulnes of the Toronto chapter commented, "I loved his ideas about passion and creativity, and the way he applies them not just to work but to life."

Following the opening session, attendees filtered throughout the Hyatt Hotel to attend technical sessions and browse through the offerings of the STC Bookstore. In the Exhibit Hall, conference-goers examined the winning entries of STC's technical art, technical publications, and online competitions and sought information from exhibitors about the latest products for technical communicators. Pleased with what he saw, senior member Robert Frick of the St. Louis chapter declared that the exhibitors had given him "very helpful information. Everyone I've talked to has been able to answer all my questions." Scott Coykendall of the Northern New England chapter concurred: "I'm



impressed with the wide variety of exhibits. There's a nice mix of tools and services."

Capitalizing on attendees' curiosity, eHelp Corporation introduced two new software packages, RoboHelp Enterprise and RoboInfo Enterprise, at the conference. The programs monitor feedback to online help systems and intranet sites, respectively, providing data on the kinds of questions users or employees ask and the frequency with which they ask those questions. Earlier in the week, eHelp gave a sneak preview of these products to the San Diego chapter STC.

On Monday, May 14, a special evening reception was held at Chicago's Field Museum of National History. Famous for housing "Sue," the world's largest and most complete Tyrannosaurus Rex skeleton, the Field Museum proved a stimulating location for socializing. The museum also offered exhibits on ancient Egypt, Japanese lacquer art, and African culture. Attendees enjoyed roaming the exhibits and returning to buffet stations. Marianne Madsen of the Intermountain chapter expressed the sentiments of many: "It's worth every penny to have the entire museum to ourselves, to be able to wander around freely. The last time I was here [in the Field Museum], it was packed with schoolchildren on field trips, so this is great. The food is wonderful



SOCIETY FOR  
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*Designing the future of technical communication*

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Region 3 Director-Sponsor..... Rob Houser

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*A sharing community creating opportunity*

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and the [architecture of the] building is really impressive."

The Honors Reception and Honors Banquet, held the next evening, paid tribute to this year's fellows, associate fellows, and honorary fellow and to the winners of the Jay R. Gould award for excellence in teaching technical communication, the chapter achievement award, and the chapter pacesetter award. Technical sessions continued through Wednesday, May 16, and many attendees remained in Chicago to take advantage of several post-conference workshops and tutorials on Thursday, May 17.



The information and networking opportunities offered at STC's 48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference catered to the varied needs of technical communicators and reflected the diversity of the profession. With almost fifty years of history, STC's annual conference, the world's largest annual gathering of technical communicators, made full use of the opportunity to examine where the profession is now and where it can go in the future.

*Editor's Note: This article was reprinted with permission from the Society for Technical Communication, Arlington, Virginia, U.S.A.*

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### **Document Design Workshop to Benefit Chapter Scholarship Fund** by Margaret Carbaugh

Dr. Karen Schriver, an internationally renowned researcher and instructor in the field of document design, will be in Memphis the weekend of October 6 to present a workshop on document design.

### **STC's 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference** **Nashville, Tennessee** **May 5 – 8, 2002**

In his book, *Leading the Revolution*, Gary Hamel chronicles the issues companies around the world face as they struggle to remain competitive in the new economy. Hamel argues that a strategy of radical innovation is essential to survival. As technical communicators, we too are faced with the possible need for radical innovation in our personal and professional lives.

- Which tools should I learn in order to compete with other writers in my field?
- Which strategy for online documentation is best aligned with my company's vision and mission?
- What information products can we develop that will give us the competitive advantage?
- What will the next generation of software manual, online help, or Web page look like?

STC's 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference can help provide the answers to these questions. As a conference presenter, you can share your insights and experiences with fellow technical communicators. With five redefined conference stems for 2002 in five presentation formats and a full day of post-conference workshops, there are many opportunities to share your successes – and failures – so that others can learn from your experiences.

For more information about STC's 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, visit:

[http://www.stc.org/2002\\_conference.html/](http://www.stc.org/2002_conference.html/)

The workshop is open to the general public; however, STC members get a special rate for attending the function.

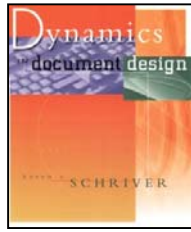
Dr. Schriver is the author of a highly acclaimed graduate text on graphic design, *Dynamics in Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers*. She is an internationally recognized expert in document design. Dr. Schriver's positions have included the Belle van Zuylen Professor of Language and Communication at the University of Utrecht in Holland, Research Director of the prize winning Communications Design Center at Carnegie Mellon University, and Research Associate for the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy at Carnegie Mellon and the University of California at Berkeley. She recently received a 2001 Apex international award for her editing and redesign of a physics text. The Apex awards for writing, editing, and design are highly sought professional prizes.



Entries this year exceeded 5,000! Dr. Schriver currently heads her own research and consulting firm based outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The workshop will focus on research-based principles of design that can be

applied to any media, from books, newsletters, and reports to Web pages or interactive media. To make the workshop more tailored to your needs, attendees are encouraged to submit work examples of their own.



Because the workshop is being held in Memphis, it is an especially attractive cost-saving alternative to attending an out-of-town conference or training, where costs for transportation, lodging, and meals can triple or quadruple the cost of attending the actual event. Plus, it is being held on a Saturday to avoid pulling employees away from their regular work schedules.

Proceeds from the workshop will benefit our chapter scholarship fund, which made its first award this year.

- Who:** Dr. Karen A. Schriver, renowned author of *Dynamics in Document Design: Creating Texts for Readers*
- What:** Document Design Workshop
- When:** Saturday, October 6, 2001, 9:00 a.m.
- Where:** University Center, University of Memphis
- Cost:** \$110 general admission, \$90 for STC members, \$50 for students

Contact Mary Sue MacNealy at (901) 678-4431 for additional information or if you would like to submit examples to be used in the workshop.

## Where Do You Look For Inspiration?

by Rob Houser, Region 3  
Director-Sponsor



Read any good technical manuals lately? What is your favorite online help system? Who is your favorite brochure designer? Have you ever started reading a proposal and just couldn't put it down until you finished it? When is the last time a newsletter made you cry tears of joy?

No, these are not nerdy pick up lines for technical communicators. They may, in fact, be legitimate questions that we sometimes forget to ask ourselves as technical communicators. Okay, maybe not that last one.

When I was in high school, my favorite English teacher always said: "If you want to learn to write, you have to read, read, read." Of course, she was talking about writing and reading fiction, but shouldn't we approach technical information the same way?

How can we improve our ability to write and design if we don't seek out work by our peers and analyze it critically? I don't mean critically in the sense that we point out the shortcomings of a writer under real-world constraints (most of us instinctively do that). Rather, I mean that we should read, and re-read, examples of technical communication and try to identify what makes them effective.

We should study the winners of our publications, art, and online competitions. We should dig out the manuals that came with the products we bought recently and look at the documentation more closely to see if we can learn anything new. We should grab those brochures about different illnesses and diseases on the wall at the doctor's office; however, make sure nobody's watching you get them all or nobody will want to sit next to you.

If you can't keep the helpful manual you're using, make a photocopy of a few representative pages. Make screen shots of well-done help systems. View the source of that Web-based training with the creative effects.

We need models of effective communication to study and even emulate to improve our skills and set professional standards. I recommend dedicating a box or drawer for storing these examples. Keep them close. Thumb through them when you're stuck or brainstorming to solve a new communication problem.

If you haven't read a good piece of technical information lately, let me encourage you to seek out some of those that I like so much.

### User Manuals

- Getting Results with Microsoft Office 97 (<http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/9798/gresults.aspx>)
- Assembly instructions from Sauder office furniture (check out the supplemental tips at <http://www.sauder.com/Tips>)
- HP CD-Writer Plus User's Guide (delivered online with product)

### Help

- Microsoft Works (for early, user-centered embedded help)
- TurboTax (for blending different levels of information/instruction)
- PowerPoint (for well-written field-level help)

### Web Sites

- Immunization Information on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site (<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/>)
- NASA for Kids (<http://kids.msfc.nasa.gov/>)

### Training

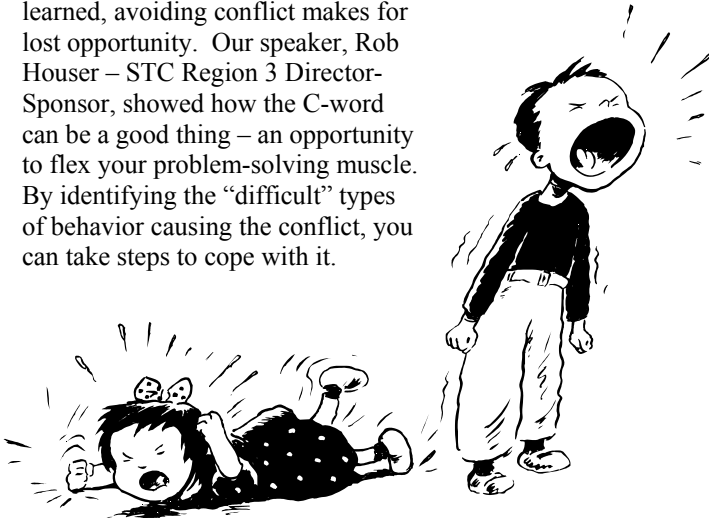
- Epson Knoware University (<http://knoware.epson.com/>)
- Lotus SmartSuite Tutorials (on CD with product)

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## Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

If “avoid” is the first word that comes to mind when you think of the word “conflict,” you are not alone. As the 22 people in attendance at our meeting last May learned, avoiding conflict makes for lost opportunity. Our speaker, Rob Houser – STC Region 3 Director-Sponsor, showed how the C-word can be a good thing – an opportunity to flex your problem-solving muscle. By identifying the “difficult” types of behavior causing the conflict, you can take steps to cope with it.



Rob outlined 10 common difficult behaviors and their characteristics:

**Sherman Tanks** are attacking, accusing, abusive, abrupt, intimidating, overwhelming, and confrontational. They feel they need to prove their view of the world is always right and get irritated or angry if they sense resistance.

**Snipers** tease and use innuendoes and digs to make you look foolish in groups. They hide behind crowds and social constraints, and are often very witty.

**Exploders** throw adult tantrums when they feel thwarted or threatened. They may cry, be silently enraged, or yell and scream.

**Know-it-all Experts** are highly productive, thorough and accurate thinkers. They are condescending and do not wait for others to catch up to their thought processes. They have a low tolerance for correction/contradiction.

**Think-they-know-it-alls** seek the admiration and respect of others by trying to act like experts, when they're not, but they do not always know that they're not experts.

**Super Agreeables** want to be liked by everyone. They tell you things that are satisfying to hear. They say “Yes” to everything, but often don't deliver because they are over-committed.

**Indecisives** put off making decisions because they do not want to hurt anyone. They have high standards and strive to help people. They usually stall until the decision is made.

**Unresponsives** close down, even when asked a direct question. They clam up when you need a response or expect them to have a conversation with you. It is difficult to determine why they are silent.

**Complainers** find fault with everything, complain constantly, and are accusatory and prescriptive. They feel someone should be doing something, but feel helpless to take action. They have a distinct idea of what should be done, and there usually is some truth to their complaints.

**Negativists** feel defeated and dispirited as though they have little power over their lives. They are pessimistic and more cynical than complainers. They say things like “We've tried this before” or “That won't work,” without looking for solutions.

Sound familiar? Rob, in turn, outlined the specific coping methods that correspond to each difficult behavior.

The basic strategy for coping with all these behaviors is a two-part process: Determine positive intent, then speak to be heard. To determine positive intent, listen to them, but stop any destructive behavior. Summarize what they have said, and clarify by asking questions. Then, speak your positive intent. Tell the story from your point of view. And, if possible, do not damage the relationship.

If you're interested in more information on working with difficult people, Rob recommended three books that he used in researching this topic:

Bramson, Robert M. *Coping with Difficult People*. New York: Dell Publishing, 1981.

Bolton, Robert and Dorothy Grover Bolton. *People Styles at Work*. New York: American Management Association, 1996.

Brinkmen, Rick and Rick Kirschner. *Dealing with People You Can't Stand*. New York: R.R. Donnelly & Sons, 1994.

And always keep in mind, everybody is somebody's difficult person, sometime!

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## Welcome New Members!

Over the summer, the Mid-South chapter gained two new members. Please welcome them!

**Leslie Terrell** is a new student member from the University of Memphis. Her maiden name is Sherrill, so you may remember her as the recipient of our 2001 scholarship award!



Leslie has been busy the last couple of months. Besides receiving the scholarship and attending summer school, she just got married, so she deserves to be congratulated on several accounts.

Currently, Leslie is in her junior year at the University, where she is studying Professional/Technical Writing. After she finishes her undergraduate degree, Leslie hopes to pursue her Masters of Art in Rhetoric and Composition, and eventually teach English at a college somewhere out West. In her free time, along with her new husband, Harold, Leslie enjoys doing publication research in a variety of disciplines, such as world religions and philosophy.

**Wanda Thorne** is a Publications Editor in the Office of Agricultural Communications at Mississippi State University (MSU), which serves the school's units in the Division of Agriculture, Forestry, and Veterinary Medicine. In this capacity, Wanda produces educational and public relations pieces. Although she has been a full-time editor for only eight years, Wanda has worked in the field of communications for almost twenty.



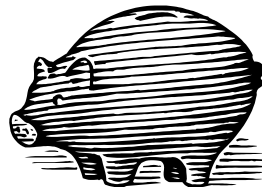
As she states, "In a 'previous life,' I was a full-time community volunteer." Acknowledging her involvement in several professional organizations, this summer, Wanda was awarded Senior Practitioner status by the Southern Public Relations Federation, following a nomination from her local chapter. Her first, she also attended the STC International Conference in Chicago! Having enjoyed the experience, she hopes to attend the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Nashville next year. And, even though Wanda only officially joined this summer, she's no stranger to the Mid-South chapter, which has awarded her both an Award of Merit and Award of Excellence as part of its past Publications Competitions.

Wanda received her Bachelors and Masters in Education from Louisiana State University. Although a native of New Orleans, Wanda and her husband Mike, a Psychology Professor at MSU, have lived in Starkville, Mississippi, for 31 years.

## Treasurer's Report

by *Mary Sue MacNealy*

This financial report reflects the balance for our treasury as of August 20, 2001.



<b>Previous Cash Balance</b> <b>(As of June 15, 2001)</b> .....	<u>\$1,637.29</u>
<b>Income</b>	
Interest on account.....	\$0,004.64
Rebate from STC international organization .....	\$2,221.00
Total Income .....	<u>\$2,225.64</u>
<b>Expenses</b>	
No expenses for June or July .....	\$0000.00
Total Expenses.....	<u>\$0000.00</u>
(Total income less total expenses) .....	\$2,225.64
<b>Current Cash Balance</b> .....	<u>\$3,862.93</u>

## 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*.

### 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.

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 Ed Rutkowski  
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 Wanda Thorne

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## Meeting Reminder

**What:** September (Dinner) Meeting

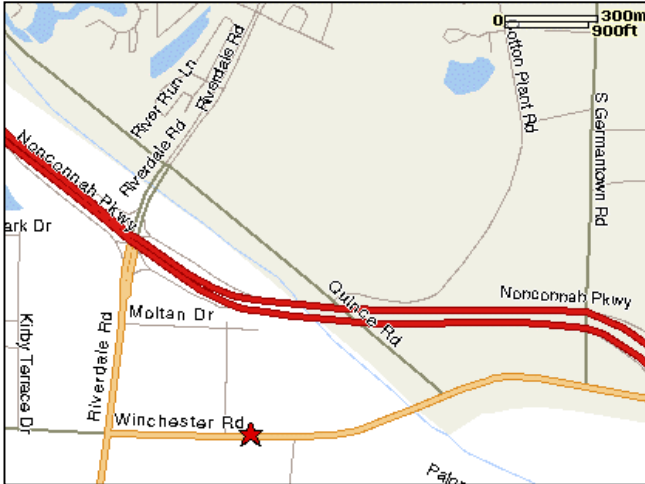
**When:** Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup>,  
6:00 p.m.

**Speaker:** Scott Thompson, Web Content  
Developer for AutoZone,  
“Providing The Do-It-Yourself  
Market With What It Takes To  
Do The Job Right!”

**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



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