



# The Quill



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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## A "Thanksgiving" barbecue

### A welcome message from our incoming President

by Ted Edwins, President, 2001-2002

Hamburgers, corn on the cob, and potato salad are not typical thanksgiving food. June is not the typical time of thanksgiving. But as one year of activity ends and we prepare for another to begin, now seems to be just as good a time as any to give thanks.

I want to thank Lynda Baxter and the rest of the 2000-2001 council for their efforts during the year. We were able to provide a full slate of general meetings despite not having a full-time program manager. Many people stepped into the breach and ensured our members had informative meetings and tasty barbecues to attend.

Turning our attention to the future, I want to take the opportunity to thank those people who volunteered to serve on next year's council. The lifeblood of the chapter depends on our ability to attract people to serve on council and to ensure that we maintain a balance between returning members of council and rookies. New people are a valuable source of new ideas. We have Holly Curtis to thank for championing the nominations process. Many long hours went into publicizing nominations, drafting the ballot, and recruiting people to serve on council.

The new council is already preparing activities for next year. We look forward to increased activities in SIGs as Elaine Garnet, Opal Gamble, and Craig Marley have stepped forward to lead the dormant Contractors and Independant Consultants, Online, and Special Needs SIGS. Sherry McMenemy is planning some special events that will take place outside of regular general meetings.

We still have openings for volunteers on council. The Vice President, Public Relations Manager, and Competition Manager positions remain vacant. In addition, there are still some committee positions available.

I strongly urge you to volunteer for a council position. The benefits are many:

- ◆ You add value to an organization that provides professional development opportunities to members and champions the technical communicator as a viable career choice.
- ◆ You gain leadership experience as you lead a committee.
- ◆ You make network connections with members of both our chapter and other chapters.
- ◆ You make friends as you work with other people to reach common goals.

My personal experience of council has been all good. The most important benefit to me was getting to know many other members.

My first council position was Competition Manager. I quickly came to know many people in both our chapter and the Toronto chapter as I became immersed in the process of arranging for the receiving and judging of entries. These people have become a source of information when I have a professional question and some have become friends.

If you are interested in a council position, please contact me at [president@stc.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:president@stc.waterloo.on.ca). ❖

## Announcing

### Quill Wins Award!

The Southwestern Ontario Chapter earned an award of *Excellence* in the 2000-2001 STC Newsletter Competition.

Thirty-two chapters and special interest groups entered this year's competition. Fourteen awards of *Excellence*, twelve awards of *Merit*, and two *Distinguished* awards were presented. *Best of Show* was awarded to the Online Information Special Interest Group's newsletter, *Hyperviews: Online*.

All award-winning newsletters were on display during STC's 48th Annual Conference, held May 13-16, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois.

*The Quill* has an established history as an award-winning newsletter, due to the hard work of its past editors. This newsletter is just one more of the many benefits you receive as members of the Southwestern Ontario chapter of STC.

I am happy to pass the torch to our newsletter's next editor, Andrea Braniff. We expect great things from you, Andrea!

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## Canadian Members List Server Is Now Up and Running



Alexa Campbell of the Manitoba chapter informs us that the Canadian Members list server is now functional. The Canadian Members list server is open to all Canadian members and friends.

Alexa asks that people please be patient while they work through the inevitable technical difficulties (most of the major ones should have been eliminated by now).

You may subscribe by going to

<http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?join=stc-ca-1>

Click the Join stc-ca-1 button. The list password is SpringINJune. You will also be asked to select a personal password that you can use to read and send messages. Once you have subscribed, you can use either the web interface or email to send messages to the list. The address is

[stc-ca-1@lists.stc.org](mailto:stc-ca-1@lists.stc.org)

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# Usability in mobile computing

## Deb Maskens presents a summary of impressions from CHI 2001

by Rob Glover

At the general meeting, held May 1, outgoing Chapter President Lynda Baxter officially “passed the baton” to the new President, Ted Baxter, and to the new Chapter executive.

For the presentation on “Usability in Mobile Computing”, the guest speaker was Deb Maskens of Quarry Integrated Communications. She attended the CHI (Computer-Human Interaction) 2001 Conference, which was held from March 31 to April 5 in Seattle, Washington. The theme of the CHI conference was “anyone, anywhere”: allowing universal access to computing from anywhere the user is at any time. The keynote speaker for the conference was Bill Gates, who offered his insights into “anyone, anywhere.”

In Bill Gates’ address, he stated that one of the goals of Microsoft’s .NET applications is to encourage standardized techniques across different platforms to encourage universal access, to develop the “vision” of access from every desktop to every home to any time, any place.

Microsoft, for example, now has 142 “usability engineers” (compared to only two in 1988) and six labs devoted to research on the subject, and yet computers still have a long way to go to become usable. By comparison, books—described as “dirty marks on shredded trees”—offer an ideal method of allowing information to be accessed and processed at the user’s request. Yet that hasn’t translated well into digital media.

As for the usability of web sites, “it’s about content.” Content is what brings the user to the website, and usability is about how easily the user can follow the “information scent” to find what is desired.

About wireless devices like PDAs and cellphones, Deb believes that they will be merged into one unit, allowing the prioritizing of both incoming e-mails and phone calls. However, there are a few myths

to explode; for example, the idea of bringing the web to the cell/PDA. “Who wants this?” she asked noting that the phone “market” or pool of users is larger than the web “market”.

Also, what is difficult to predict is who will end up using such devices. One example is “texting” cell phones; that is, allowing a user to type messages on a telephone keypad and have the phone send text messages instead of calling. While the concept was originally designed for business people to allow them to send and receive messages without having to talk out loud, it turns out the largest group of “texting” users are teenagers. In the UK, for example, it is thought that the decline in the rate of teenage smoking is due to teenagers wanting to own and buy cell air time to allow them to utilize the “texting” features. (Presumably, they spend money on air time instead of cigarettes? Or perhaps instead of gathering in groups to smoke, they stay at home and send messages to each other instead.) The biggest appeal perhaps is that teens develop their own language, indecipherable to adults. (Typing “#911” means there’s a parent in the room.)

However, to make wireless devices truly universal, what is needed is a “killer app”—an application so compelling that everyone must have it, and therefore the device behind it. Such an application has yet to be developed. In the meantime the best approach for designers and engineers is to create the wireless device so that “my device can remember who I am, where I am, and remember my preferences” and will display data that is useful; that is, “my data.”

Afterwards, Lynda Baxter thanked the speaker, and awarded the last STC mug to one of the two attendees who won prizes that night. She also reminded everyone to come to the annual STC Chapter barbecue at Bingeman Park on June 8. ❖

## It's a wrap!

### Council's final meeting of the year ends on a positive note

by Sandra Ford, Recorder

The council's final meeting of the year was held on May 15 at InscriberTechnology in Waterloo. (Many thanks to Inscriber for our meeting rooms for the year!)

The last general event for the chapter is a barbecue. Heather Martin has worked diligently to finalize all the arrangements for the evening—planned for June 8 at Bingeman Park in Kitchener.

Our Treasurer, George Zador, reported that the chapter will have a surplus at the end of the year. This is particularly good news for the development of next year's programs. Next month, George will also be working with new portfolio managers to establish committee budgets for the 2001–2002 program.

As part of the handover to the new council,

outgoing council members welcomed the incoming members.

Incoming president, Ted Edwins, offered a few words to the new council. As in past years, Ted encouraged council members to bring forward their ideas—new viewpoints and perspectives will be welcomed. Ted also plans to meet with the new council over the summer to set out some goals for the coming year and to start looking at any tasks that need an early start.

There are still a few vacancies on the council, including Vice-President, Public Relations Manager, Competition Manager, and the Newsletter Committee. If you are interested in helping out with council activities in 2001–2002, please contact Ted Edwins ([president@stc.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:president@stc.waterloo.on.ca)).

So, until September 2001... it's a wrap! ❖

## Southwestern Ontario Chapter Announcements



### Competition Manager Needed

STC Toronto is taking the lead in organizing the competition this year, so the role for our chapter will be small, but we do need someone to make sure that things get done and to keep the STC council informed. There is something to do almost every month, with the most activity in the fall.

The Toronto and Southwestern Ontario chapters have set high standards in all of our competitions. We're well respected for it. Our top entries go onto the International awards and do very well.

Nancy Halverson, a co-manager for the 2000-2001 competition, will help: "Even though I can't commit to managing the competition portfolio this year, it was a great experience and I'll continue to support anyone who takes on the task."

Contact Nancy ([nancy@inscriber.com](mailto:nancy@inscriber.com)) or Ted Edwins ([president@stc.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:president@stc.waterloo.on.ca)) if you'd like to know more about an easy way to gain experience as a manager of a high profile competition. ❖

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## About the Quill

The **Quill** is the official newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). The Quill is published in Waterloo, Ontario monthly, except in January, July, and August, and distributed free to all local STC members. Material in this publication may be reprinted, provided the author and the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC are acknowledged. All readers are welcome to submit short articles, letters, and other interesting items relevant to technical communication to next year's editor, Andrea Braniff, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

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**Full page** \$80

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If you are interested in any of our vacant positions or you would like to join a committee, please get in touch with Ted Edwins, [president@stc.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:president@stc.waterloo.on.ca).

Answer to May puzzle:

