LASTC

The Technograph

Newsletter of the Los Angeles Chapter, Society for Technical Communication *October 2005*

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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

LASTC Members

Congratulations to the following individual for achieving senior member status:

Linda M. Davis

LASTC welcomes into our chapter the following new members.

June:

James Toland
Amanda Abelove
Christina Chan

July:

Michelle Teng
Sarah Kern

August:

Jack DeLand
Suzanne Nabliba

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An Experimental Year

Visualizing LASTC Workshop

by Nels Hanson

The LASTC Council and other interested members met for most of Saturday July 16 at the Holiday Inn in Santa Monica to develop next steps for LASTC. The Visualizing LASTC workshop is part of a larger, ongoing effort by LASTC, and STC as a whole, to make the chapter and organization more relevant to its member community.

LASTC's president, Kerry Tani, started the workshop with almost an aside, saying that the coming year would be an experimental one. She asked the group if they were asking the wrong questions (or incorrectly framing their existing questions) regarding how best to secure LASTC's healthy future.

The day's goals were as follows: the morning session would focus on LASTC's rechartering statement, and the afternoon session would cover LASTC's programs for the coming year. There were overlapping themes in the two sessions: that the way LASTC currently reaches out to its community isn't working, that changes in STC's organization ensure LASTC will need to change, that change is difficult, and that LASTC will have to experiment to see what works for its community.

The morning session worked through the rechartering statement LASTC committee members have developed over several months. STC has asked all STC communities to submit a rechartering statement, believing it will help the communities clarify "goals, strategies, and activities" that will support members and potential members that the communities serve.

The serious exchange of ideas, the reorganization and wordsmithing of the rechartering goals, and the obvious desire to get it right, helped make the morning session go quickly. LASTC's goals are:

- Enhance members' skills and knowledge.
- Support members' career development
- Provide networking opportunities
- Promote awareness and expertise of the technical communication profession
- Maintain organizational viability

Kerry Tani's article on page 5 of this issue discusses some of the ideas and strategies behind these goals.

It became very clear in the afternoon session that 2005-2006 will be an experimental year for LASTC. While the morning session tried to stay focused on defining goals and identifying broad strategies to achieve those goals, the afternoon session asked members to suggest, define, and explain the concrete activities that would implement ideas suggested in the goals.

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From the Editor

The Technograph
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Editor: Nels Hanson
editor@lastc.org
P.O. Box 91400
Los Angeles, CA 90009

The Technograph is published four times a year: September, December, March, and June. Please submit to the Editor articles and other information you want published in the Technograph.

You may reprint original material appearing in the Technograph as long as appropriate editorial credit is given and you send the Editor a copy of the publication.

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles they wish to be considered for publication.

Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the Editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

The Technograph is available for $12 per year (4 issues) to non-STC members and members of other STC chapters. If you wish to advertise in the Technograph, please submit an electronic version of your ad to the Editor at least 6 weeks before publication. Cost per ad per issue is: full page, $100; half page, $65; quarter page, $40. Discounts are available for repeat advertisers.

Well, so much for our "School's out for summer, school's out forever" short-term memory mentality. Fall comes and anyway how much mental and physical vacation did any of us really get over the summer? Especially when the end of summer brought all of us Katrina, which will not leave our consciousness anytime soon.

I am sure you all did what you could to support those who are now part of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast Diaspora.

In metaphor and in reality, fall asks us to focus on more serious issues (even in Los Angeles daylight hours get shorter). Katrina just brought us fall a little earlier. Though in Los Angeles most of us were not affected directly by Katrina. We go on with our lives and we have time to think about other important subjects, such as, hmm, our state's special elections, and LASTC.

We all know which of the two is more important. Take a break from the millions of dollars that stream across your TV set. Maybe vote with the Red Hot Chili Peppers and "Throw away your television, Time to make this clean decision." More realistically, maybe, Tivo away those commercials until after the November 8 election. Instead, read intelligent editorials and op-eds over a cup of coffee on your Saturday and Sunday mornings, and you will have the time to focus on what LASTC is doing. While you're at it, focus on what you can do for LASTC.

This fall there is a noticeable change in LASTC, in part reflected in the content of this newsletter. The change is visually visible in the calendar on the page opposite this column. What happened to our steady diet of monthly chapter meetings? What is this Chapter doing for me? The content of the chapter and this newsletter is still focused on members of this chapter and on technical communications. But nothing stays the same, as you have probably already surmised from reading the lead article on LASTC's planning meeting held in July.

You will also find help wanted ads in this newsletter. What's up with that? It's for our organization. Well, it does take more than six council members to screw in enough light bulbs to furnish light so everyone inside (and outside) the chapter can see what LASTC does. Do more than just thinking about answering one of those help wanted ads. Or if light bulb images are too close to bad jokes, there must be a myth or fairy tale out there that talks to building a healthy organization. We are all aware of how important stories can be in making our lives work. If you know a myth or fairy tale that's relevant, or if you want to write one, send it to me (editor@lastc.org), and I'll publish it.

It does take lots of people for an organization to really work. You can meet some of those people in some of the articles in this newsletter.

Please vote on November 8. My jab above was not about elections and voting, it was about the shouting hundreds who make voting feel crass. Taking the time to vote is in the same league as being an active, rather than passive, member of LASTC. There is no guilt because you are contributing. The sacrifices, in terms of time and inconvenience, are small but potential rewards are great. Think about it, and act.

—Nels

ASK STC

STC now has a dedicated communication tool so members can bring their questions and concerns directly to Society authorities.

It's called ASK STC, located at

http://www.stc.org/FAQ/ask.stc.aspx

The Board of Directors and the STC Office staff are truly interested in hearing from members, in order to know what issues need to be addressed.

We hope that ASK STC helps all members get the answers they need in order to participate in the Society's continuing success.

Beau Cain, Region 8 Director

LASTC—Upcoming Activities in 2005

LASTC Launches a Lunchtime Forum in El Segundo!

Come network with your peers and get input on your technical communication challenges and questions at the new LASTC Lunchtime Forum.

The LASTC Lunchtime Forum is an informal and informative networking lunch. We'll meet the first Thursday of every month, beginning October 6. Technical communicators of all levels and specialties are welcome. Your hosts are: Nels Hanson, a contractor at CB Richard Ellis and the LASTC Technograph editor; Mardi Rollow, an employee at Phoenix Software International and the LASTC webmaster; and Melissa Stoller, a contractor at Boeing.

We'd love to know if you plan to attend, but reservations are not required.

Where	Capistrano's Restaurant at the Embassy Suites Hotel 1140 East Imperial Avenue El Segundo, CA 90245 (310) 640-1070
When	November 10 December 1 11:45 A.M.–1:15 P.M.
Directions	The Embassy Suites Hotel is just west of Sepulveda Boulevard. If you take the 105 West Freeway, go all the way to the end, make a left turn at the first light, and make another left on the frontage road (Imperial Avenue). The hotel is on the south side of the street. Capistrano's is in the north-east corner of the lobby.
Parking	There is free parking under the hotel and plenty of street parking.
Food	We'll each order from the menu and pay our own bill. Capistrano's offers a wide variety of delicious salads, sandwiches, soups, pastas and more.

Do you have a topic you'd like to discuss? Would you like more information? E-mail the LASTC Forum Coordinator at lastcforum@lastc.org.

Spotlight Awards Judging Underway

by Karen Bergen

Will you win a Spotlight Award? If you worked on one of the 41 entries submitted to this year's Southern California Technical Communication Competition, you might be a winner.

If you volunteered to judge, you are already a winner! Judges see some of the best work of the year, get ideas for their own work, set the standards for excellence in our profession, and add prestigious experience to their resumes.

We are exchanging entries with the Houston chapter. That means we have over 100 of their entries to judge. In spite of the gulf coast hurricanes, dedicated volunteers in Houston are judging our entries.

A large group of enthusiastic technical communicators in Southern California have volunteered as judges. We are proud to say that many of them are members of the Los Angeles Chapter, including:

Dorthea Atwater
Sasha Faynor
Joe Fields
Christine Koyanagi
Leslie Lawson
Laura Mickens
Jody Nishime
Phyllis O'Neill
Larry Palkovic
Linda Radomsky
Brian Rosenbery
Pam Wilkes
Tom Wilson

Want to join them and see your name in the spotlight? It's not too late to get involved. Contact Karen Bergen at kbergen@comcast.net.

Chapter Officers 2005-2006

President:
Kerry Tani
president@lastc.org

Vice-President, Programs:
Open
programs@lastc.org

Vice-President, Membership:
Li-At Ruttenberg
membership@lastc.org

Treasurer:
Tom Myers
treasurer@lastc.org

Secretary:
Nels Hanson
secretary@lastc.org

Education Manager:
Pam Wilkes
education@lastc.org

Volunteer Manager:
Karen Bergen
volunteering@lastc.org

Employment Manager: Fifi
Sherman Klein
fifi2u@aol.com

Webmaster:
Mardi Rollow
webmaster@lastc.org

Immediate Past President:
Li-At Ruttenberg

Region 8 Director:
Beau Cain
ds8@stc.org

Society for Technical Communication
901 N. Stuart St.
Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
703 522 4114 (voice)
703 522 2075 (fax)
Website: www.stc.org
Email: stc@stc.org

LASTC Q & A

Kerry Tani, LASTC President

This is the first in what I hope is an ongoing column that will interview LASTC's officers and branch out, when possible, to interview other LASTC members. Send questions you would like answered in future interviews (editor@lastc.org). Thanks. —The Editor

How did you get started in TC?

I received a bachelor's degree in economics from UCLA. However, the class that I recall most vividly had nothing to do with economics. During my senior year, I enrolled in a year-long course titled "Practical Writing and Editing." The class gave me my first exposure to technical writing. Our assignments included writing procedures, indexing, using a rudimentary mainframe-based word processing system, and lots of rewriting. I learned how to edit others' work, and how to accept edits, gracefully.

With that background, I transferred to the technical writing department and from there to a position as a systems and procedures analyst. All of these jobs involved various aspects of technical communication, although I wasn't to label the experiences with that term until later in my career.

Why did you join LASTC?

A few years ago, I was downsized out of a job. At the time, I was part of the information technology department of a small company. My duties had included writing end-user procedures, creating program specifications, and developing test plans. During my "what should I do with the rest of my life?" phase (also known as job hunting), I came across the STC web site and felt a rush of recognition: although my job title was business systems manager, the work I actually did (and liked to do) was technical communication. I was pleased to learn that Southern California was home to several STC chapters, and was particularly impressed by the friendly atmosphere and commitment to the profession shown by other attendees at Los Angeles chapter meetings.

I officially joined LASTC just over three years ago, and have found membership to be a rewarding experience.

Why did you decide to run for office? What has STC leadership done for you and your career?

My first experience with the LASTC administrative council was to help out the Membership Vice President. I decided that because LASTC members had been so welcoming to me, I should extend that hospitality to others. The following year, I agreed to run for the office of Membership Vice President, which gave me insight into the workings of a volunteer, nonprofit professional association. I'm now serving my second term as president.

Like any management job, the presidency of LASTC has many constituencies. I feel honored to represent our members to the greater STC community; at the same time, I think it's important to take STC issues to the LASTC administrative council for review and consideration. The experience of chapter presidency has helped me see the big picture while not losing sight of important details.

I am grateful to have so many talented leaders available to provide guidance. Several past presidents of the chapter, including Karen Bergen, Betsy Suttle, and Li-At Ruttenberg, have provided valuable insight and expertise. My predecessors make wonderful role models, and inspire me to achieve LASTC's mission: to be the leading local source for technical communication professionals seeking career development and networking opportunities.

What technical communication projects are you currently involved in?

I'm documenting procedures for the Corporate Finance division at my company, in support of Sarbanes-Oxley compliance. The projects I work on have given me lots of exposure to various financial accounting concepts.

Although some people may think accounting is dull, I think otherwise. One of the reasons I like learning about finance and accounting is that *every* company makes use of the concepts. I've gained knowledge that I can always put to future use.

Our company also publishes its procedures online, so this job has enabled me to expand my skill set to include RoboHelp.

What is your favorite technical communication tool, and why?

I'm interested in wikis. I believe that online interactivity will dramatically change the field of technical communication—and I want to know what's coming before it hits me!

I'm putting my interest into practice, and convincing others to join me: This article was created and edited on a wiki. Using a wiki has been an experiment in collaborating with my LASTC editors, and allowed us to work on a common document without emailing files back and forth. Change tracking allows comparisons to prior versions. Another important benefit is that the most recent version is always available—we won't have someone making edits to an old version.

For more information about wikis, I recommend an article recently published by Information Week magazine. http://www.informationweek.com/shared/printableArticle.jhtml?articleID=170100392

What are the benefits you get from your STC membership?

For the past three years, all of my employment opportunities have come to me through STC. In addition, being a chapter leader has provided me with valuable management experience. Finally, I've come to know many talented individuals with a wide range of backgrounds.

From the President

by Kerry Tani

I am pleased to report that we have completed the STC Community Rechartering questionnaire, and are currently waiting for final approval from the STC Board of Directors. Rechartering is a way for a chapter to look at their goals for the future, and to help ensure that they are providing member value to the right audience for their geographic area of practice.

Many LASTC members contributed to our rechartering effort. I would like to commend the Rechartering Committee chair, Pam Wilkes, for her work on this project. I would like to thank the other members who contributed time and valuable input: Karen Bergen, Dee Camacho, Sasha Faynor, Joe Fields, Nels Hanson, Stanley Hansrajh, Tom Myers, Mardi Rollow, Li-At Ruttenberg, Melissa Stoller, Betsy Suttle, Marcy Tichacek, and Raymond Urgo.

The most important result of the rechartering process is our mission statement:

Los Angeles STC (LASTC) strives to be the leading local source for technical communication professionals seeking career development and networking opportunities.

We'll strive to fulfill our mission by aiming for the following goals:

- Enhance members' skills and knowledge of industry trends and technology trends.
- Support members' career development.
- Provide networking opportunities that allow the Los Angeles technical communication community to establish relationships with other people interested in the field.
- Promote awareness, value, and expertise of the technical communication profession.
- Maintain the organization's viability.

Let me explain the last goal, maintaining the organization's viability. Without a dynamic, involved membership, our other goals can't be attained. Maintaining LASTC's viability means fiscal responsibility: balancing expenses and revenues. Maintaining viability means reaching out to people who think LASTC is an organization worth belonging to. It means getting you—our members—to increase the sense of ownership they have in our community.

With our rechartering document complete, we've got a blueprint to maintain our viability. I'm looking forward to all of us working together to make LASTC the leading local source for technical communication professionals.

Remembering Dr. Shirley Thomas

by Karen Bergen

LASTC has lost a long-time member, cherished teacher, and Associate Fellow. Dr. Shirley Thomas died on July 21 at the age of 85.

Dr. Thomas was a professor in the Masters of Professional Writing program at USC for the last 30 years. Every semester she brought her class to one of our chapter meetings, graciously introducing her students and engaging them in conversations with chapter leaders. With Dr. Thomas's encouragement, many of her students went on to become highly successful technical communicators and active members of our chapter.

Dr. Thomas joined the chapter in 1975 and held the office of Programs Chairman in 1980-81. She and her husband Bill Perkins were regular volunteers for the KCET pledge drives that LASTC participated in for many years. Dr. Thomas provided valuable feedback and support to LASTC Council members, and was a recipient of the Distinguished Chapter Service Award.

Born in Glendale, Shirley Thomas was educated at Sussex College, England. She began her career as a radio and TV broadcaster, and was a host of Rose Parade coverage for CBS in the 1950s. In 1954 she served as Secretary of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Although she gave up her Hollywood career for writing, she never lost the polished diction and elegant appearance of a broadcaster.

Dr. Thomas became fascinated with space exploration in the 1960s, and began writing about it, eventually publishing 8 volumes of "Men of Space" biographies between 1960 and 1968. She campaigned for over 20 years to have the Post Office issue a stamp in honor of Theodore von Karman, one of the pioneers of supersonic flight.

Shirley Thomas was the author of 15 books on space, and presented more that 30 papers at international professional society meetings. She wrote documentary films for NASA, the USAF Air University, and the Communicable Disease Center, and provided senior consulting services to JPL, Stanford Research Institute, and George Washington University.

She was a fellow of the British Interplanetary Society and received awards from the Aviation Education Association,

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LASTC—Meetings, Networking, … …Learning, Friendships…

June: Honoring Those Who Inspire and Lead

by Nels Hanson

The June chapter meeting brought together old and new members and guests to honor Dr. Patricia Hunt and Fred Klein, two people important to STC's Los Angeles chapter.

Associate Fellow Raymond Urgo presented the tribute to Pat, first reading a testimonial from John Mignot, another Associate Fellow, who marvelled at Pat's integrity and leadership.

Raymond reviewed Pat's professional career, telling the audience that Pat started at UCLA Extension in 1980 as a teacher of composition. In 1983, UCLA Extension asked Pat to take a part-time position developing programs for extension. Her memory was that it was a full time job with part time pay.

Pat wanted to develop a technical communications program for Extension. Fred Klein was LASTC chapter president at the time and the two of them discussed what skills a technical communicator would need to learn. It was an interesting time in technical communications with military documentation on the way out and software documentation was starting to play a significant role and the Extension classes were there at the right time.

Pat said it was a pleasure to develop a program in collaboration with LASTC members. Pat found STC was very open to ideas about teaching technical communication, which was refreshing after working in academia.

Karen Bergen, former LASTC president, LASTC Historian, and STC Associate Fellow, presented the tribute to Fred Klein. She read a testimonial from Kurt Ament, who related a personal story about bringing a resume to Fred. Kurt remembered that Fred looked at the resume and "with a twinkle in his eye said 'I'll rewrite your resume.'" Karen remarked that was quintessential Fred.

Karen spoke of Fred's biography, which included being a "graduate of Auschwitz," living in South America, and starting another career in Los Angeles.

Tradition and history were strong that night at The Embassy Suites Hotel in El Segundo. After dinner Lance Gelein performed his 4th annual "unswearing in" of LASTC officers.

Lance's program for the evening was "Portfolios for the Electronic Age." Framing his talk, Lance noted that in 1978 there was the first project to create a paperless office. The results he said—and everyone in the audience knew what he was going to say—was more paper. But of course in 1978 the people the paperless office was being created for were all used to paper.

In 2005, generational changes have shifted the emphasis to electronic media and "kids are used to looking online." Lance asked how do portfolios fit into the new electronic paradigm?

Lance said portfolios are always important for a technical communicator. Portfolios organize documents and can be an important part of the interview process. In the 21st century, you might be able to bring a laptop into an interview. But, Lance cautioned with the age-old technical communicator's first commandment, know your audience. Is a laptop presentation of your portfolio appropriate? If you aren't sure, bring your paper copy portfolio as well. If the interview is important to you, bring a paper copy anyway—just in case (battery failure, bad lighting for a presentation, etc.).

Lance also cautioned against bringing your presentation on a CD. You don't want to leave *your* work with the company. Some companies will use the documents you give them and not hire you.

Personal web sites can also be part of a portfolio presentation, but again, Lance warned, you don't want to make your writing available to everyone. You should create a secure web site and do not put propriety documents

Even managers should develop a portfolio. Again, Lance emphasized that a portfolio can help organize your work. A manager can develop a portfolio that shows the value-added of the department, a good way to market the department and grow a current job, and the portfolio is there when looking for a new job.

Lance finished his presentation with another rhetorical question to the audience: "Who is responsible for managing your career?"

Remembering Shirley Thomas

Continued from Page 5

Air Force Association, and California Museum of Science and Industry, among many others.

In spite of her many honors and accomplishments, Shirley Thomas will perhaps be best remembered as an inspiring teacher and proponent of technical communication. Ten years ago she wrote in the *Technograph*:

"In the wondrous world of tomorrow, where we all will be speeding along the Information Superhighway, and like spiders we will be climbing the World Wide Web, the capability that can prove most stabilizing is that of technical writing. This is a talent diligently acquired, infinitely useful in any form of communication, and valuable to any application. That is the best kept secret of technical writing."

An Experimental Year

Continued from Page 1

Many of the ideas that had percolated up in the morning session (including why members do not attend chapter meetings, what should be the focus of meetings, and how LASTC can reach out to bring together technical communicators beyond the core attendees) were reviewed and discussed. By the end of the session, we had a series of proposals for the coming year.

There was general agreement that though some of the chapter meeting locations in the past year may not have been perfect, the speakers brought knowledge and insight that technical communicators need to have to succeed in this fast-paced world. The other part of the question was that LASTC should be able to draw from the large and talented technical communication community that exists in Los Angeles. How should LASTC reach out to those talented people?

Suggestions the group came up with in the afternoon included:

- Bring in big name paid speakers for meetings to draw more people to the meetings
- Create informal breakfast or lunch meetings in several locations to network and discuss specific topics
- Develop weekend workshops on specific topics
- Join with other professional organizations in meetings, workshops, functions

Everyone in the session was aware that additional time and energy would be required to take on these activities. It was said several times during the workshop that the group couldn't do everything, but that activities must be tried, more than once—because they are new—to see if they will work to bring more participation by technical communicators that live or work in Los Angeles.

The general consensus of the participants was that lots of really good ideas were developed and that follow-through was important. The workshop participants adjourned to the bar for a well-deserved break. After a drink and a little conversation, everyone went home energized, but tired.

Top from left to right: Joe Fields, Karen Bergen, Sasha Faynor, Kerry Tani, Nels Hanson, Dee Camacho, Tom Myers,
In front left to right: Melissa Stoller, Li–At Rutenberg, Betsy Suttle, Pam Wilkes.

Help Wanted

Program Development Volunteer

Requirements:

- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Willing to make cold calls to interesting people to speak at LASTC chapter meetings
- Maximum commitment: 10 hours/month

Rewards:

- Involvement in an excellent volunteer organization
- Support from people who have done this before
- Great for professional growth and for resume

Meeting Coordinator Volunteeer

Requirements:

- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Research sites for monthly chapter meetings
- Coordinate with Program Development to book meetings
- Maximum commitment: 8 hours/month

Rewards:

- Involvement in an excellent organization
- Support from people who have done this before
- Great for professional growth and for resume

Public Relations Volunteer

Requirements:

- Enthusiasm
- Initiative
- Willing to write up copy for chapter meetings and other events
- Maximum commitment: 10 hours/month

Desired:

- Creative opportunity to develop copy for web sites and other publications

Rewards:

- Involvement in an excellent organization
- Support from people who have done this before
- Great for professional growth and for resume

Want more information? Ready to volunteer? Contact Kerry Tani, LASTC President, or Karen Bergen, LASTC Volunteer Coordinator.

UCLA Extension

Department of Business and Management

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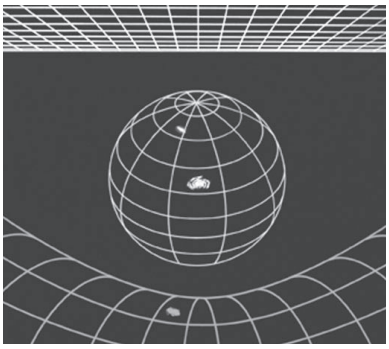
Sharpen Your Skills

through online courses in technical communication



As a technical communicator, you play a central role in conveying complex information effectively to audiences that range from software programmers to end-users, scientists to laypersons, executives to stockholders. Often you manage and control documentation projects—a function that requires yet another set of skills.

UCLA Extension offers online courses in technical communication that are designed to provide current perspectives and knowledge in this dynamic and expanding field. Our courses cover all aspects of technical communication, including current practices in the various segments of the industry within the Los Angeles area. For information on our online certificate program in Technical Communication, contact Yvette de la Cruz at **(310) 206-1578** or e-mail **ydelacru@uclaextension.edu**.

For UCLA Extension courses currently offered, call **(310) 825-4192** or visit **uclaextension.edu**.

http://www.uclaextension.edu/index.cfm?href=/online_tech_com/index.cfm

LA STC
CELEBRATING
50 YEARS

Society for Technical Communication

Los Angeles Chapter

P.O. Box 91400

Los Angeles, CA 90009

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