

Los Angeles Chapter  
July/August 1999

What's Inside

**2** President's Message

**3** Regional Conference Update

**5** Calendar of Events

**6** Employment Listings

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

Visit our Conference Web Site:  
<http://stc.org/region8/conferences/www/index.html>

# The Technograph

## Getting Along by Going Along?

By David Fredericks

A distressing but familiar knot welled up in my gut that long-ago morning. Discord is not something I relish. And yet, as the interview proceeded, it became clear to me that my thoughts—once expressed—would in no way please my two inquisitors. Further, once I said what I had to say, I'd not likely get the technical writing contract I really needed. My problem, you see, has always been my complete inability "to get along by going along."

The incident I now describe to you took place in February 1986 at a small aerospace manufacturer with big aerospace customers like Northrop, Lockheed, and General Dynamics. The company was about to lose multimillion-dollar contracts—and for good reason: among other shortcomings, government auditors had uncovered faulty manufacturing practices, poor quality control methods, and even worse, policy and procedures documentation, especially with respect to ductwork for fighter aircraft. They needed a fast, competent technical writer more than they could ever imagine.

In a dusty office strewn with defective metal parts, my primary inquisitor, a gruff, bearded, barrel-chested Quality Assurance manager in his mid-40s, gazed sternly at me across a cratered desk. The second man, a diminutive, studious-looking QA engineer seemed to peer at me, as through the magnifier in his pocket protector. The requirement, they agreed, was to use the existing documentation as a base and model for new documentation. And by the action of massaging and sup-

plementing it, create documentation that would satisfy the government auditors and prevent them from losing valuable contracts. Pleased with his oration, the QA Manager leaned forward powerfully and barked, "Is this something you're able and willing to do?"

"Able? Maybe. Willing? No!" I replied to startled faces (I prayed for a metaphor). "Look," I said, "if I were a carpenter, an honest one, and you asked me to build a house on a seriously defective foundation, I'd say "no" for the same reason I'm saying it now. This stuff you've showed me, frankly, is Gawd-awful, and it's not worth fixing or building on. I'd only be setting myself up for failure."

Long pause.

The diminutive engineer chimed in curiously, "Hmm, how would you solve this problem? We cannot afford to pay you to start this documentation all over again."

"Actually," I interjected, "can you really afford not to pay me, or someone like me, to start all over again? How much will those contracts cost this company, if lost?"

(Pregnant pause. Agitated shuffling of papers by QA Manager.)

I pressed on. "Listen, I'm a good writer. When I'm cranking out good, documentation that others and I can take pride in, I become an enthusiastic writer. And when I become enthusiastic, I become a faster and much better writer. This project won't take me as long as you might imagine.

*See Get Along, page 4*

# Great Things are A'Coming!

By Jack Molisani

**H**i there! I am Jack Molisani, and I'm the chapter president for the 1999–2000 STC year. I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce myself and let you know about some plans the board has for the coming year.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm a senior member of the STC, I co-own a technical writing consulting and recruiting company, and I was the Conference Support Committee chair for the STC's 45th annual conference in Anaheim. (I'm also the chair of the upcoming Year 2000 Region 8 conference, but that's a topic for another column!) The chapter has done some phenomenal things over the past few years, and I hope to leverage my experience in the STC to keep the momentum going and take the chapter to a new range of service and excitement!

The incoming board has exciting, action-packed activities slated for the year and planning is or soon will be underway during the summer months. However, the board can't do it alone, so this is a not-too-subtle invitation to join the growing list of volunteers helping to make the chapter's plans a reality.

One activity that is well underway is the 1999 Region 8 conference, and LA is the host chapter! The conference will be November 11–14 in Long Beach, so mark your calendars. Also contact Christine Stevens, the conference chair, at [cnl@iname.com](mailto:cnl@iname.com) or (310) 216-0816 to lend a hand. Christine has a great conference planned and could use some help on the production team.

The next major activity is the soon-to-be-launched LA Seminar Series. One of the things that chapter members have been asking for are low-cost workshops on RoboHELP, FrameMaker, HTML, etc, and the Seminar Series is designed to give just that! The chapter will be organizing hands-on workshops taught by chapter members, and they are going to be very reasonably priced.

Now check this out: members who volunteer over the year will not only get free admissions to seminars of their choice, they will also get first dibs when seating is limited! So drop me an email at [jm@clarityauthoring.com](mailto:jm@clarityauthoring.com) and let me know how you can help and get in on the action! Ω

## The Technograph

### Managing Editor

Christine Stevens  
[cnl@iname.com](mailto:cnl@iname.com)  
(310) 216-0816

### Copy Editor

Esther Spachner

*The Technograph* is published 10 times a year by the Los Angeles chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (LASTC) to disseminate information regarding chapter, society, and industry events.

The editorial staff welcomes articles, calendar items, letters, and advertising from readers. The deadline for submissions is the first of the previous month.

Articles should be 250-1,000 words and must be submitted electronically to the editor. The editor reserves the right to edit articles to fit available space. Other STC chapters may reprint articles if credit is given and the editor is sent a copy.

To advertise in *The Technograph*, send electronic or camera-ready material to the editor by the first of the preceding month. We offer reasonable rates (discounts available to repeat advertisers):

|              |       |
|--------------|-------|
| Full page    | \$100 |
| Half page    | 65    |
| Third page   | 50    |
| Quarter page | 40    |
| Sixth page   | 30    |
| Eighth page  | 20    |

*The Technograph* is available for \$12 a year to non-members and members of other chapters.

STC is a nonprofit individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the art and science of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 18,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it. For membership information, contact STC international headquarters:

**Society for Technical Communication**  
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1854  
Phone: (703) 522-4114  
Fax: (703) 522-2075  
Web site: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

## 1999-00 LASTC Council

President

Jack Molisani

jmolisani@clarityauthoring.com  
(323) 874-1435

Vice President, Membership

Esther Spachner

spachner@earthlink.net  
(310) 207-6902

Secretary

Karen Blair

Treasurer

Suzanne Ferrell

suzanne.ferrell@transamerica.com  
(213) 742-3322

Internet Manager

Tom Magnus

Tom@mrwrite.com  
(310) 318-9100

Mentor Program Manager

Steve Zirl, Szirlstc@aol.com  
(213) 662-4087

Public Relations Manager

Pam Wilkes, pmlawilkes@aol.com  
(310) 470-0696

Community Service Manager

Amy Dolcourt

Amy\_Dolcourt@XonTech.com  
(310) 737-1795

Database Manager

Melissa Stoller

melissa@stollerdesign.com  
(310) 390-6880

Region 8 Conference Chair

Christine Stevens

cnl@iname.com  
(310) 216-0816

Society for Technical  
Communication

Los Angeles Chapter

P.O. Box 91400

Los Angeles, CA 90009

(213) 896-2982

<http://stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm>

## Regional Conference Update

# Fee Schedule, Tours Announced for November Conference

**T**he conference planning committee has been hard at work making arrangements for the 1999

Region 8 Conference, to be held November 11-14 at the Long Beach Hilton Hotel.

### Registration Fees

Visit our conference web site for a copy of the registration form:

<http://stc.org/region8/conferences/www/index.html>  
STC members residing in Region 8 will receive a registration packet and preliminary program in September. The registration deadline is October 17. After October 17, add \$50 to all registration fees.

Your paid conference registration includes admission to all conference sessions, one résumé/portfolio consultation, the exhibit hall, and competition winners exhibit; one copy of the *Conference Proceedings* on CD-ROM; breakfast and fully catered breaks. Nonmembers paying the full conference rate will be invited to become STC members. Full day workshops include breakfast and lunch; half-day includes breakfast or lunch.

### Entire Conference:

STC Members \$200

Retired/Students\* \$100

### One-day only:

STC Members \$125

Retired/Students\* \$65

Full day workshop (members) \$90

Half day workshop (members) \$50

\* Current student ID required.

### Tours to Three Local Attractions

For an extra \$15, conference attendees have the option of touring one of three exciting attractions: a behind-the-scenes tour of the Queen Mary; the historic adobe and gardens of Rancho Los Alamitos and shopping at Belmont

Shore; or the Aquarium of the Pacific. Family and friends are welcomed at all social events, including tours!

Belmont Shore is renowned for its funky mix of specialty shops, clothing boutiques, and local color. Stroll the strand and browse the multitude of fun shops. After shopping, we visit one of Southern California's oldest domestic buildings, Rancho Los Alamitos. Constructed in 1806, the Rancho's adobe house, barn, and gardens offer a rare example of a Southern California pioneer home. We have reserved a private tour of the barn and home, which is populated with authentic furnishings and tapestries. The 4-acre garden, which features tiled fountains, an 80-foot Oleander Walk, and rose gazebo has been reported on by *Sunset Magazine* several times, most recently in the June 1999 issue.

The second tour option is a special behind-the-scenes tour of the Queen Mary (different from the standard Shipwalk Tour), the historic ocean liner and World War II troopship. You'll see restored areas that have been under wraps since the final voyage in 1967, including the Isolation Wards and the aft Machine Rooms.

The Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific, the third tour option, offers visitors a chance to explore the largest body of water on the Earth—the Pacific Ocean. When first entering the Great Hall of the Pacific (the size of an entire football field), visitors come across the Aquarium's three Preview Exhibits. High above is a full-scale model of the planet's largest creature, the Blue Whale, which measures 88 feet in length! Visitors can watch trained aquarium divers—one of whom is LASTC VP of Programs, Betsy Suttle—feed the fish and clean the tank. These divers are equipped with microphones and can talk to visitors from with-

*See Conference, page 5*

Plus, I've already got some formatting ideas guaranteed to please those government auditors" (I wasn't as confident on this point as I think I sounded). "Show us," the QA Manager countered sternly.

Now here's the tricky part for us contractors. The thinnest of lines exists between enough of a "let-me-show-you-how-to-this" and too much. You don't want to provide so much information that they'll think they can eliminate you (and your paycheck) from the project. This lesson in negotiation can cost you.

I took out a writing pad from my attaché case, withdrew my pen, and drew some progressively larger boxes. "What I envision," I began, "is a three-tiered structure, that is to say, three stand-alone manuals, each one growing out of the other, with all of them cross-referenced to each other." I explained how the first manual would likely be a thin volume aimed purely at executives, the second, a bit larger, aimed at line managers, and the third, a good deal larger, for rank and file workers. I explained further how the first manuals would talk in more general terms about process and how the third manual would include blow-by-blow, easy-to-read-and-follow procedures for the workers. Each module would be supported by line art.

When I had finished my description, I thought I'd favorably impressed the two men. I also saw their apprehension—they sort of understood what I wanted to do, but not really. Unquestionably, however, they liked the samples I'd shown them, and they surely wanted to have writing like it to show to those pesky auditors.

"Well, we'll think about it," the QA Manager said, abruptly concluding our interview. "It was very nice meeting you," the diminutive man added with a firm handshake. "We'll let you know after we talked to the other candidates. You were only the first." I nodded my understanding.

"Oh, one more thing," I added, "if, by

some chance, you should choose me, you'd have to add quite a few dollars an hour to the numbers you gave the agency," I added on my way out to the shop floor.

Thinking about what had just taken place, I gave myself no chance of getting the job. Nor was I sure I wanted it—at any rate of pay. But I was pleased with my honesty. Several years ago, I'd decided to never again please the "powers that be" by imitating bad writing styles. Prostituting one's talent and hard-won knowledge aren't things I choose to do. "Better," thought I, "that I should dig ditches or wait tables—do honest work outside my area of talent—if I'm going to work only for money, or for less than I'm worth."

However, in this instance, fate drew me a royal flush. The melodic words, "Can you start tomorrow morning?" came from the QA Manager's mouth before the end of that business day." Andy, the diminutive man, heightened my optimism by telling me that he and the QA Manager had reasoned this way: "Why would we want to hire a technical writer who's willing to do exactly as we tell him when, frankly, this is not our area of expertise?" The truth is that both men felt better about hiring somebody who 1) stood on principle, 2) had clear notions about how to proceed, and 3) insisted on doing a first-rate job . . . even if it did cost the company a bit more time and money in the short run. I agreed.

Within a few months, the frowns of government auditors lifted into smiles. "Ah, you finally decided to hire a professional," the auditors exclaimed as they happily reviewed the new literature. Workers began expressing satisfaction at having procedures they could actually read. Managers took pride in having documentation that encouraged competence and efficiency. Letters that I ghosted for managers allayed the bad feelings of customers. And word circulated fast that there was somebody on board who could write.

Soon, the Human Resources Manager paid me a visit. He wondered if I couldn't please sandwich the design and writing of a "safety manual" into my schedule. Which I did, quickly paying for my entire salary, because the manual reduced comprehensive insurance costs by \$50,000. That's notwithstanding the several million dollars that I believe (and which I was told) I saved the company in rescued contracts.

Some sage once said, "All the most important things in life are invisible." We technical writers have the hardest thing in the world to sell—an intangible. A powerful value-adding, money-saving, goodwill-producing intangible.

In the years since I successfully concluded the assignment described here, I have often acted just as I did in this case. To me, it's impossible to take pride in yourself or your work if you compromise your talent, skill, and principles. Usually, though not always, this small act of occasional rebellion has worked to my employer's benefit and mine. Indeed, this manner of working has added to my sense of purpose, prevented career burnout, won me many friends, and allowed me to find deep enjoyment and satisfaction in my career.

So I say to my fellow technical writers: Don't be a Pollyanna. Respect the talents and specialized knowledge of others. Work as though you owned the business. Never stop developing your gift for clear expression. And, especially, Don't go along to get along. **Ω**

---

*OCSTC member David Fredericks is a field engineer-turned-technical and marketing writer/editor who, for over 20 years, has promoted and documented a myriad of products, services, and companies. A resident of Huntington Beach, he recently finished a contract assignment for Compaq.*

# Calendar of Events

## UCLA Courses

▪ "Technical Writing (Online)." Fee: \$550. Credit: 4 units, Management Reg. #B7694B **July 5-Aug. 30.** Instructor: Sara Stohl, M.A., senior technical writer, Parsons Corp. Reg. #B7770B July 15-Sept. 9. Instructor: Patricia Kalman, M.A., technical writer.

"Technical Editing (Online)." Reg. #7720B **July 14-Sept. 15.** Credit: 4 units, Management Fee: \$550 Instructor: TBA.

▪ "Creating Readable Documents (Online)." NEW COURSE Reg. #B7781B **July 15-Sept. 9.** Fee: \$550. Credit: 4 units, Management Instructor: Adrienne Escoe, Ph.D., president/consultant, Escoe/Bliss Communication, and author, Nimble Documentation.

▪ "Information Design (Online)." Reg. #B7715B **June 29-Aug. 4.** Fee: \$550. Credit: 4 units, Management Instructor: Sara Stohl (for credits, see above).

*For more information, call UCLA Extension's Department of Business and Management at (310) 825-4192. To enroll, (310) 825-9971 or (818) 784-7006. For a free UCLA Extension catalog, 1-800-554-UCLA. Complete course details can be found on UCLA Extension's Web site: <http://www.unex.ucla.edu>.*

## Upcoming Conferences

▪ The IEEE Professional Communication Society presents International Professional Communication Conference 1999 at the Omni Royal Orleans, New Orleans, **September 7-10.**

▪ The Phoenix chapter is hosting the STC Region 5 Conference **October 14-16** at the Grace Inn in Ahwatukee, Arizona (near Tempe). Contact Sandy Harnagel at [sandyh@worldnet.att.net](mailto:sandyh@worldnet.att.net) or visit the chapter web site ([www.stc-phoenix.com](http://www.stc-phoenix.com)) for more information.

▪ 1999 Region 8 Conference, Driving Forces in Technical Communication, **November 11-14** at the Long Beach Hilton Hotel. Hosted by LASTC.

in the tank.

*Conference (continued from page 3)*

## Hotel Accommodations

The Long Beach Hilton is offering a discounted rate of \$115 to all conference attendees who reserve their rooms by October 17, 1999. To receive this special conference discount, call 562/983-3400 x3636 or 800/HILTONS. This discount is not available via the hotel's web site and does not include 12.05% local hotel tax. The hotel has generously agreed to extend this offer for three days prior to and three days after the conference. The special conference rate represents a substantial discount off the Hilton Long Beach's regular room rates of \$189 for singles and \$214 for doubles. The hotel is also offering reduced parking rates for conference attendees.

## Exhibit Information

The Exhibit Hall will be open from 7:30 AM to 5:30 PM on Friday, November 12, and Saturday, November 13. The conference committee is currently accepting advertisements for the preliminary program, which will be mailed in late August to 4600 STC members. What a great way to spread the word about your product or service!

We offer reasonable rates on all conference advertising venues. For information on exhibiting or advertising at the 1999 STC Region 8 Conference, contact the Industry Liaison, Jeff Randolph at: (949) 583-9402 or [71203.2712@compuserve.com](mailto:71203.2712@compuserve.com). Or, visit the official conference web site <http://stc.org/region8/conferences/www/index.html> for regular conference updates, a floor-plan of the Hilton's meeting room space, and registration forms.  $\Omega$

Visit the Technical Book Company  
2056 Westwood Blvd.  
LA 90025

(800) 233-5150

View the Tech Standards Web site at [www.tecstandards.com](http://www.tecstandards.com)

(800) 889-7116

# Employment Listings



## **Content Editor/Writer, BizBuyer.com**

Responsible for gathering data on products and services from various industries, including telecommunications, insurance, and office equipment, and generating buying guides and related collateral material. Experience required: Minimum 3 years' writing user manuals, buyer guides and/or articles for business periodicals required. Experience with small businesses preferred. Must provide samples of recent work (published product-related material) and industry references. Must be able to independently evaluate material and make decisions affecting the final product. Superior business writing skills necessary. E-mail cover letter and résumé to Kathy Blake at jobs@bizbuyer.com. Include the position you're applying for.



## **Senior Technical Writer, El Segundo (Contract-to-Hire)**

Start: 7/1/99; rate: \$40-\$45 an hour; \$55-60K + benefits after conversion. Write and maintain online and hardcopy user documentation for fully integrated ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) system. Automotive application experience is a requirement. Must be able to write documentation interfacing with the application designer and using the software application. At Least 3 years' technical writing experience with automotive, manufacturing, inventory, or financial applications. MS Windows and Word proficient. Online help development using a help authoring tool. Experience with basic HTML or Windows HTML. FrameMaker experience a plus.

## **Technical Trainer, Monrovia (Full- time direct-hire)**

Start: ASAP; rate: \$50K range, DOE Create and present training materials for customers of a leading provider of enterprise integration technology. Provide feedback from customers to development/documentation groups. Need solid understanding of UNIX from a user's perspective. Need to have excellent presentation/communication skills, customer service orientation and some training experience. Experience with C is a plus. Must have good head for technical details and be a fast learner. Travel, usually 2 weeks per month 9 nights at a time; no weekends required. Strong customer service orientation. Good communication skills. Class sizes are usually about 10 people.



Society for Technical Communication  
Los Angeles Chapter  
P.O. Box 91400  
Los Angeles, CA 90009

Address Correction Requested