Los Angeles Chapter
March 1999

society for technical communication **STC**

The **Technograph**

Shirley Thomas Named STC Associate Fellow

By Esther Spachner

Dr. Shirley Thomas, a long-time member of the Los Angeles chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), was recently elected an STC associate fellow, the society's second highest honor. To be eligible for nomination, a person must have been active in the field for at least 15 years and have been an STC member for at least 10. The member must also have been responsible for some important work in technical communication.

Thomas certainly meets these requirements. A native of Glendale, Thomas has been active in the field of technical communication for more than 20 years and has been a member of LASTC since 1975.

An adjunct professor at the University of Southern California in the Professional Writing Program since 1976, she has also been an instructor at executive seminars since 1975. She received a PhD in Communications from Sussex College, in Sussex, England; received a Diploma from the Russian Federation of Cosmonautics, and is a Fellow of the British Interplanetary Society. She has also served as a senior consultant to Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Stanford Research Institute, and George Washington University.

In addition to her academic achievements, Dr. Thomas has been a supervisor and senior publications engineer for the Ralph M. Parsons Co.; a senior technical writer for Dames & Moore; a senior technical writer/editor for the

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; and a proposal writer for Whittaker and Ampex corporations.

She is the author of seven books, including *Men of Space*, Vol. 1-8 (Chilton); *Satellite Tracking Facilities* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston); *Computers: Their History, Present Applications, and Future* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston); *Los Hombres del Espacio* (Plaza & Janes); *Uomini del Espacio* (Societa Iniziative Editoriali e Aeronautiche); *Men of Space*, Vol. 1 (Hillman/MacFadden Books; and *The Diet for You* (Popular Library).

In addition, she edited the works presented at the Theodore von Karman Memorial Seminar for the AAA Science & Technology Series, and was a consultant to Holt, Rinehart & Winston on a chemistry textbook. Von Karman, a physicist and aeronautical engineer (1991-1963), was the first recipient of the National Medal of Science.

She has also authored nearly 30 papers, which were presented at professional society meetings throughout the world. Among her most recent papers are a biographical memoir of aerodynamicist Dr. Homer Joseph Stewart (1995) and "The Apollo Fire and Investigation: Facts Not Considered" (1996), presented at the International Astronautical Congress, the first in Oslo and the second in Beijing. Her paper on biographical memories of J. Leland Attwood, the former chairman of the board of North American Aviation/Rockwell

Visit our Web Site:
http://stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm

Letter from the Editor

Conference Update

Plans are well underway for the 1999 STC Region 8 Conference, to be hosted by the Los Angeles chapter. The conference will be held November 11-14 at the Long Beach Hilton Hotel. This luxurious hotel has 393 rooms and is located in downtown Long Beach near the Queen Mary, Aquarium of the Pacific, and Pine Ave. The hotel is offering a deeply discounted guest room rate of $115 per night if you reserve by October 17. The city offers a free shuttle service around Long Beach, which is handy if you plan to take the MetroRail to the conference and explore the city afterward.

The winner of the conference theme/logo contest will be announced March 15 on the chapter web site and in news releases sent to Region 8 newsletter editors. The call for papers will be in mailboxes soon. Committee members are scheduling keynote speakers, programs, banquets, and tours. Planners are planning and scouts are scouting. So there's nothing more for you to do, right?

Wrong! We are still seeking motivated individuals to serve as industry liaisons, hospitality coordinators, registration table attendants, and entertainers (musicians, magicians, comedians, etc). All committee members will receive a substantial discount off regular conference admission. For information on any of these positions, contact Christine Stevens at cnl@iname.com or (310) 216-0816.

Sound like too much work? How about opening your home to one or more students or speakers? If have some sleeping space at your home or apartment for out-of-town conference attendees, we would like you to consider hosting a special speaker or student. And it is no extra effort to take a passenger or two with you from home when you drive to and from the conference. Interested? Contact Esther Spachner, (310) 207-6902 or e-mail spachner@primenet.com. Ω

President's Message

March is Education Month

You've been asking for a FrameMaker class, and here it is. This is a 3-day, hands-on course offered by New Horizons on March 25-27. You get a professional instructor, professionally produced materials, and follow-up technical support—all for the special price of $525. If you have been wanting to learn FrameMaker, I urge you to take advantage of this outstanding opportunity. See the flier insert for complete details about this class.

On March 13, Jack Molisani is offering his "Complete Career Makeover" class, jointly sponsored by the Los Angeles and Orange County chapters. For more information, see the listing in the calendar section and the flier insert.

Next month's seminar on "Zen and the Art of Online Help Development" taught by Mark Bloom continues LASTC's education program. See the insert for more information.

Our chapter meeting on March 30 is yet another opportunity for learning. This is the Awards Banquet for our 1998-99 Technical Art Competition. Feast your eyes on the winning entries, which include software packaging design, manual and quick reference design, online information design, and cover design. Not only will you have a chance to view the entries, but you'll also meet the creators and see how they did it.

To share your own knowledge about tools and technology, consider presenting at the 1999 Region 8 Conference this November. The call for papers, which you will receive later this month, outlines the procedures for submitting a paper or presentation idea for the conference. This will impress your boss or clients, enhance your reputation among your peers, and look great on your résumé. If you're thinking about giving a presentation at the Annual Conference next year, you can give it a "local tryout" at our Region 8 conference. Ω

Look Forward to Fun at STC's May Conference

By Amy M. Hess

Plan to be entertained as well as informed when you attend STC's 46th Annual Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, May 16-19. The Southwestern Ohio Chapter has recommended several excursions to make your stay more pleasurable, from Argosy riverboat gambling to visiting the world-renowned Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens. Conference attendees can also tour several businesses in the greater Cincinnati area that are prominent in various aspects of software development. Hospitality booths staffed by STC volunteers will be conveniently placed in the Albert Sabin Convention Center, where almost all sessions and events will be held, so you can easily obtain information about the excursions and the city. The Convention Center is located within three blocks of the hotels.

Hospitality Tours: Take Some Time for Fun

To fully appreciate Cincinnati's ties to the Ohio River, visitors should take the Riverboat Luncheon Cruise (Wednesday, May 19) or the Riverboat Dinner Cruise (Monday, May 17). Imagine cruising slowly down the mighty Ohio River, admiring the Cincinnati skyline and Northern Kentucky as you eat lunch or dinner. On the river boat, you can see the old and new Cincinnati: the historic Roebling Suspension Bridge (the prototype for New York's Brooklyn Bridge) and the site of the new riverfront football stadium.

If a lazy cruise isn't for you, then join the Argosy Casino Tour (Tuesday, May 18, or Wednesday, May 19). The cruise package includes transportation from the convention center in downtown Cincinnati to nearby Lawrenceburg, Indiana. You will enjoy a buffet dinner and of course, have time to try your luck at slots and tables.

To become acquainted with the rich heritage of Cincinnati, try the Highlights of Cincinnati Tour (Saturday, May 15; Sunday, May 16; Monday, May 17). You will see sites around the city such as: Mount Adams, which overlooks downtown and the Ohio River, and is an area full of interesting shops, good restaurants, "shotgun" homes, and offers spectacular views of Music Hall, City Hall, and the Plum Street Temple, all architectural masterpieces of the 19th century; Riverside Drive in Covington, Kentucky, famous for its antebellum homes and skyline views, Procter & Gamble's world headquarters; the Taft Museum in Lytle Park; the Contemporary Arts Center; Cincinnati Art Museum; and Playhouse in the Park.

For Art Deco lovers, taking the Museum Center at Union Terminal Tour (Monday, May 17) is a must. Union Terminal is the largest half-dome structure in the world and houses some of the largest tile mosaics in the US. A unique feature of the Terminal is that you can whisper a message at one end of the dome and be heard at the other end because of the terminal's circular structure. Once a railroad depot for all the passenger and freight lines coming through the city, Union Terminal now houses the Omnimax Theater, the Cincinnati Natural History Museum, the Children's Museum, and the Cincinnati Historical Society.

The U.S. Air Force Museum Tour (Sunday, May 16) will take conference-goers to the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, just 35 miles north. The museum houses the plane that dropped the A-bomb on Nagasaki, a German V-2 rocket, early aircraft built by the Wright Brothers, and more than 200 other aircraft and missiles. It is rumored that UFO remains are stored here!

A visit to Cincinnati isn't complete unless you Go Wild! At the Zoo (Saturday, May 15). The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens is renowned for its collection of more than 100 endangered species, including six that are now extinct in the wild. The zoo is also known globally for its work with captive birth programs, producing rare animals such as lowland gorillas, tapirs, and white tigers. They're all there

Document Usability for Technical Communicators

By Toomas Patterson

You can have the most desirable product in the market, but if people cannot use it easily, your company risks losing sales, competitive advantages and profits. Andrea L. Ames lectured at January's STC meeting to give an overview of some of the problems, goals, limits, and methods of testing to create usable documents.

Products can be hard to use. Traditionally, companies have put document emphasis on the product and not the end-user. It is important to know who the target audience is. In many circumstances, the buyer is not the end-user. The best way to evaluate product documentation is to involve participants who are end-users. Unfortunately, this is expensive, and many companies today hesitate to invest money in documentation because there is a perceived cost but not a perceived value. As a result, technical writers can become test subjects, and it is their responsibility to figure what the end-user will need to know.

Goals of Testing

The end goal of creating usable documentation includes:

- Quick, easy, and well-written document that meets the end-user's needs

- Consistency throughout (i.e., use metric or imperial measurements)

- Full product support

Testing with end-users and inviting their participation gives a unique insight into what they want. Knowing the needs and desires of the end-user gives the company a competitive edge and minimizes the risk of product failure. Providing usable documentation also minimizes the cost of service calls.

Limitations of Testing

Extensive testing helps to create a usable document, but it is important to realize that testing is artificial. In a test situation, participants may feel they are being tested rather than the product and may react accordingly. The test group is small and rarely represents the full target population, especially when technical writers substitute for end-users.

Testing may not always be the best technique to evaluate the product or documentation. The test results do not prove the product works (e.g., $2 + 2 = 5$ is a product flaw even though the procedure is correct). The main methods of testing include:

- *Exploratory*. This is only done very early in the product development cycle. The product is often a paper stage. Occasionally, a prototype model of the product is ready.

- *Assessment*. Evaluate the usability of instructions by asking the user to perform certain tasks. Testing usually occurs midway through the product development process.

- *Validation*. How do the users compare to a predetermined benchmark or a standard level to complete each task? Testing is more rigorous as the product is nearing the end of its development cycle. This is the stage where product problems should be corrected.

- *Comparison*. This type of testing may be continued throughout the product development cycle. The testers interact with participants to compare various methods of documentation to decide which is easier to know and use. Testers also evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of each design to create the final document. Ω

Toomas Patterson is a creative writer entering the field of technical writing.

Community Service Report

By Amy Dolcourt

In the Works

Join us for KCET's March pledge drive, Saturday, **March 6**, 5–11 PM, likely to be live on the air. All volunteers will receive an STC T-shirt and a free dinner.

Seeking reviewers for a public résumé clinic on **April 24**, 10 AM to 1 PM at El Segundo Public Library. Lunch will be provided after the clinic.

Easter and Passover are rapidly approaching. If you have an extra seat at your holiday table, there are "orphan" seniors happy to help you celebrate.

English as a second language and inner-city students at Foshay Learning Center are looking for e-mail pen-pals to practice English with. Frequency of correspondence and subject matter are between you and the student. Just provide me with your e-mail address and I'll set it up.

Toy donations will be accepted at the March meeting for distribution to hospitalized children. Examples of hospital-safe toys: bubbles, beads, coloring books, puzzle books, toy cars. No guns or balloons. Ω

To volunteer, contact Amy Dolcourt at (310) 737-1795, Amy_Dolcourt@XonTech.com.

March Meeting Features LA Art Competition Winners

LASTC's March meeting will feature the winners from the chapter's art competition held last fall. The entries will be displayed, and the competition awards will be presented to the entrants in a special ceremony.

The winners range from online instructional materials to packaging and design of technical products. In addition to viewing the winning entries, you'll learn how they were created. The winners will explain how they developed their designs, what tools and techniques they used, and the process that led up to the finished product. Hear the stories behind the entries and learn what it takes to create an award-winning design.

If you've ever wondered how it's done, this is your chance to find out. Don't miss this opportunity to learn the secrets of outstanding technical communication design from our blue-ribbon experts.

Local STC chapters sponsor competitions for publications, online information, and technical art. Although this is the first year our chapter has sponsored an art competition, members of LASTC enter and win awards every year in local competitions.

Three levels of awards are given: Merit, Excellence, and Distinguished. The International STC office provides competition rules, strict judging standards, and other guidelines. Local winners at the Distinguished level are entered in the international competition for each category, and the international winners are exhibited at the Annual Conference every year. The exhibit becomes a travelling road show available for all chapters to share at meetings and other events.

Besides recognizing outstanding efforts of individuals, STC competitions serve a number of other purposes:

- Establishing professional standards for our work
- Providing visibility for the profession
- Adding to chapter revenues to help sponsor other activities
- Providing a forum for sharing ideas and approaches to new technologies

Schedule for March 30 Meeting
6:00 PM Networking and Check-in
7:00 Dinner
8:00 Announcements and Employment Exchange
8:15 Awards presentation

Location
Embassy Suites Hotel, 1440 E. Imperial Highway, El Segundo (at the end of the 105 Fwy., one block west of Sepulveda)

Cost and Reservations
Members with reservations: $21
Nonmembers with reservations: $23
Without reservations: $30
Program only: $10
Program only Students/Retirees: $5

To reserve (or cancel a reservation) call LASTC's voice mail at (213) 896-2982 no later than 5:00 PM, March 26. Ω

Ask Not What Your Chapter Can Do For You...

The Los Angeles chapter is seeking a managing editor for its newsletter, *The Technograph*. The position will become available in mid-June. This is a great opportunity to learn QuarkXPress, improve your design skills, and expand your network! To find out more, contact Christine Stevens (310/216-0816).

International, has been accepted for presentation at the International Astronautical Federation meeting in Amsterdam in 1999.

Thomas has written and produced documentary films for NASA, the United States Air Force Air University, and the Communicable Disease Center, the last on the transfer of Earth organisms to a foreign body. Thomas also organized and chaired the Theodore von Karman Postage Stamp Committee. A stamp honoring the famous scientist was introduced in 1992 at the 43rd International Aeronautical Congress in Washington, DC. She also organized and chaired the Space Advisory Committee for the City of Los Angeles and the Aerospace Historical Committee of the California Museum of Science and Industry. She remains head of the Historical Committee, some 13 years after organizing it.

Her honors include a special award from the Aviation Education Association; the Airpower Arts and Letters Award from the Air Force Association; the Aerospace Excellence Award from the California Museum of Science and Industry; and the Yuri Gagarin Medal of Honor. She also holds the Medal of Honor from the Daughters of the American Revolution.

In addition to STC, she is a member of the International Academy of Astronautics; the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics; the British Interplanetary Society, Fellow; and the National Association of Science Writers.

It is difficult to isolate a notable contribution to the advancement of technical communication in the case of Thomas, since she has done so much for the field. She has trained hundreds of technical communicators in her Technical Writing courses at the University of Southern California. Many of her students enter the writing program with notions of becoming fiction, TV, or other nontechnical writers. As her students have told us at STC meetings, they often discover a new world of technical writing, and find that it opens attractive opportunities for them.

At least once each term, and sometimes more frequently, Thomas brings her students to LASTC meetings. She always introduces her students and presents the chapter to them in glowing terms. With Thomas' encouragement, many of her students become chapter members and get involved in chapter leadership. She has also been a welcome source of support for chapter leaders, always offering kind words, congratulatory notes, and other appreciative gestures.

Her work in bringing the history of space pioneers to life through her teaching and writings provides a solid foundation for her associates and students to make further technical accomplishments. Thomas is listed in *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, the *Dictionary of International Biography*, and *Notable Americans*.

Each January, STC's associate fellows nominating committee reviews all recommendations and submits the finalists' names to the board of directors. A two-thirds vote is required to elect a nominee. Thomas and other associate fellows will be formally honored at a special ceremony at the May 1999 Annual Conference in Cincinnati. Ω

Esther Spachner, a writer/editor, is a senior member of LASTC.

in habitats such as the African Veldt, Jungle Trails, and Wildlife Canyon. Stop by the nursery to see the latest newborns. And, don't forget to check out the extensive gardens as you stroll through the grounds.

A Toast to Cincinnati (Thursday, May 20) reminds you of Cincinnati's long heritage as a brewing center. Today, several microbreweries are building on that long history. You'll visit Oldenberg Brewery and the American Museum of Brewing History and Arts in northern Kentucky; a micro-brewery in Cincinnati for a tour and sampling; and Meier's Winery, Ohio's oldest and largest winery, for a tour of the cellars and tasting.

The Art and Architecture Tour (Wednesday, May 19) will appeal to art aficionados, who can learn about Cincinnati's rich artistic culture. You will visit the Taft Museum, once the residence of Charles P. Taft and now home to paintings and decorative arts from the 18th and 19th centuries; the Cathedral Basilica, built to resemble the exterior of Paris' Notre Dame, in Covington, Kentucky, just across the Ohio River; and the Cincinnati Art Museum in Eden Park, with holdings that span 50 centuries. Lunch at the Rookwood Pottery in Mount Adams is included. Originally the home of the early 20th century art pottery founded by Mary Emery, the Rookwood Pottery is probably one of the few places where you can have lunch in a kiln.

Other tours take you to wonderful places close by. Go about 30 miles north to Historic Lebanon (Tuesday, May 18) for lunch at Ohio's oldest operating inn, the Golden Lamb, where many historic political figures spent the night. Visit the Warren County Historical Museum and browse through the antique shops and galleries in the downtown area.

You can also head south about 70 miles to Kentucky Horse Park (Saturday, May 15) in Kentucky's bluegrass region. Here are the famous plank-fenced horse farms and million-dollar horses. Exhibits describe the champion racers born and bred in the region. Lunch is included in the Clubhouse Restaurant.

Tours are also scheduled for several local businesses. They are described in greater detail and price information provided in the STC 46th Annual Conference Preliminary Program mailed in February 1999. All tours are subject to cancellation if preregistration does not meet a minimum of 35 people. Ω

Amy M. Hess is a member of the 1999 STC Annual Conference Publicity Committee.

Calendar of Events

- KCET's March pledge drive, Saturday, **March 6**, 5–11 PM, likely to be live on the air. See page 4.

- "The Complete Career Makeover" by Jack Molisani. Saturday, **March 13**. Held at Boeing, Long Beach. Fee: $75 full day or $50/session for members; for nonmembers, $125 full day or $75/session. Send your check payable to OCSTC to: Judy Berman/STC, 25411 Remesa Drive, Mission Viejo, 92692. Write *LASTC* on the check. See flier insert.

- LASTC member Raymond Urgo will be leading two 1-hour clinics titled, "Flow Diagrams that Keep Your Readers Learning" at the Los Angeles section (**March 10**) and Orange County section (**April 13**) of the American Society for Quality. For info/reservations for the LA section, call (310) 217-7574; for the Orange County section call, (310) 638-6167.

- "Beginning Framemaker 5.5." **March 25-27**, 9 AM to 5 PM, at the New Horizons Computer Learning Center, 100 Corporate Pointe, Suite 195, Culver City. Fee: $525 for STC members; $600 for nonmembers. The class is limited to 15 people and will fill up quickly. See flier insert for more information.

- LASTC monthly meeting, **March 30**, Embassy Suites, El Segundo. See page 5.

- "Zen and the Art of Online Help Development," by Mark Bloom. 10 AM to 5 PM, Saturday, **April 10**, at the Los Angeles Public Library (in downtown L.A.), 630 W. Fifth Street, LA. Fee: $75 for STC members; $100 for nonmembers. See flier insert for more information.

- STC's Inland Empire Chapter will host STC international VP candidate Judy Glick-Smith, speaking about "How Technical Communicators Add Value," at the April meeting. Thursday, **April 15**, 6:30 to 9 PM, Canyon Crest Country Club, 975 Country Club Drive, Riverside. E-mail dkirtland@fleetwood.com by Tuesday, **April 13** or use the form at www.iestc.org/this_month.html. Fee: STC members: $18 with reservation; non STC-members: $20 with reservation; walk-ins: $22. Cost includes dinner. For more information, visit www.iestc.org.

- Seeking reviewers for a public résumé clinic on Saturday, **April 24**, 10 AM to 1 PM at El Segundo Public Library. Lunch will be provided after the clinic. See page 4.

UCLA Extension is offering the following courses online or on the UCLA campus in the spring quarter. A new nine-course online certificated program in technical communication is now available. For more information, call UCLA Extension's Department of Business & Management, (310) 825-4192. To enroll, call (310) 825-9971 or (818) 784-7006. Online enrollment and additional course information can be found on UCLA Extension's Web site: http://www.unex.ucla.edu.

- "Technical Writing: Process and Products," Thursdays, **April 8-June 20**, 7-10 PM, at UCLA, 3288 Bunche Hall. Fee: $335. Credit: 3.3 units, Management. Instructor: Kent Pearson, quality control editor, American Honda Motor Company.

- "Introduction to Policies and Procedures Communication," Saturdays, **April 17 and May 1**, 9 AM-4 PM, at UCLA, 2288 Franz Hall. Fee: $225. Credit: 1 unit, English. Instructor: Raymond Urgo, M.A., principal, Urgo & Associates, and advisor to the Society for Technical Communication.

- "Technical Editing (Online)," **April 21-June 16**. Fee: $550. Credit: 4 units, Management. Instructor: Larry Palkovic, Ph.D., technical writer, Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

- "Technical Writing (Online)," takes place in a choice of two sessions between **April 6 and June 1 or April 28 and June 23**. Fee: $550. Credit: 4 units, Management. Instructor for first session: Bonnie Lund, M.A., owner/founder, The Writing Company. Instructor for second session TBD.

- "Strategic Communications Planning (Online)," **April 13-June 8**. Fee: $550. Credit: 4 units, Management. Instructor: Judy Shane, M.A., communications consultant, Judy Shane Communications.

- "Information Design (Online)," meets in a choice of two sessions between **April 6 and June 1 or April 28 and June 23**. Fee: $550. Credit: 4 units, Management. Instructor for first session: Sara Stohl, M.A., senior technical writer, Parsons Corp. Instructor for second session TBD.

- "ISO 9000: (Almost) Everything You Wanted to Know (Online)," meets between **April 15 and June 10**. Fee: $550. Credit: 4 units, Management. Instructor: Adrienne Escoe, Ph.D., president/consultant, Escoe/Bliss Communication, and author of *Nimble Documentation*.

Check out UCLA Extension's Web site for their latest course offerings!
www.Unex.ucla.edu

Society for Technical Communication
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