



the Quill

the Newsletter for the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC



NOV/DEC 2006 (Volume 18 Number 2) [About the Quill](#)

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President's Message: Stress or a Sense of Accomplishment?

Debbie is all about the Holiday season, and facing its challenges, deadlines, and stressful moments head on. It's the gift that keeps on giving. ♦

General Meeting: Dealing with "Customers"

At our November meeting, Carolyn Watt, past president of the Toronto chapter and customer experience guru, shared with us how to create a positive experience for your customers (yes, this includes SMEs) and make you and the SME look good! ♦

Director's Message: Stand Up and Be Recognized!

In an excerpt from her bi-monthly directorial address, Cindy, Director for Region 1, fills us in on the recognition awards, the Region 2 conference across the pond, and her upcoming tour dates. ♦

Framemaker Chautauqua 2006

Travel down to Austin and the FrameMaker Conference with Fei Min, our chapter FrameMaker expert, and learn about the hot debate between structured and unstructured content. Which side of the fence are you on? ♦

Learning, the Endless Possibilities

All of our upcoming educational events in one easy read, and an opportunity to let us know what else you want to learn about. You're welcome. ♦

What's In It For Me? Getting the Most Value out of your Membership

It's renewal time for your STC membership, so why should you renew? Debbie has lots of great reasons... ♦

The Editor's Message



Fa la la, la la la la. December is the month of giving, but while you are out battling the crowds for just the right colour iPod, don't forget to stop and smell the poinsettias. And as my gift to you, there will be no singing of carols in this edition of The Quill; however, I cannot promise you won't be spurred into the occasional thoughtful hum. ;))

Staying Connected

This is more than just plugging in your modem, roaming with your cell phone, and googling on your PDA—it's about all of that, and actually endeavouring to have meaningful conversations with the people you know or want to know better. Come up with a unique question this holiday season and ask everyone from great Aunt Thelma to your six-year old nephew (trip him as s/he races by if you need to).

When you learn something new about someone, it can spark a lot of interesting conversation, beyond the ol' exchange of leftover turkey recipes. Go ahead ask cousin Fred about the worst storm of his life, where he was, and who he was with. Everyone has a story.

And even though the chapter is taking a break over the holidays, you can stay in touch through our [website](#) and we are always available via email. We may be "on hiatus" over the holidays, and into January, but we are always connected. Really.

The Elves

Speaking of connected, I would like to take

Membership Profile

Know Jacqueline Fry? Well read all about her! She joins our chapter for the first time this year, and is looking forward to the ride. ♦

New and Improved Student Awards

Calling all students! This year you can submit your application for the Heidi Theissen Memorial Award online. Read all about it! ♦

Council Meeting Minutes

In breaking news, the council DID NOT HAVE PIZZA in our last meeting. We went an entirely different route. You'll have to read Carol's minutes from the meeting to satisfy your curiosity. You know you want to. ♦



this opportunity to personally and publicly thank all of those who help make this newsletter possible each issue. *Debbie*, for her dedication to detail and always worrying for me. *Laura*, for reading everything I send her and getting it back in record time. *Cindy and Carol* for their regular contributions, and the rest of the council for jumping in whenever I ask. And last but not least, *you*, our membership, the heart of our organization, who actually read what we publish and let us know when we hit a chord. Thanks to all of you.

And to all a very sparkly holiday season— may it be wonderful and insightful.

Questions? Comments? Email Margie at quill@stc-soc.org.



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



About The Quill

by [Margie Yundt](#), The Quill Editor



The Quill is the bi-monthly newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, which is a Canadian chapter in Region 1. Our chapter spans from Windsor to Mississauga and Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario. This area is home to the technology triangle, which is home to many high-tech industries.

The Quill History

In October 1989, the first edition of the The Goose was launched by editor Rick Martin, who immediately announced a contest for a new name. The winning entry was, of course, The Quill. Within two years, The Quill earned an Achievement Award for small chapter newsletters, followed by back-to-back Merit Awards in **1993** and **1994**. **1992** and **2001** saw Awards of Excellence. In **1996**, we were awarded not only the Distinguished Award, but the Best of Show for all chapter newsletters. In **2003**, our first year in an online format, we won a Merit Award. In **2004**, we won Most Distinguished, Most Improved, and STC Best of Show.

Publication Policies and Frequency

The Quill is published bi-monthly, with the exception of January, so there are five issues published from September 2006 to August 2007.

The following is a summary of when articles must be submitted so that they can be included in a particular issue. To help the Quill Editor to plan the content of each issue, contributors are encouraged to submit their story ideas one week before submitting their articles.

Issue	Article Deadline
September/October	September 26
November/December	November 21
February/March	February 20
April/May	April 24
July/August	August 21

Copyright Statement

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When you submit an article, you give the editor and the newsletter staff the right to edit your article for clarity and to ensure that it adheres to the newsletter's style and standards. All articles are edited, copy edited, and proofed prior to publication.

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Articles contained in this newsletter may be reprinted if credit is given to The Quill and the author of the article. You must also submit an electronic copy of the article to The Quill Editor at quill@stc-soc.org OR mail two paper copies to the mailing address below.

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STC Head Office

Mission Statement:

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

You can find out more about the STC using any of the following methods.

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President's Message: Stress or a Sense of Accomplishment?



by [Debbie Kerr](#), President

Although technically "'tis the season to be jolly," I don't think the word has truly gotten around. Financially, it might be year-end for your company, so it can be stressful at work if management is pushing you to get a product out the door. Since I work at an insurance company, we don't want anything going out the door, like money for claims. It's a whole other reason I want you to drive safely this holiday season. I want to see you all next year, but I don't want you to be incurring any claims, especially if you are insured with us.

Performance Appraisals

Where I work, we do formal performance appraisals, so we end up giving and getting feedback at this time of year. Depending on whether you are getting positive or "developmental" feedback can determine whether you get into the holiday spirit. It might also be where the saying came from, "It is better to give than to receive." In some cases I asked for feedback, and the people didn't respond to my e-mail. I don't know if that was feedback in itself or if it just meant that they were busy meeting their own year-end, because we actually do have something to get out the door for the end of the year. They also may have given the feedback directly to the person who will be performing my performance appraisal. Either way, I am so excited, I can hardly stand it. For those of you don't know me, please insert sarcasm here.

For the managers that I work with, my resource manager will ask them directly for feedback, so I will get to hear their comments when I meet with my resource manager. My performance appraisal is on December 4, so its timing will be close to when you are reading this article. Reading my performance appraisal may be almost as exciting as reading this newsletter, but then again, it won't have the animation that I assume this issue will have. Really, nothing compares to one of Margie's issues. Somehow I think the humour may be missing from my performance appraisal that you may find in the newsletter. I certainly hope it doesn't make me laugh, although it would be better than making me cry. What, me nervous?

STC Head Office

Work is not the only place that has its deadlines. By the time you read this, I will have submitted the form for the Distinguished Chapter Service Award. We

are hoping to have Director, Cindy Currie, present the award this year at our annual Wine and Cheese. She is trying to co-ordinate a trip across Ontario, and since she will be at the Eastern Ontario Chapter on March 28, I am trying to see if she will be able to visit us the same week. We are working out the details now.

The end of the calendar year also marks the deadline for judging the chapter-level competitions for the online communication and technical publications and then submitting the Distinguished award winners to Head Office. December 1 was the deadline for applying to judge those entries at the international level. This also marked the end of a successful competition for our chapter. Thank you to those involved in this event from those running it to those who entered it. You can't have one without the other.

The Gift of Stress

While I have already pointed out stressful items, they have nothing to do with the holidays. They are all year-end events. Holiday stress has more to do with trips to the stores, parties, and weight gain. It's not that I am bitter. Well, maybe I am. I just tell it like it is. After all, that's what I get paid to do, but not here in the newsletter. I don't want you to get the wrong impression and think that only the president gets paid to write articles. Soon everyone would want to be president and would write long articles in a bid to get paid by the word. But I digress.

When you are trying to meet so many other deadlines, running around to buy gifts, and make them thoughtful ones, seems a "tad" challenging. Although, if it was easy, where would the fun be in that? Maybe if I had bought the presents before the feedback, there would have been no stress issues now about the performance appraisal, because bribery would have worked, and my gift buying would have been ahead of schedule. I will put that on my "To Do" list for next year.

The Positive Side

While I have said a lot of negative things about this time of the year, there are many positives. For example, with pressure and deadlines like this, you certainly have the opportunity to experience a great sense of accomplishment. Whether you meet your deadline at work or get your shopping done, you can certainly say that got something done. It's not like those dog days of summer where you ask yourself where the time went and what you have to show for it. At this time of year, the evidence is pretty obvious.

You get to see family and friends. While some of you may find this problematic, this is generally a good thing. Whether you are attending parties or family gatherings, you get to see people you may not have seen in a while. Even as council members, we get together in December, and, for some of us, this is the first time that we have seen each other for a while. While we each perform our duties, we are not always able to attend all the council meetings. In December, we meet in a restaurant, and get to talk socially. It's a nice change from just asking someone's opinion on something each month.

It's a time to reflect on what we have. While Thanksgiving is past, it is never the wrong time to be thankful for the people we have in our lives and to give them positive feedback about how they have impacted our lives. While formal feedback can be stressful, we often take the people around us for granted, and a well-written letter would be just as good a present as purchased one.

Take care of yourselves. We have some surprises planned for next year. This STC year is like no other year, and we are trying new things. To see what is coming, [check out the article about learning](#). We are still working out the details, so we can only give you hints, but 2007 holds a lot of promise and possibilities for you.

Think of the STC as the gift that keeps on giving, because we promise to keep giving you more and more value throughout next year.

Be safe. Have a great holiday season. I look forward to seeing you (or at least hearing from you) soon. ♦

About Debbie Kerr

In the 20 years that Debbie has been writing documentation, she has worked in a variety of industries: government, retail, software, and insurance. She is currently employed at The Economical Insurance Group in Waterloo, where she has stepped out of her traditional role of writing user guides and help files, and now writes a variety of specifications.

Debbie has been a member of the STC since 1994 and has been a council member for many years. For the second year in a row, Debbie has bravely taken on the role of Chapter President.

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General Meeting: Dealing with “Customers”



by [Mark Grausam](#)

Is the customer always right? No, but they must always be respected. For anyone who has worked in any kind of service industry, they will surely have some interesting customer stories to tell! In my former days as a waiter, I have experienced the full gamut of customers. By and large, I think that most customers are decent if treated with respect and decency.

In our industry as technical communicators, we are not always aware that we have our own “customers” — the Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) of our workplace. Without them, we would have nothing to write about. In our business we do things with and for other people. As technical communicators, we help people do things simply. With good communication, it is a lot simpler to do our work.

On Tuesday, November 7, Carolyn Watt, president of [The Customer Experience Company](#), presented her ideas on how to make dealing with customers a little easier. The following notes are a summary of her presentation on this valuable topic.

Moments of Contact

Carolyn Watt defines a customer experience as “the collective moments of contact that your customer has with you measured against their expectations”.

These “moments of contact” can include:

- Written or oral communication
- Words, appearance, facial expression, body language
- Logos, corporate communication
- Telephone calls
- Deliveries
- Using your software, product, or user guide
- Meetings
- Websites

All of these moments of contact make up a collective experience and how the customer (SME) will judge you.

Creating a Customer Experience

Tips for creating an excellent customer experience:

- Write a "customer experience statement". This will help you define more precisely how you will treat your customers.
- Emphasize to SMEs that you are there to help make them look good.
- Communicate clearly.
- Be easy to do business with.
- Send out questions to SMEs in advance to help them prepare their answers beforehand. This is especially helpful for those SMEs whose first language is not English.
- The first person's action will set the mood. To guide the SME, it should be you who sets the tone.
- Make sure your SME feels good working with you. There's an emotion associated with every moment of contact. Customers don't remember what you do for them — they remember how you made them feel.
- Create a feeling of trust with your customer.
- Keep your promises. This includes submitting drafts on time and keeping meeting within the established time limits.
- Don't have them expend more energy than needed.
- Create a consistent, common, and positive experience.

In other words

What is your role in the experience with your customer? You will need to craft an experience, and be totally responsible for your interaction with your customer.

Follow these guidelines. You will make your SME look good, and you will produce the best documentation possible! The two go hand-in-hand.

And finally...

The council would like to thank [The Peer Group](#) for donating the fabulous door prize! Congratulations to *Paul Kostiuk*, our lucky door prize winners! ♦



About Mark Grausam

Mark is a recent graduate of Seneca College's Technical Communication Program and a new member of the STC. He taught ESL overseas in South Korea for several years, and is a certified TESL instructor. Other than this brief foray abroad, he is a native Waterloovian having graduated from Wilfrid Laurier University with a degree in English. He is now happily beginning his new career as a technical writer at Research in Motion.

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Director's Message: Stand Up and Be Recognized!



by [Cindy Currie](#), STC Region 1 Director

Community Recognition Programs

I'd like to encourage all communities to plan to apply for a Community Achievement Award (CAA,) and be recognized for your accomplishments this year. The program has recently been revamped to bring it more in line with STC's new strategic priorities. In addition, a new base level category of award ("Fundamental") has been created to recognize communities that are clearly meeting (but perhaps not exceeding, for whatever reason) the baseline criteria for running a successful community.

As I reviewed the community reports just prior to the October Board of Director's meeting, I was concerned when I saw that most communities were not planning to apply for this award this year. I realize that many communities are experiencing challenges, but most of you are doing some really good, creative things to keep your communities going and you should be recognized for those efforts!

So, be sure to check the www.stc.org website for the updated information on the CAA program. I looked just before sending this article out, and I did not see that the new information has been posted yet. The deadline for these awards is in the spring. More on this as we get closer.

Region 2 Conference Report

Kudos to the Region 2 conference planning committee for an outstanding conference! Some highlights are called out below:

- **Great collection of presentations and expert speakers** — a really good program with lots of globally recognized speakers and hot topics! I participated on a panel discussion called "Technical Communication Meets Business: Where Do We Go from Here?" which seemed to be very well received.
- **Sponsorships** — the conference planning committee did a fabulous job of covering their costs through corporate sponsorships! Many lessons to be learned from their successes in this area.
- **Town Hall Meeting** — Our new Executive Director, Susan Burton; President, Paula Berger; First Vice President, Linda Oestreich; and Second Vice President, Mark Clifford held a Q&A session with Region 2 conference attendees to that provided a forum for members and others to meet these influential STC leaders and get answers to their most pressing questions. This event was very well attended.
- **Chocolate Raffle** — Yes, a personal favorite of mine, and I won a nice assortment of European chocolates! The Transalpine chapter (aka the "chocolate" chapter) has been doing this for a number of years now. All monies raised were donated to a local charity. (**Tip:** *Consider doing something similar to raise money for a charity near you or to raise money for your community. You could split the proceeds, donating half to a charity and retaining the other half for your community.*)

Here's how it worked: many who attended the conference brought an assortment of chocolate from their city, region, or country. These were all displayed on a large table near the conference registration desk for all to see (and drool over), and I spent a great deal of

time here. Committee members sold (a limited number of professionally printed with the conference logo) raffle tickets throughout the conference. Mid-way through the conference, they SOLD OUT of raffle tickets!!!! And, a black market for Chocolate Raffle tickets sprang up!

At the end of the final day of the conference, all the chocolate was bundled into a number of small assortments and raffled off during the closing reception (complete with champagne, hors d'oeuvres, and cakes!). Executive Director, Susan Burton and former Region 2 Director, Vici Koster-Lenhardt acted as Emcees for the raffle. It was quite a lively affair and seemed to be thoroughly enjoyed by the whole crowd!

- **Board Meeting Report** — The Board met in London on October 12-13, with a workshop day on the 12th and our official face-to-face fall board meeting on the 13th. The board's focus during this time was on membership, marketing, partnerships, and the 2007 budget, which we have now finalized. Please visit http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/101306_BoardReport.pdf to read the official meeting minutes. You can also access a slide presentation containing status updates on all STC committee work, as well as summaries of regional community reports from the Director-Sponsors at http://www.stc.org/ppt/061013_BoardStatusSlides.ppt.

Out and About

My chapter visit plans for this year are beginning to take shape and look like this at the moment:

- **Northern New England** Chapter, January 2007
- **Eastern Ontario** Chapter, STACIES, February 2007

And, I'm working with the Canadian communities (**Eastern Ontario, London Ontario Student, Southwestern Ontario, and Toronto**) on a possible joint visit or "sweep" through Ontario province to visit all of these chapters in a single trip sometime next spring.

Please let me know what your program plans and events are for this STC year and if you'd like to me to visit your chapter or attend a special event. I will continue my visits as your interest and my finances and schedule permit. ♦

About Cindy Currie

Cindy is currently the Director of STC Region 1. She is an STC Fellow and a member of the Northern New England and United Kingdom chapters, and well as numerous SIGs. She is a senior project manager at Hewlett-Packard Company.

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FrameMaker Chautauqua 2006



by [Fei Min Lorente](#), Volunteer Co-ordinator

A *chautauqua* is a travelling meeting for the purpose of education. That's the name of the annual FrameMaker Conference, which was held this year in Austin, Texas, November 8 to 10. [Bright Path Solutions](#) organizes it, and it's full of FrameMaker users and vendors. Feel the love!

As a FrameMaker supporter myself, I felt quite at home with the other enthusiasts. However, emotional divisions appeared when we discussed unstructured FrameMaker, structured FrameMaker, and DITA. For the uninitiated:

unstructured FrameMaker

Using FrameMaker to apply formatting to your document.

structured FrameMaker

Using FrameMaker to tag "things" in your document. The tags are called elements, and they can be named to reflect what something is instead of how it looks. Every element can have attributes (or information about the element, called metadata). Structured FrameMaker can involve XML if you choose.

Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA)

A standardized XML architecture that includes a standardized way to extend the structure to meet your particular needs. It's a cool idea that is explained well in [Introduction to the Darwin Information Typing Architecture](#).

The following article explains my views on the advantages and disadvantages of each of the three ways of using FrameMaker, drawn from the various presentations at the conference, and by talking to other attendees. I have attempted to be objective about this, but apparently no one can be completely objective.

Unstructured FrameMaker

Most FrameMaker users use unstructured FrameMaker. FrameMaker was unstructured from the beginning, and it does an excellent job of producing documentation. It even enables you to produce different flavours of documentation from a single source if you use text insets and conditional text. Since it isn't broken, why change it?

Unstructured FrameMaker is the easiest to understand—we're all familiar with formatting. Simply choose the font, the size, the space above and below, any autonumbering, and you're done. Also, you can write in a natural narrative style and do not have to think about the elements of structured writing.

FrameMaker began as a desktop publisher, so all of its features work in that environment. When structured FrameMaker was developed so that documents could be structured world be compatible with XML, a few things did not translate well, like text insets, conditional text, and custom table formatting. You can still use these features in structured FrameMaker, but if you're importing from or exporting to XML, you'll need some help with these ones—more on this shortly.

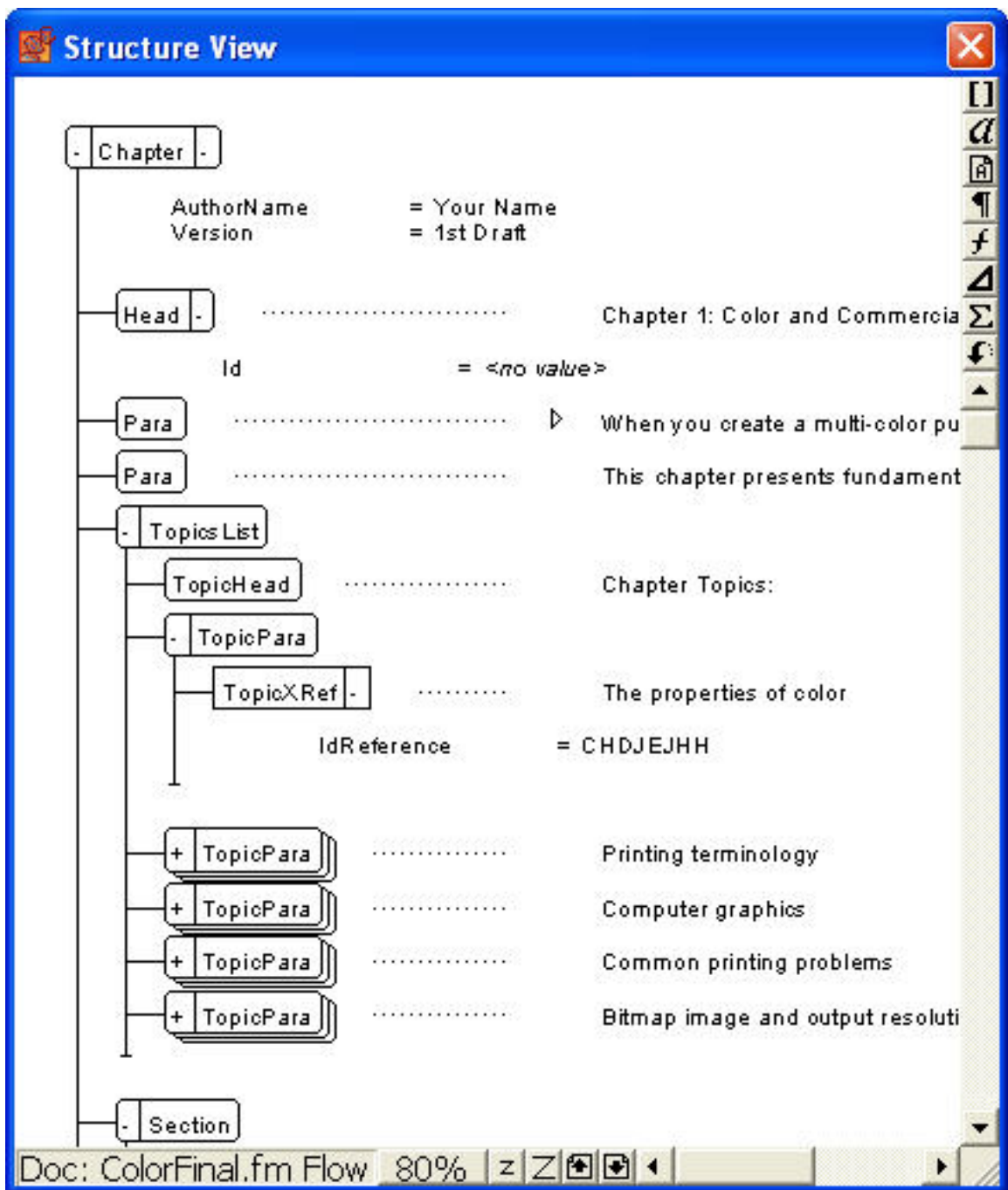
I can certainly understand why a lot of people cannot find time to investigate and use structured FrameMaker, but ever since the SGML version 6.0, they are missing out on the inherent features of structure. As of version 7.0, everyone gets structure capability with the regular FrameMaker, and it's just sitting there quietly, waiting for them to notice it. I think the problem is that they don't know what they're missing.

Structured FrameMaker

Structured FrameMaker allows you to give more information to FrameMaker so it does more work for you. A concrete example is that FrameMaker can format things based on their context. If you define an element called *Title*, and set up structured FrameMaker to use particular formats depending on where that *Title* appears, you will never again have to tag each title *Heading1*, *Heading2*, *Heading3*, or anything else.

In general, structured FrameMaker reduces your formatting time. As you drag and drop units of information (elements), they automatically look different. You don't even have to think about it. Just imagine, no more *FirstNumberedItem*, *NumberedItem*, *LastNumberedItem*! No more applying paragraph tags when you change the order of items in your list!

To help you work with structure, which is hierarchical, FrameMaker provides a Structure View. This window has the added benefit of allowing you to drag and drop chunks of text (anything enclosed in an element). You can also collapse the elements so that you're only seeing the highest-level ones and immediately choose the section you want with a minimum of scrolling.



Example of a Structure View

Furthermore, if you have a group of writers, structure helps to keep everyone consistent because you've reduced the number of formatting choices they can make. Any deviation from the architecture shows up in red in the structure view. Any customizations are easily wiped out by importing the structure again.

If you choose to venture into the world of XML, you have the opportunity to automate more of the documentation process. For example, XML is ideal for publishing information from databases or source code. If you have consistently formatted data to work with, a programmer (or you) can write some sort of script, and you can turn that information into an XML document that complies with the structure you've defined in FrameMaker, import the XML and instantly

have a formatted document.

With structured FrameMaker, you can even attain the dream of collecting information from Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) without having to reformat their writing. If SMEs choose to work in FrameMaker, the structure helps to guide them through the writing process. It certainly reduces their interest in features like the paragraph and character designers. If SMEs choose to work in their favourite editor, they can give you XML that automatically formats when you open it in FrameMaker.

If you have FrameMaker 7.0 or later, and you want to know more about XML, structured FrameMaker provides a gentle introduction to XML principles and it's free! Compared to the heavy-duty XML tools, FrameMaker is easy learn when you want to define a customized structure. Most significantly, it's easy to *relate that structure to a format!* Creating names for elements and setting them up in a hierarchy is the easy part; telling your tools what you want each element to look like (on your screen and in the final output) is hard to do without learning XSL or XSL-FO. FrameMaker simplifies the process by associating the elements with FrameMaker formatting, and then you can use your usual tools to produce HTML and PDF files.

Since both structured and unstructured documents are all FrameMaker documents, you don't have to convert all your documents simultaneously. If you have older documents that are not being revised much, you don't have to convert them at all. The deliverables will look the same, regardless of whether they are structured (or not) in the FrameMaker files. You can make the transition to structured while continuing to publish documentation.

Finally, structure encourages consistency and modular writing which are bound to be helpful sooner or later. At some point in the evolution of your documentation set, you are going to want to make sweeping changes, whether it's for translation or because you're changing to a new editing tool, or you have to provide a new deliverable format. Structure will make that sweeping change much less painful, and may even be the factor that makes it possible. Furthermore, if you can convert to XML, then you have the chance to automate those sweeping changes with a script.

There are some drawbacks to structured FrameMaker. If you use XML, not all FrameMaker features are supported. That is, you can use them in FrameMaker, but they won't be preserved if you export them to XML and import them again (round-trip). On the bright side, many people have developed plug-ins to take care of the more critical features, like conditional text and text insets. If it's important to you, chances are it's important to someone else, and that someone

may have found a solution that they're willing to share.

The unavoidable drawback is that it takes time to learn structured FrameMaker and set up the supporting files. When you're busy writing to a deadline, you won't have time to think about this, much less do it. However, if you can squeeze it into your busy schedule, or if there's a lull between releases, it's worth the investment in time. To give you an idea, I took about 120 hours to learn and set up the first working structure for a complete manual, having no previous knowledge of XML or structured FrameMaker. This did not include converting any legacy documents, and more time was spent over the next couple of years refining and tweaking the structure as things came up.

You could take less time because Adobe provides better resources now to get you started. You could also reduce the learning and set-up time if you went on a course, or hired a consultant. You could take more time if you have more documents than I do, or if they use more FrameMaker features, or if you have to work with a committee. ;-)

DITA

DITA is standardized XML, and it's the latest buzzword. Many of the tool vendors are providing support for DITA, which means they should already know how to display this structure, and you won't have to explain it to the tool. Standardization has a lot of advantages (and some disadvantages).

The difference between DITA and using any old form of XML is that it makes the interchange of documentation with other companies easier. Although XML is theoretically transferable as long as you provide its DTD or schema, in practice, both companies have to have the same tools because the interpretation of the structure to format is tool-dependent. With DITA, you don't have to have the same tools. This is especially handy if you have to deal with translation companies or Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs), who provide their documentation to you so you can then incorporate it in your documents.

Using DITA means that you don't have to figure out a sensible structure for yourself and learn from your mistakes. Many people at IBM with lots of experience with documentation have worked on DITA, and they've made and fixed the mistakes for you. Now that it's in the hands of the OASIS standards organization, even more people are involved to ensure the highest quality.

If you've heard of DocBook, you might be wondering why we need another standard, but DocBook was modeled on a printed book structure, and it tried to be everything to everyone, and ended up being too cumbersome to use. At the other extreme, people would trim DocBook to suit their own purposes, and then

it wasn't a standard anymore. DITA solves that problem by starting with three basic types (concept, task and reference), and allowing extensions and specialization, all within the standard.

Writing to the DITA standard is ideal for re-use. Since you have to put your information in discrete chunks that are tagged semantically (according to what they mean, not how they look), you have a much better chance of getting a piece of information that can be used in more than one place and in more than one context. This sort of organization seems to beg for a Content Management System (CMS), but before you start protesting that you could never afford one, consider how much you can accomplish with a file structure, well-planned file naming conventions, and a file versioning system.

From what I heard at the conference, one of the hardest parts of making the transition to DITA is writing for a topic-oriented structure. Perhaps if you are accustomed to writing for online help, it would be similar, but if you really had to write each chunk as if it could be re-used anywhere, I think that would be a challenge.

Someone asked one of the DITA presenters if there were situations where he would not recommend using DITA, and one of the cases he mentioned is a lone writer situation. DITA involves more overhead than is necessary for a small documentation set.

I also got the feeling that many people found the concept of DITA overwhelming. The experts also added that they don't recommend making a leap from unstructured FrameMaker straight to DITA.

In Summary

You might have noticed from the relative length of each section that structured FrameMaker is my favourite. There are many benefits that unstructured FrameMaker users could derive from changing to structured, if only they had the time to learn it and implement it. Legacy documentation can even be left in unstructured FrameMaker, so there needn't be a large conversion cost.

My current situation as a lone writer does not warrant the adoption of DITA. We do not translate our documents, nor exchange them with an OEM. We rarely re-use information in discrete chunks, and what we do re-use can be handled with conditional text, text insets, and cross-references. Most of all, my information is written by the SMEs, and I can't imagine training them to think and write in re-usable topics. However, as tool support grows for DITA, and because we use Eclipse which is also an IBM creation, I might have to adopt DITA in the future. If I do, converting documentation from XML will be easier than converting

unstructured documentation.

More Information

There's always more information about these hot topics:

- Adobe has developed a short and friendly guide to help you make the move from unstructured to structured FrameMaker: [Migrating from Unstructured to Structured FrameMaker](#). I wish this had been around when I made the move.
- Bernard Aschwanden can tell you how to safely use DITA in FrameMaker: [Topic: FrameDITA-lite](#)
- Scriptorium Publishing has a wonderful selection of white papers that can give you authoritative advice on whether structure or DITA are right for you, and what you should do about it: [Scriptorium Publishing White Papers](#)

The Challenge

As I said at the beginning, these are emotional topics. People were passionate about promoting whichever mode of FrameMaker that they used. What I have presented are simply my opinions from attending the FrameMaker Chautauqua and other presentations. While I have experience with unstructured and structured FrameMaker, I haven't actually tried to use DITA in FrameMaker or elsewhere. If you would like to express a different opinion, or correct my view of the "facts", then quill@stc-soc.org of *The Quill*. She'd love to hear from you, and so would I. ♦

About Fei Min Lorente

Fei Min is working at AMI Semiconductor Canada Company, running her own business called Articulated Concepts on the side, and is the current Volunteer Coordinator. She has held other council positions in the Alberta Chapter, including secretary and vice-president. When she's not doing technical writing or family stuff, Fei Min fills in the spare minutes with scrapbooking. When she needs stress relief, she bakes.

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Learning, the Endless Possibilities

by [Debbie Kerr](#), President



Webinar (aka Telephone Seminar) on "Creating Training That Sticks"

Open to one and all (geared to the intermediate/beginner level) on December 6 at the Waterloo Public Library. Free for STC members! [Read all about it.](#)

Vote "Yes" or "No" for Free Online Training

Tieline is monthly newsletter that gets sent by email to council leaders. In the November issue, there was an article from the Sacramento Chapter STC about a website that offers great online training. What that chapter did was pay the \$1000 fee and then used the five licences that they received to let their members select which training they would like to take.

Review the Website

We are considering doing the same thing for our members, because we realize that not all of you can come to our education days. We want you to go to www.vtc.com and look through the site and see if there are courses on this site that you would be interested in taking — for free.

Cast Your Vote

Once you review the website, cast your vote on the home page of our website. Please only vote once so that we get an accurate reading of the number of people who are likely to use this site. We don't want to invest money in something that people won't use. We also want to get a sense of how busy the site might be if we purchased five licenses.

February's General Meeting

The first general meeting of the new year is in February. So, don't go rushing out to the university in January only to be disappointed. We plan to do something special for our February meeting. We may even arrange to do a Webcast, so that those of you who have never been able to attend a general meeting can actually see what goes on. We are working out the details even as you are reading this text. Keep checking the calendar page of our website. It's the first page where the details will be posted.

We haven't forgotten that the name of this chapter is "Southwestern Ontario" so we are trying to reach out to more of that area using technology. If you can't

come to the meetings, we will try to bring some of the meetings to you.

If you have a special topic that you would like to see covered, let me know, and I will see what I can do.

Spring Education Workshop: Sarah O'Keefe comes to town in April

We welcome Sarah O'Keefe to Southwestern Ontario from April 24-26th, 2007. A well-known expert in all things XML, Sarah will usher spring into the region with a two day workshop titled *XML and Structured Authoring*. Working together with Sarah, we've custom-designed this workshop to provide something for those new to XML, as well as for those already using XML in their authoring environment.

Day One and Day Two

Days one and two will explore the possibility of using Extensible Markup Language (XML) and structured authoring in your publishing efforts. You will receive a solid introduction to XML and will understand how to fit XML into your environment efficiently and effectively.

Day Three

For those among us who are on the cutting edge, an optional third day will offer advanced tips and tricks for people who have already tackled XML and are now seeking additional tool and guidelines for easing the learning curve and the overall implementation.

More About Sarah O'Keefe

Sarah O'Keefe is the founder and president of Scriptorium Publishing, a company that helps companies develop and deliver high-quality documentation for high-tech products. Sarah offers consultation on issues such as identifying the best tools and strategies for a company's documentation process and has coauthored several books. Within the STC, Sarah's name has become synonymous with XML and moving documentation forward to meet multi-format publishing demands. For more information about Sarah, visit <http://www.scriptorium.com>.

For more information

Pricing and registration information will be available on the Southwestern Ontario website in late January 2007. In the meantime, if you would like to be placed on the preliminary registration list or for more information, please email leanne@leannerollins.com. ♦



About Debbie Kerr

In the 20 years that Debbie has been writing documentation, she has worked in a variety of industries: government, retail, software, and insurance. She is currently employed at The Economical Insurance Group in Waterloo, where she has stepped out of her traditional role of writing user guides and help files, and now writes a variety of specifications.

Debbie has been a member of the STC since 1994 and has been a council member for many years. For the second year in a row, Debbie has bravely taken on the role of Chapter President.

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What's In It For Me? Getting the Most Value out of your Membership



by [Debbie Kerr](#), President

Did you ever buy a pen and set it on the table, and then complain because it didn't do anything? Would you say that a pen provides no value because it doesn't write for you? It doesn't make sense, yet many of us do exactly that with our STC memberships.

A pen or a membership is only as good as the person who is using it.

Reading Material

When you pay your membership, you get a lot of reading material that many of you never read. [Intercom](#) and *The Journal* have many great articles that are just waiting to be discovered. You make appointments for doctors, dentists, and haircuts. Why not make an appointment to sit down and read your magazines? If you want to grow as a person, then you have to care for all aspects of your development.

General Meetings

Our general meetings are a great way to get to know people and to learn new information. We try to vary the format of these meetings to keep things interesting. We are looking at a webcast for February, so that we can get everyone involved, but we have worked out the logistics yet. Make the effort to attend. Generate some excitement about the meetings. The more people who attend the meetings, the more perspectives there are for discussions.

Webinars

Our chapter offers Webinars free to members. They are just there for the taking. You just have to register and show up at the location, and you get to sit and listen to someone talk for a lunch period about topics that are relevant to technical communication. I realize that some of you are outside of the area and can't get to these events, but for those in this area, you are missing out on an opportunity. Just because it is free doesn't mean it is too good to be true.

Free Online Training

Since not all of our members can make it to our members, we are trying to look

at ways to provide value to our members who are not in the Kitchener-Waterloo, Cambridge, and Guelph area. When we came upon an article about the Sacramento Chapter offering free training to its members, we thought this might be something we could do for our members as well. We want you to see that the STC has value, and that we are providing you value as a chapter. Remember to vote on [our home page](#) to show that you would use this service, if we purchased it.

Networking

You can see the value of you membership if you don't network. Remember, you can network in many ways. You can come to the general meetings and the Webinars. You can email each other. The council members have their [email addresses on our website](#). We'd love to hear from you. Maybe you just want to introduce yourself, or maybe you have an idea to share. Why not write an article for The Quill or write to someone who has written an article? There are so many ways to network. Don't say you can't network, because you aren't close by. With today's technology, there are no excuses.

The Quill

Our newsletter is one of the benefits of being a member. You get some great information in here. While it may appear simple to read, so you may question its value, you would be surprised at how much work goes into creating it.

Education

Each year, our chapter offers education seminars. If you are an STC member, our education seminar is substantially cheaper. The topic of these seminars is always timely, and the feedback has always been good. The [Annual STC Conference](#) is another place where being an STC member comes in handy. Rates to attend this great conference are always a lot cheaper if you are an STC member. This is also expanding to Localization Industry Standards Association ([LISA](#)) events, because the STC has worked out some deals with them. Today, more than ever, you get more value with an STC membership, when it comes to education.

Volunteer

This last item is certainly not the least. When you volunteer, you get back a lot more than give, although, to be honest, at times it may not feel that way. For example, right now I am judging in our chapter's competition, and it is great to

see the quality and variety of work that is out there. As president, you get to communicate with people that you may not normally talk to. Being on council, you communicate with a wide range of people, and you develop a wide range of skill sets that you may not develop in your regular job.

It takes commitment and effort. It can be like another job. You have to work at it. The end result can be like a fulfilling career. When I describe some of the things that I have done, people say that my face lights up. I feel a real sense of accomplishment and pride in how far our chapter has come, and I can honestly say I played a part in our success. That is my paycheck.

...and finally

For those who are already STC members, it's time to [renew your STC memberships](#). For those of you who are considering becoming members, take that leap, and then take the extra step, and get involved. If you don't get involved, you will become one of those people who expects a pen to write by itself. You are a writer, so pick up that pen and write. ♦

About Debbie Kerr

In the 20 years that Debbie has been writing documentation, she has worked in a variety of industries: government, retail, software, and insurance. She is currently employed at The Economical Insurance Group in Waterloo, where she has stepped out of her traditional role of writing user guides and help files, and now writes a variety of specifications.

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Member Profile: Jacqueline Fry



Welcome to Southwestern Ontario chapter, Jacqueline!

Member Name:	Jacqueline Fry
Member Since:	2006
Education:	Honours B.A. in Rhetoric and Professional Writing (co-op) from the University of Waterloo (1995)
Number of Years as a Tech Writer:	11
Why did you join the STC?	I decided that after so many years in this profession, I needed to join the STC and take advantage of what it offers (for example, webinars and the 'Intercom' magazine). It also lends me a 'credibility factor'.
Why do you renew each year?	I haven't renewed for 2007 yet, but I plan to. My employer pays for the membership, so that's a bonus.
How do you give back to the STC?	I haven't had a chance yet! I have to think about how I can do this.
How can others give back to the STC?	By volunteering, going to the meetings, and voting. I've only had the chance to go to one meeting since I joined, but I am hoping this will change in 2007.
Will you continue your involvement in the STC?	Yes!

If you are interested in submitting a profile, please email your bio to membership@stc-soc.org. ♦

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Student Awards — New and Improved!!



by [Pauline Horn](#), Student Awards Manager

It's hard to believe, but it's time to start thinking about our annual Student Awards competition — the **Heidi Thiessen Memorial Awards for Student Writing**. This year we've enhanced the submission process so that the basic details can be submitted online!

It took teamwork to design the web form, create the code, test and review the changes and finally release it for use. We had a great team and they worked together between their regular jobs and lives. Great work, everyone.



**Hey Students!
Need some extra
cash? Click here!**

Be sure to check out the [Chapter's website](#) and follow the link from the home page. Better yet, encourage those students you know to submit their work for consideration. The prize money will certainly come in handy in the springtime.

Students, please feel free to ask any questions: email studentawards@stc-soc.org. ♦

About Pauline Horn

Six years ago, after a career as a developer/analyst, Pauline decide to take on technical writing. It's been a great change and she still uses most of her technical skills to create documentation. Right now, she is taking a sabbatical (which includes volunteering on the STC council) and plans to start her own consulting company next year.

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Council Meeting Recap

by [Carol Lawless](#), Recorder



Our last council meeting was at Equitrac and, despite an optimistic agenda; we managed to get through (almost) everything! Our secret – feed Paul subs. His creative juices really get flowing.

General Meetings

While we're still looking for one more speaker for our general meetings, there are some exciting things planned for the new year. At the top of the list is that we're also looking into the logistics of broadcasting our February general meeting via Webcast. Stay tuned for more. If you would like to speak, or you have a speaker or topic you would like to hear, please send an email to Debbie at president@stc-soc.org.

Training

For those of you wondering, "What happened to the Webinars?" we were unsuccessful in finding a (free) venue we could use on a regular basis, but Fei Min Lorente seems to have found a viable option. Come out to the Waterloo Public Library on Dec 6 for "[Creating Training that Sticks](#)". Registration is limited; act right away.

We'll keep watching for other Webinars that we think you will find useful. We are hoping to host them on months with no general meetings. Let us know which ones interest you.

On a related note, we're considering offering online training (see the [Learning article](#) for details). Go to our [home page](#) and complete the poll to let us know if you would use this training option.

We discussed our Education days. It will be in April this year. We're still looking at presenters, but we expect the theme will be XML and single sourcing.

Awards and Celebrations

Other portfolio managers were either not at the meeting or had nothing to report at this time. That doesn't mean that they have nothing to do. I know for a fact that things change quickly.

Shhhhhh — By the time you read this Debbie will have submitted our nominees for the Distinguished Chapter Service Award. Find out this year's winner(s) at the

Wine and Cheese in the spring. Although this event is currently scheduled for April, we're trying to co-ordinate that event with a visit from [Cindy Currie](#), our Region 1 Director. She's hoping to stop here at the end of March, so watch the calendar for the date — it may not be on the usual "first Tuesday of the month".

We'll also be awarding the [Heidi Thiessen Student Award](#) winners that night (everything is on track), and will display the best of show competition winners. Our online communication and technical publications competitions are on track too. Although there are not a large number of entries, the submissions look good and we have a great cast of judges.

So make plans to come out to our annual Wine and Cheese, meet Cindy, celebrate with all our award winners, and visit with old friends and new.

The Budget

And finally, we passed our budget, even though there is a deficit. We are doing this because we are committed to ensuring we give value back to our membership, and we have funds in the bank from previous years. We have kept some of the money we had in GICs out this year, so that we could use it. The rest of the money has once again been put back into GICs. Three-quarters of it will be rolled into a three-year term GIC to get higher rates and one quarter of the remaining money will go into a GIC that renews annually. This will give us a buffer of money if we need it from one year to the next.

We'd love to see you...

Council meetings are always open. Check the [calendar](#) on our website for the time and place, and come join us. We're always looking for your ideas and suggestions and would love to share the subs with you! ♦

About Carol Lawless

Carol has been a member of our profession since 1993 and is a senior STC member. She is a founding partner of KCA Consulting, specializing in web usability and usability testing. She's also an independent contractor, when a suitable project arises. She is our official recorder at council. Outside of the STC and work, Carol's special interest is Ancient Civilizations, and still does not tire of visiting ruins (her favourite is Delphi with Karnak a close second). In her spare time, she runs Mom's taxi and loves to read (while waiting for the next taxi run!).

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