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For information about copyrights, reprinting articles, and submitting articles, see the article submission policies on page 4.

This printer-friendly version of the ActiveVOICE includes the same content as the online newsletter on the chapter Web site ([www.stc-sf.org](http://www.stc-sf.org)). The text has been reformatted to reduce the number of pages required to print the newsletter.

## February 2006 Meeting -- Single-source Publishing with DocBooks XSL

*Presented by Bob Stayton*

The February meeting is on Wednesday, February 15, 2006, from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm at the Elephant & Castle in San Francisco's financial district. For details about the location and instructions for purchasing tickets, visit [www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm](http://www.stc-sf.org/stc-meetings.htm).

### About the Presentation

Single sourcing is the process of writing modular, reusable documentation components and assembling them into multiple output forms and versions. DocBook is an XML schema written specifically for technical publications, and it provides an open, vendor-neutral documentation file format. The DocBook XSL stylesheets can generate PDF, HTML, and Help files from DocBook XML files. The stylesheets provide all the features needed for technical publications, including conditional text, cross referencing, and localization. The stylesheets can be customized to match corporate or organizational specifications. This presentation will provide an introduction to DocBook and its XSL stylesheets, and will include a quick-start on customizing the stylesheets.

### About the Presenter

Bob Stayton is the principal consultant with Sagehill Enterprises, an independent center for DocBook development and implementation. Bob has been engaged in computer-based publishing since 1980, starting with WordStar and a daisy wheel printer, progressing to desktop publishing and laser printers, and now implementing XML-based publishing systems for multiple output formats. Bob is a member of OASIS, and is Secretary for the DocBook Technical Committee that develops and maintains the DocBook DTD standard. Bob is a member of the technical team for the DocBook Open Repository Project on SourceForge that develops the stylesheets and other tools. Bob is the author of *DocBook XSL: The Complete Guide*.

## November 2005 Meeting -- The Future of Technical Communication: A San Francisco Perspective

*Presented by Barbara Giammona, Andrew Davis, Meryl Natchez, and Julia Cope and reviewed by Marc Smircich*

On November 16, 2005, the San Francisco Chapter STC celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary with a panel discussion that took a look at the past, present, and future.

### Happy Twenty-Fifth Anniversary!

Susan Becker opened the meeting with an overview of the chapter's history. It was originally called the Golden Gate Chapter and covered the geographic area of the current North Bay, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley Chapters. The East Bay Chapter covered the entire area on the other side of the bay. After the Silicon Valley Chapter formed, the Golden Gate Chapter became the San Francisco Chapter.

Susan brought greetings from Lottie Applewhite, who was one of the original members the San Francisco Chapter. Lottie is now retired and living in Chapel Hill, NC.

### Prizes

Before the panel presentation began, Richard Mateosian won a pair of wine glasses with the chapter logo, and Josh Burns won a logo polo shirt. After the panel finished its presentation, three more prizes were awarded. Richard Good won a logo polo shirt. Glenn Goodrich won a pair of wine glasses. Mary Rosberg won the grand prize, which was free admission to the chapter's holiday party in December.

### The Panelists

The panelists were Barbara Giammona (moderator), Andrew Davis, Julia Cope, and Meryl Natchez. At the start of the presentation, each of these people talked about their background.

**Barbara Giammona.** Barbara moved to San Francisco seven months and one day before this meeting after

having spent ten years and four months in New York. She started in technical communication after graduation from UC Irvine and got a job for an English major who was not afraid of computers. She has been a manager for most of her career.

**Andrew Davis.** Andrew got his start in technical communication in 1985 with word processing as a Samna Pro guru. He also sold Encyclopedia Britannicas and wrote for the Bay Guardian. From 1995 - 2001, he ran Synergistic, a recruiting firm for technical communicators. He has revived Synertistic "v 2.0" as a recruiting firm for technical communicators and all kinds of IT positions.

**Meryl Natchez.** Meryl has been CEO of TechProse, a provider of technical communication and training, since 1982. Her start in technical communication came from volunteering to write a tutorial for word processing at a community college. In 1980, she did technical writing for a small operating systems company in Emeryville, then moved into contract writing. In 1982, she founded TechProse because she had too many contracts for one person to handle.

**Julia Cope.** Julia is an assistant vice president and Communications Manager for Wells Fargo's Private Client Services (PCS). Julia started her career in 2000 with an M.A. in English and certificate in Technical and Professional Writing (TPW) from San Francisco State University. Her previous experience includes consulting for universities and working as a contractor at Wells Fargo. In her present position, she manages the Web site for PCS. She moved from Los Angeles to San Francisco in early 2003.

### Perspectives on the Past, Present, and Future

**The Past.** Andrew and Meryl, both of whom have a long history with the San Francisco Chapter, provided a perspective on the past. Andrew is a past president of the chapter with a long history of involvement. Jim Dexter recruited Andrew as chapter treasurer in 1985, after which he was vice president for six years, then president in 1993 - 1994. He looked back at some of the accomplishments from the past:

- In 1988, Andrew's rolodex became the Networking Guide, which had information on how to get in contact with hiring managers directly.
- Ruth Ann Fowler spearheaded the creation of the Touchstone competition, a regional technical communications competition for Northern California.
- Patrick Lufkin and David Bradwell created a detailed salary survey for technical writers in the Bay Area.
- Andrew helped to get the STC on the Web. The URL [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) used to belong to the San Francisco Chapter, and the URL for STC international was [www.stc-va.org](http://www.stc-va.org).

Meryl, who was chapter president in 1991 - 1993, added a comment that each recession looks similar. They all end, and we are at the end of one.

**The Present.** Julia represented the present. The San Francisco Chapter is supportive, and the networking has proven very valuable. The chapter needs to focus on adding value to membership.

**The Future.** Barbara looked to the future. She is the author of the article "The Future of Technical Communication: How Innovation, Technology, Information Management, and Other Forces Are Shaping the Future of the Profession," which was published in the August 2004 edition of Technical Communication. The article received the Frank R. Smith Award for Distinguished Technical Communication.

Here are some thoughts for what technical communicators should do:

- Become involved in the development process from the beginning. Find ways to promote the value of our profession.
- Learn business and management skills. For example, Barbara got an M.B.A. to get into business roles at Morgan Stanley.
- Repackage skills to find new roles in companies.
- Avoid outsourcing our key competencies by applying our skills to the key strategic initiatives for our employers.

### Questions for the Panel

The panelists and audience had a discussion that focused on four questions.

**Future of Technical Communication in the Bay Area.** We are coming out of a recession. What is the future of the profession in the Bay Area? There were four panelists and four different answers.

Andrew: The need for technically oriented "geek" writers is stronger than ever. There is a bidding war for people who can read code, and people who write end user documentation are starving.

Meryl: The geek jobs are going to India. The way to get jobs is by keeping your network fresh. Technical communicators add value to companies by getting the message out. It's important to keep skills current.

Barbara: Figure out who you are and be the best you that you can be. Barbara doesn't like being a geek, but there are plenty of jobs for the geeks.

Julia: Be creative. The financial services industry in San Francisco has many businesses that do not realize their need for technical communicators. Julia's role is doing translation work between technologists and sales people.

An audience member commented corporate procedure writing is the next big thing for technical communicators. The current regulatory climate is the impetus for this development.

**Hard Copy versus Online.** What is the future of hard copy versus online distribution of information? This question prompted an animated discussion that involved both the audience and panelists.

Everything is going online. The trend is to store documents online, then print them when you are ready to read them. It is easier to read a printed document than an online one.

There are two streams:

- The PDA model with all information in the device itself
- Large procedure manuals

An audience member commented that the real challenge is to make pertinent information available when it is needed.

**How to Move into Project Management and Analysis.** How do we do PR work so that technical communicators can become project managers and analysts? This question elicited a lively discussion that involved the panelists and members of the audience.

Here are some of the ideas that came from this exchange:

- The STC should have a volunteer to define what we are and the skill set for our profession.
- Look for volunteer opportunities at your current job.
- Technical communicators spend too much time networking with each other. We should spend time at professional organizations that are desperate for our skills, such as those for engineers or mycologists.
- To break into an area of interest, go to the professional society meetings for that area.
- Have informational interviews with people who have succeeded in making the transition that you want to make.
- To branch out, look at other industries, such as biotech or environmental firms.

**Future of the San Francisco Chapter.** This is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the San Francisco Chapter STC. What should we do in the future?

Meryl: The chapter is a place to meet and network.

Andrew: Continue to be generous.

Julia: Be aware of what it means to be a technical communicator and be open to and supportive of that variety.

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## December 2005 Meeting -- Holiday Party

*Reviewed by Marc Smircich*

On December 14, 2005, the San Francisco Chapter STC held its annual holiday party at the Elephant & Castle. It was a lively occasion with plenty of good food and drink, and several people went home with prizes.

This year, the party was on the second Wednesday of the month because the third Wednesday, which is the chapter's normal meeting day, was only three days before Christmas Eve.

Twenty-nine people showed up for an evening of fun, food, beverages, and prizes. The conversation was lively as people renewed old friendships and made new ones. There was an abundance of food, including crab cakes, potato skins, buffalo wings, pot stickers, and a veggie tray. The bar served red wine, white wine, and beer.

About half way through the party, Tim Bombosch played master of ceremonies. After a brief time for newcomers to introduce themselves, there was a game where audience members got to play subject matter experts and interviewers. The object of the game was to separate amusing fake news from real stories. There were two winners. Keith Albert won a chapter polo shirt, and Richard Mateosian won a copy of Mind Manager Pro 6.0 donated by Mindjet.

After the game ended, there was a raffle for one final prize: a one-hour resume review by Andrew Davis at Synergistic Communications. Bill Klemens was the lucky person upon whom the fates smiled.

After the drawing was over, the conversation continued, and many people stayed after the official end of the party at 8 pm. All in all, it was a festive and fun way to bring the waning year to an end.

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## 2005 Technical Communication Competition

By Patrick Lufkin and Richard Mateosian, STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship Committee

This fall, for the first time since 2002, we had a technical communication competition in the Northern California area. The Berkeley Chapter sponsored the competition, and the STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship committee managed it. We had 21 entries, resulting in proceeds of approximately \$2,000.00 for the scholarship fund. Two entries (one

print, one online) earned Distinguished awards and went on to the international competitions. You can find the list of winners on the Berkeley Chapter Web site ([stc-berkeley.org/Berkeley\\_Pubs\\_Competition/includes/Awards\\_Text.htm](http://stc-berkeley.org/Berkeley_Pubs_Competition/includes/Awards_Text.htm)).

We announced the competition winners and displayed their entries at the Berkeley Chapter meeting in January. The display is available to other chapters. The San Francisco Chapter displayed the entries at their January meeting, and the East Bay Chapter plans to do so in February.

Up until 2002 we had an annual competition called Touchstone. Because of the long-term economic downturn that followed the dotcom bubble, the 2002 competition was only moderately successful, and we were unable to put on a competition in 2003 and 2004. In 2005 the local chapter presidents, led by Susan Becker, tried to revive Touchstone. They worked valiantly, but they were unable to assemble the considerable resources needed to put on a full-scale Touchstone competition. At the end of July they announced that they would not go forward.

The STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship depends upon competition proceeds to support its scholarship program. In August, the scholarship board decided to put on a scaled-down, no-frills competition to fill the gap. The Berkeley Chapter agreed to sponsor this competition. By holding expenses to an absolute minimum, we were able to earn a substantial amount for the scholarship fund, even though the number of entries was much smaller than in prior competitions.

The STC Kenneth Gordon Scholarship thanks the Berkeley Chapter board and the following volunteers: Nancy Baltz, Melody Brumis, Joseph Devney, Jim Dexter, Judith M. Herr, Jessica Livingston, Patrick Lufkin, Richard Mateosian, Joy Montgomery, Gwaltney Mountford, Sue Phelan, Hillary Russak, Marc Smircich, Vince Swanson, Linda Urban, and Anne Wilson. Without their support the competition would not have taken place, let alone been the success it was.

## New and Transferred Members

By Marc Smircich

We welcome the following new members who joined the chapter in November and December of last year:

- Tracy D. Abad
- Janice M. Amador
- Donna M. Hill
- Jeff Knight
- Matthew Lindgren
- Sophy T. O'Donnel
- Alan Reade
- Susan D. Tiner
- Jamie R. White
- Jennifer Yu

We also welcome the following people who transferred in to the chapter during November and December:

- Jean Y. Fukunaga
- Ada L. Lai
- Kevin G. Lim
- Richard Mateosian
- Dawn Turner

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## ActiveVOICE Article Submission Policies

The ActiveVOICE welcomes articles from technical communicators. Having a published article is a good addition to your portfolio. This document describes the guidelines for submitting an article to this newsletter. If you have any questions, you can email the editor at [newsletter@stc-sf.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-sf.org).

### Publication Information

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### Submission Guidelines

Submit all articles via email to the newsletter editor ([newsletter@stc-sf.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-sf.org)) in either of the following ways:

- Microsoft Word format as an attachment.
- Plain ASCII text in the message body or as an attachment.

If your article contains copyrighted materials, you are responsible for obtaining permission for the ActiveVOICE to publish the copyrighted materials.

Please include the following with your article:

- Your name. Please spell it exactly as you want it published.
- The title of the article. If you get to choose the title, make it descriptive and inviting. When readers are looking at the front page of the online newsletter, the title is the only basis they have for deciding whether to click on the link to your article.

NOTE: For recurring monthly articles, such as reviews of meetings, you do not get to choose the title.

- Headings. Please include headings so that it is easy for busy readers to scan your article (just as you do when reading technical publications). Headings are especially important when people are reading online. If your article does not have headings, the editor may add them.
- A brief bio (no more than 50 to 75 words). This bio is a chance for you to say a little bit about yourself that you want to share with the world.

### Articles Published

The ActiveVOICE publishes the following kinds of articles:

- Reviews of previous meetings. Each edition contains reviews of previous meetings. Normally, they should be no more than 1,000 words, but some meetings may require a longer article for adequate coverage. The purpose of these articles is to provide a summary of the meeting for those who did not attend.

- Columns by STC officials. To keep our audience informed of what is happening with the STC, the newsletter accepts articles from STC officers at the chapter, regional, and international levels.

- Publicity for STC events and other professional organizations. The newsletter accepts publicity articles for conferences, seminars, and other events sponsored by the STC, an STC chapter, an STC SIG, and closely related non-profit organizations.

- Articles related to technical communication. The newsletter accepts software reviews, book reviews, information about industry trends, tips on how to use popular software packages, and other such articles. To be accepted for publication, the primary purpose of the article must be to inform and educate, rather than to market a particular product or service. If you have an idea for an article, please contact the newsletter editor at [newsletter@stc-sf.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-sf.org).

### Editorial Discretion

The Society for Technical Communication, San Francisco Chapter reserves the right to edit all submitted articles for length and appropriateness. The chapter is the sole arbiter of whether to accept an article for publication and when to publish it, either in whole or in part.

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