

*The Technograph*

Newsletter of the  
Los Angeles Chapter  
of the Society for  
Technical Communication

October 1999

*"The mission of the Society for  
Technical Communication is to  
improve the quality and effectiveness  
of technical communication for  
audiences worldwide."*

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**STC Web site:**  
[www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) and [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org)

**LASTC Web site:**  
[www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm](http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm)

**Region 8 Conference Web site:**  
[www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/confer\\_8.htm](http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/confer_8.htm)

# The Technograph

REGION 8 CONFERENCE NOV. 11-14

## Explore the Driving Forces in Technical Communication!

Like the Los Angeles freeway system, the latest tools and trends in technical communication can be a confusing maze.

Attend the 1999 STC Region 8 Annual Conference, Nov. 11-14, 1999, at the Long Beach Hilton Hotel in Long Beach, California.

The 1999 STC Region 8 Conference will prepare you for career growth by guiding you through the information interchanges you face on a daily basis. Meet your peers, share ideas, and learn about the forces that are driving our profession.

### The Workshops

This year's conference, sponsored by the Los Angeles Chapter, will feature six exciting preconference workshops and a whopping 47 sessions presented by some of the most formidable technical communication professionals practicing today.

Half- and full-day workshops on Thursday offer you hands-on versions of several of the most popular sessions.

The sessions, beginning Friday and ending Sunday, are divided into these

three topical stems:

- **Working Under the Hood:** Introduces exciting new tools and technology trends
- **Navigating the Freeways:** Explores skill development topics and career development topics
- **Directing Traffic:** Explores issues related both to managing people



and projects, and to professional development

Topics include writing and editing skills, online help, Web page design, project management, and presentation skills. "Psst! Wanna Buy Some Doc?" by Bonni Graham shows attendees how to educate "buyers" on the value of technical communication.

Orange County STC President Mark Bloom presents his "Zen and the Art of Online Help" as a full-day workshop.

*See LASTC is Hosting on page 8*

## The Technograph

Editor  
Scott J. Wilson  
sjwilson99@earthlink.net  
(805) 492-5533

Copy Editor  
Esther Spachner

*The Technograph* is published 11 times a year by the Los Angeles chapter of the Society for Technical Communication to disseminate information regarding chapter, society, and industry events.

The editorial staff welcomes articles, calendar items, letters, and advertising. The deadline for submissions is the first day of the preceding month (Oct. 1 for the November issue, for example). Articles should be 250 to 1,000 words and must be submitted electronically to the Editor. The Editor reserves the right to edit submissions.

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To advertise in *The Technograph*, contact the Editor for submission guidelines. We offer the following rates (discounts available to repeat advertisers):

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Third page	\$50	Eighth page	\$20

*The Technograph* is available for \$12 per year to nonmembers and members of other chapters. Contact the Editor for more information.

*The Technograph's* mailing address is:  
Society for Technical Communication  
Los Angeles Chapter  
P.O. Box 91400  
Los Angeles, CA 90009  
Attn: Technograph Editor

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# STC Membership is Valuable!

At a recent documentation summit for my company, we were asked how the company could support us as technical communicators. I explained why I thought the company would benefit if it paid for everyone to join the STC.

When I was done, the person next to me said quietly, "Wow, an STC membership is valuable!" And so I proudly pass on to you my reasons why your LASTC membership is valuable.

**Seminars and conferences:** One of the most compelling reasons to be involved in the STC is to become better in your craft from the seminars and conferences available. The STC holds an annual conference, coincidentally enough, every year. The handouts from the last one, the 46th, are available online at <http://www.stc-va.org/47confframe.html>; there is information about a huge range of topics important to technical communicators. The 47th conference is set for Orlando, Florida from May 21–24, 2000.

Speaking of conferences, the Region 8 conference is being held in Long Beach Nov. 11–14. See the front page story for more information.

**Publications:** If you can't attend chapter meetings or the conferences, you can learn from the publications you receive as an LASTC member: *The Technograph*, the *Intercom*, and *Technical Communication*. Chapter newsletters like *The Technograph* have chapter and national news, chapter meeting information, and articles about tools and techniques. *Intercom* has lots of articles about tools and techniques, management and careers. *Technical Communication* provides in-depth research articles.

**Competitions:** Do you want to get ideas about how to improve your documentation? Are you dying to know just how good yours really are?

Enter them in an STC competition. You'll get constructive feedback, and you might even take home an award. See the article on page 6 for more information.

**Chapter meetings:** Want to meet other people who do what you do? Looking for interesting speakers presenting about issues relevant to what you do day in and day out? Then make your reservations for the next LASTC chapter meeting. You'll meet some new people, hear about some new concepts, get challenged, and we'll feed you, too.

**Web sites:** Both the LASTC and the national STC have them. The amount of useful information is staggering. Check them out at <http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/lahome.htm> and <http://www.stc.org/>, respectively.

**LASTCTALK and LASTCJOBS-L:** Not all chapters have these, but the LASTC lets you participate in chapter life just by reading your email. You can discuss technical communications issues on LASTCTALK and you can get job postings from LASTCJOBS-L.

Instructions for subscribing to both of these mailing lists are, coincidentally enough, on the LASTC Web site.

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**Note to aspiring authors:** The theme for the December issue of *The Technograph* is FrameMaker. I'm going to need a general overview of FrameMaker, an article about online resources for FrameMaker, a tips and tricks article, and short reviews of FrameMaker books.

If you'd like to write one of these articles, or if you have a different idea for a FrameMaker story, send me email at [sjwilson99@earthlink.net](mailto:sjwilson99@earthlink.net). If we run your story in *The Technograph*, you get to attend the seminar of your choice for free.

## 1999–2000 LASTC Council

President  
Jack Molisani  
jm@claritytechnical.com  
(323) 874-1435

First Vice-President, Programs  
Betsy Suttle  
bsuttle615@aol.com  
(310) 478-5478

Second Vice-President,  
Membership  
Esther Spachner  
spachner@primenet.com  
(310) 207-6902

Secretary  
Karen Blair  
jdkb@prodigy.net

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

Internet Manager  
Tom Magnus  
tom@mrwwrite.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  
cni@iname.com  
(310) 216-0816

For information about the STC:  
Society for Technical Communication  
901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1854  
Phone: (703) 522-4114  
Fax: (703) 522-2075  
Email: stc@stc-va.org  
Web: www.stc-va.org

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

# The Professional Seminar Series: Training + Practice = Competence

In my last column I officially announced the 1999–2000 LASTC year would be the Year of Prosperity.

Now it's time to start the tasks that will make that proclamation a reality.

The Education Committee is in the process of producing our new LA Seminar Series—a series of seminars and workshops on everything from the basics of technical writing to leading-edge authoring tools.

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**“Anyone who regularly volunteers on any chapter committee or who lends us lab space will be awarded a free seminar...”**

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The seminar series will include topics such as:

- Introduction to RoboHELP
- Technical Writing 101
- Online Writing 101
- Indexing 101
- Human Factors 101
- Policies and Procedures 101
- The Art of Page Design
- Beginning FrameMaker
- Intermediate FrameMaker
- Advanced FrameMaker
- Intermediate RoboHELP
- HTML for Mere Mortals
- Advanced HTML
- Introduction to FrontPage
- Introduction to NetObjects Fusion
- Introduction to Cold Fusion
- Dynamic HTML
- Public Speaking 101
- Career Makeover Workshop
- Portfolio Basics

## Project Estimating and Bidding Interviewing Skills

Of course, some planning and logistics will be required to pull this off, so if you are interested in helping, contact Bret Kinkele at [bretk@microj.com](mailto:bretk@microj.com). Also, in an effort to keep the cost-per-student down, we are looking for chapter members to let us hold these workshops in their company's computer lab. (If we can't find lab space, we will have to rent it, and that equates to a serious price increase for you, the attendees.)

I'm also a firm believer that volunteers should get more out of volunteering than they put in, so I'm announcing the following volunteer policy:

**Anyone who regularly volunteers on any chapter committee or who lends us lab space will be awarded a free seminar of his or her choice.**

Plus, volunteers get priority seating in any seminar, with volunteers on the Education Committee getting priority over other volunteers.

In other words, if you are actively volunteering in any chapter activity, you will receive priority seating ahead of paying attendees.

As the people who waited too long to register for our recent RoboHELP seminar discovered, the seminars have limited enrollments and do sell out, so it is in your best interests to volunteer!

So decide which seminars you want to take, which committees you want to help, and then together let's make 1999–2000 the Year of Prosperity!

*I am always happy to hear from my readers. Feel free to contact me at [jm@claritytechnical.com](mailto:jm@claritytechnical.com) or via my Web site [www.claritytechnical.com](http://www.claritytechnical.com) with your thoughts, questions, or offers to volunteer!*

# Calendar of Events

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

## General

- Our chapter is participating with seven other Southern California STC chapters in a joint publications, online, and art competition dubbed the Southern California Unified Competition. **Entries are due October 15, 1999.** If you want to participate, read the article on page 6 of this issue and then go to the competition's Web site: <http://http://www.iestc.org/competition.html>.
- The Orange County chapter is featuring a talk by Robert Horn at its November meeting. Horn is the CEO and co-founder of Information Mapping and author of a new book about visual language for the 21st century. The meeting is Wednesday, Nov. 10 starting at 6:30 p.m.; \$25 per person, \$50 for walk-ins; includes a buffet. Space is limited, so reservations are suggested.

## Conferences

- Our chapter is hosting the **STC Region 8 Conference November 11 through 14, 1999 at the Long Beach Hilton Hotel** in Long Beach, California. Visit the conference Web site ([http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/confer\\_8.htm](http://www.stc.org/region8/lac/www/confer_8.htm)) and read the front page article for complete information.
- The **STC's 47th Annual Conference will be held in Orlando, Florida May 21 through 24.** Put it down on your calendar now, and starting checking the STC Web site for information (<http://www.stc-va.org/>), then click on the Conferences button on the left side of your screen).

## UCLA Extension Courses

- **Information Design (Online)** — Reg#D7999U runs Oct. 21–Dec. 16; taught by Sara Stohl, MA, Senior Technical Writer, Parsons Corporation. Credit: 4 units. Fee: \$550.
- **Technical Writing (Online)** — Reg#D7991U runs Oct. 19–Dec. 14, instructor to be announced. Credit: 4 units. Fee: \$550.
- **Technical Writing for the Web (Online)** — Reg#D8708U runs Oct. 13–Dec. 8, taught by Bonnie Lund, MA, Owner and Founder, The Writing Company. Online location to be announced. Credit: 4 units. Fee: \$550.
- **International Technical Communication (Online)** — Reg# D8707B runs Oct. 20–Dec. 15, taught by Patricia Kalman, MA, Technical Writer. Credit: 4 units. Fee: \$550.
- **Technical Writing: Process and Products** — Reg#D8708U runs Oct. 13–Dec. 8, taught by Kent Pearson, Quality Control Editor, American Honda Motor Co., Inc. Credit: 3.3 units. Fee: \$345.

*For more information, call (310) 825-4192 or visit <http://www.unex.ucla.edu>.*

**Editor's error:** *The Technograph* omitted Roger Angle's biography from the article last month about KCET fundraising. Here it is.

Roger Angle has been a public relations consultant in the Los Angeles area since 1986. His experience includes the financial, health care, nonprofit, medical equipment, and semiconductor equipment sectors. Before going into public relations, Angle was a newspaper reporter and editor for 12 years. He was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize during his first year as a reporter, for the York Gazette and Daily. He can be reached at [rogerangle@earthlink.net](mailto:rogerangle@earthlink.net) or <http://home.earthlink.net/~rogerangle/>.

# Getting That First Job and Then Getting Ahead

by Michelle Maurer

**The Technograph asked Michelle Maurer, who works for Technical Standards, and thus has a lot of insight into what employers are looking for in technical communicators, to share some of that insight with us. Her response was so good that I just couldn't cut any of it.**

## Getting Into Technical Communication

*Why would a company hire someone with little or no documentation experience?*

Know what you have to offer. Don't sell yourself short by settling for a position that does not take advantage of your past experience and qualifications.

Instead, use the knowledge and experience that you already have to help you obtain a position that will allow you to gain the documentation experience you desire, without going below your employment expectations.

It is extremely difficult to make a lateral move from one profession to another, especially when trying to maintain a similar level of income.

An ideal solution is to find a transitional job that can give you the most transferable experience with the least amount of sacrifice on your part.

*How do I go about finding a transitional job into documentation?*

Start by taking an inventory of your skills, specific industry knowledge, and experience. Identify similar industries and companies that would view your background as beneficial and valuable. Target positions within those industries that incorporate some of what you have already done and some of what you would like to be doing.

For example, a nurse with limited documentation experience may target a

position with a medical device driver company that could appreciate and value the specific knowledge of medical equipment and understanding of medical terminology. A candidate with this background may have a better chance at the position than someone possessing documentation experience from an unrelated industry.

*What do hiring parties look for in technical communicators?*

They need to see that you understand and are able to meet their needs and requirements.

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"A clear, concise  
resume and well-  
presented portfolio  
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documentation job  
you want."

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Tailor your communications to cater to your audience's interests by highlighting similar types of work, experience, and education that they can relate to their documentation positions.

Provide solid samples of your work to further reinforce your capability of meeting the demands of the position. A clear, concise resume and well-presented portfolio can get you into the documentation job you want.

## Staying Current as a Technical Communicator

*What do I need to do to stay current on the latest trends and tools?*

Network, network, network. Stay in close contact with your peers in the field by joining or networking within relevant associations, such as the local chapters of the Society for Technical Communication, American Society of

Indexers, American Society of Training and Development, and so on.

Read publications that focus on your industry or job, and attend seminars, conferences, and classes that relate to what you're currently doing or an area that interests you.

Keep a close eye on the tools and experience that employers in your industry look for in new recruits. Regularly check Web sites and local advertisements of the companies and agencies that have jobs within your area of interest. Stay on top of the technology that is currently in demand or could be in demand in the near future.

Obtain training in the latest tools and then incorporate their use in your current position or use them to create your own sample documentation. Training is available through local associations, extended studies at local colleges, specialty training facilities, user groups, and so on.

## Looking for That Next Job

*What will make me stand out from other applicants?*

Your resume will. This is the first representation of your work that a prospective employer will see. A poorly written resume with typos and grammatical errors won't open any doors, so it is imperative that you take the time to make it your best work.

Include only the key elements and pertinent information such as skills, experience, and education that are relevant to the positions for which you are applying. Key elements for technical communicators include demonstrating success in similar environments and describing work produced for similar audiences. Include a list of types and titles of materials

*See Advice from the Trenches on page 6*

# Enabling the 'I Told You So Dance' or Using STC Competitions to Subvert Pointy-Haired Boss Decisions

by *Bonni Graham*

Enter the Weirdness

"They don't like the word 'you'," said my client.

"Excuse me?" I said. "Do you mean they don't want the manual in the second person?"

"No, no, they like that. They just don't like the word 'you'. They want you to take it out."

I carefully and reasonably tactfully explained the probable user repercussions of this decision, but the client was adamant. "You" had to go.

Much like Mozart confronted by the Emperor's famous "too many notes," I was more than a little nonplussed by this conversation. I bowed to the client's wishes and the you-ectomy proceeded painfully to its conclusion.

How to Counter Such Weirdness

I crave a reality check on this absurd, possibly even surreal request, but the manual is only recently released, so we have no user comments as yet. So what can I do to obtain carefully considered, standards-based feedback?

I can enter the manual in the Southern California Unified Publications/Art/Online Competition.

But do I seriously expect to win with a hamstrung entry like that? Of course not, but you don't have to expect or even desire an award to enter the competition. As mother always told you, winning isn't everything.

The Importance of Feedback

One of the most important but most frequently overlooked benefits of the competition is the detailed commentary you receive from the judges (three per entry). These comments are delivered by trained judges and driven by standards painstakingly developed over

the course of years by the Society. Entries are judged against these standards, not against each other, so I know any award I receive is truly indicative of my entry's absolute—not relative—quality. Through this input I know what worked ... and what didn't.

In addition, I gain several perspectives on what to do to improve my entry. As a contractor working alone (well, OK, I have a staff, but I'm at the top of the food chain), the competition offers me a rare chance to get feedback and concrete suggestions from my peers in a non-threatening and supportive way.

Sometimes the manuals even win an award; that's gravy, frosting, whatever you want to call it. The real value is the fact that I can go back to my clients with a supported case for making improvements to their documentation—improvements they often resisted earlier, but later accept when I can show that resisting cost them an award.

Giving and Receiving

And there's another side. I almost always judge as well as enter the competition.

Isn't that a conflict of interest you might ask? Well, with three different competitions (publications, online, and art) and up to 19 categories within

each competition, there's plenty of room for me to judge without ever encountering my own entries.

What Do You Get From Judging?

By judging, I get to be on the other side of the coin, to mangle a phrase. I get exposure to what my peers are doing, to see what's succeeding for them (or not), to see how they're addressing the kinds of issues I face. Also, I get to understand, down at the bone-deep level that there are standards and best practices for what we do.

The judges' training brings me in contact with STC guidelines for various types of documents and provides me a framework in which to apply them; initially to the works I'm judging, but then to my own work as well.

In the end, it's this dual experience—judging and being judged—that raises the bar for me and results in better, faster documentation for my clients. Isn't that really what it's all about?

For more information on entering or judging, see the Southern California Unified Competitions Web page at [www.iestc.org/competition.html](http://www.iestc.org/competition.html).

*Bonni Graham is chairing the 1999–2000 STC Southern California Unified Competitions.*

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## Advice From the Trenches

*continued from page 5*

produced, tools used in each project, how the work was completed, and accomplishments on the job.

A technical communicator's job is to relay information in a clear and concise manner to the target audience. Understand your audience and address their needs, but save the details for an interview.

*Michelle Maurer is currently the Regional Staffing Manager for Technical Standards, Inc in San Marcos, California and attends an average of four STC meetings per month. She has been working as a recruiter, career counselor, employee relations specialist, and resume reviewer exclusively for documentation professionals over the last three years. She can be reached at [michelle@tecstandards.com](mailto:michelle@tecstandards.com).*

# Broadband Media to Highlight October Meeting

We have just experienced a digital revolution and in its wake is the dawn of the Information Age. Systems are evolving and technology convergence is the order of the day. Interactive multimedia content providers, producers, and architects are looking for delivery mechanisms that will drive the populace into the Broadband Era.

For technical communicators involved

in multimedia from the content provider to the customer, DVD provides the digital real estate for mass distribution and the infrastructure to allow for interactive titles.

John L. Sands, Internet coordinator for IPC Communication Services, will address issues concerning content, authoring, vision, and the proliferation of DVD technologies and products and

its importance to interactive multimedia connected to a broadband network at the LASTC chapter meeting scheduled for Thursday, Oct. 28, 1999.

Sands is a broadcasting, interactive multimedia, and CD-ROM pioneer whose background encompasses radio, television, the recording industry, and the Internet. He joined IPC in 1994 and was its first Optical Publishing Manager for CD-ROM Titles. In 1995 Sands

started a consulting firm called Points of Presence, which specializes in media trends forecasting and converging technology reporting to the Software Manufacturing Industry.

## Meeting Schedule

- 6:30-7:00 — Networking, check-in, buffet dinner
- 7:00-7:30 — Business meeting
- 7:30-7:45 — Break
- 7:45-8:45 — Program

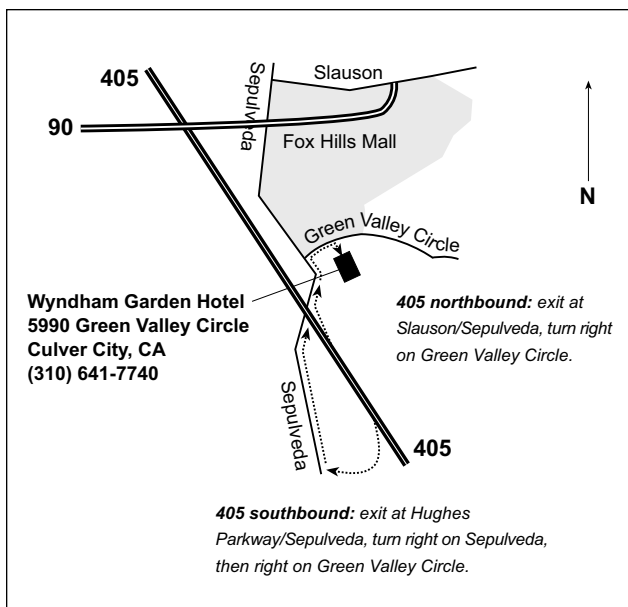
## Location

Wyndham Garden Hotel, 5990 Green Valley Circle, Culver City (see the map for directions). The phone number of the hotel is (310) 641-7740.

## Cost and Reservations

- Members with reservations, \$21
- Nonmembers with reservations, \$23
- Without reservations, \$25
- Program only, \$10
- Students or retirees, \$5 (program only)

To make or cancel a reservation, call LASTC's voice mail at (213) 896-2982 no later than Tuesday, Oct. 26.



## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

# Special Savings Available in Membership Drive

The LA chapter of STC is kicking off a membership drive, featuring different awards for bringing in newcomers to the chapter.

Several types of gifts will be presented, depending on the number of newcomers a chapter member signs up. The awards (still being determined as this issue went to press) will be listed in the next issue of *The Technograph*.

“We hope to increase our chapter membership, which is now close to 300, by at least 10 percent,” said Jack Molisani, chapter president.

Joining the STC in October or November represents a special bargain for newcomers since they do not have to pay any dues in the year 2000.

The dues are \$95 for each year plus a \$15 enrollment fee for new members. For student members, the dues are \$40, with no enrollment fee. Further, the dues may be tax-deductible since STC is a professional organization.

In other membership news, we have new members to welcome!

Coming to the LASTC as a transfer from the East Bay chapter is Alana

Garrop, who lives in Sherman Oaks.

And joining LASTC as new members are Teresa B. Avizienis, who hails from Los Angeles; Linda J. Magee from Inglewood; and Jane Miyamura from Santa Monica.

Also new to the LA chapter is Kim M. Kraus, who joined the STC this past June but got put into the wrong chapter by mistake.

To all of our new members, welcome! We hope to see you at chapter meetings and we encourage to take advantage of your LASTC membership.

# LASTC is Hosting the 1999 Region 8 Conference

*continued from page 1*

Job hunters will want to attend LASTC President Jack Molisani's presentation on "The Most Common Mistakes Technical Communicators Make When Looking for Work." Speakers from as far away as Quebec will be presenting.

The Keynote Speaker

"Technical communication will be the key profession in the next century. But, we have to take it. We must get out of cubicles and claim the work that's ours," says Mary R. Wise, this year's keynote speaker.

Wise is also the STC international president and senior manager of Education Services, Manugistics, Inc. Wise has more than 20 years' experience in technical communication.

She now directs the development of all training for Manugistics' software products and heads a corporate

distance learning initiative.

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"Technical communication will be the key profession in the next century. But, we have to take it. We must get out of cubicles and claim the work that's ours."

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Her STC service includes conference planning roles and Region 2 Director-Sponsor, and she sits on the executive council of the Board of Directors.

Registration and Other Info  
The preliminary program and registra-

tion form will be mailed to all STC Region 8 members in September 1999. Register by October 17 to receive discounted conference admission.

Also, the Hilton is extending a discounted room rate for all attendees who reserve hotel rooms by October 17. Call the hotel at (562) 983-3434 ext. 3636 to reserve your room. You must mention the STC conference to obtain the discount.

Interested in carpooling to the conference? Esther Spachner, conference carpool coordinator, will match you with someone coming from the same direction. Call her at (310) 207-6902.

For more information on the conference, visit the conference Web site: <http://stc.org/region8/conferences/www/index.html> or contact Christine Stevens, Region 8 Conference Chairperson, at (310) 216-0816 or at [cnl@iname.com](mailto:cnl@iname.com).

*The Technograph*

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

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