

# Devil Mountain Views

Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC  
March/April 2003

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## **Copyediting—Who Needs It?**

**Elaine Parrish**, our DMV copyeditor, writes about the importance of copyediting and why it should not be neglected.



## **An Online Project Information Solution**

**Don Huntington** talks about his unique way of reporting project status to clients by creating a simple web page.



## **Style Guides to the Rescue**

**Scott Wallace** provides clues on how to simplify web writing by creating a new style or adapting an existing one. As always, Scott gives us many useful references to accomplish this task.



## **What Does Video Capture Have to Do With Writing?**

**Linda Schaltz** writes about Camtasia, a video capture tool used to develop your own movies.



## **Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?**

**Susan Harlan** discusses the effects of outsourcing on technical writers and suggests a different approach to job hunting.



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## Copyediting—Who Needs It?

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by Elaine Parrish  
 DMV Copyeditor

You're a professional writer. You've done your homework by carefully researching your topic. You've written, read, tested, re-read, rewritten, and polished your piece, until you know it's perfect. You've labored and sweated and prayed in a rush to submit it at the last minute, just under a deadline that, as usual, is completely unrealistic. Who has time for copyediting? After all, you've already run it through the spell checker.

Then you see your piece come out in print with your name listed proudly at the top—and your eyes jump unbidden to a glaring typo in the middle of the second paragraph. D'oh! How could you have missed it? This is when you begin to realize the truth of Barker's Law: *Proofreading is more effective after publication.*

If this scenario sounds familiar to you, you're not alone. In this uncertain economy, companies are being forced to cut corners wherever they can. Regrettably, quality control is often one of the first fatalities. Amazing advances in technology may cause corporate decision makers to lose sight of the fact that technology is only as good as the humans who program it—and we humans are...well, only human! (Readers of "a certain age" will remember how excited we all were when spell checking first became available on our word processing programs. We were sure that our documents would thenceforward be free of errors. How disappointing that assumption turned out to be!)

### Team Effort

I've been a copyeditor for over twenty years, and in that time I've witnessed incredible changes in technology, and in the documents generated by, for, and about it. One basic fact has remained unchanged: good writing, a human endeavor, can always be made even better. This requires a team effort, and your copyeditor should be considered an integral part of your team.

As a fellow editor, Dan A. Wilson of The Editor's DeskTop (an online editing service), points out, "Even a superb writer needs a good editor. A merely good writer needs a superb editor." As a writer, you have a job to do: to communicate to your readers. And as a copyeditor, I have a job to do: to ensure that possible barriers to that communication are removed.

### Importance of Copyediting



Why should copyediting be considered so important if, after all, you're the writer—and thus the expert? The fact that you are indeed the writer, and the expert, can actually work to your disadvantage. As the writer, your very closeness to the work that you've been focusing on so intently can make you oblivious to devious little errors or inconsistencies that have subtly found their way in. *You* know what you're trying to say, and when you've read over your own words a few dozen times, it's easy to subconsciously substitute what you meant to write for what you actually wrote. And as the expert, you may be assuming knowledge that your readers do not in fact possess. Your copyeditor acts as a reality check for you by sitting in the place of your audience.

Every writer wants to be respected as a professional. Just as actors should not go onstage without proper rehearsal, writers should not allow their work to be distributed without proper copyediting. And so, for the professional writer, the question is not, “Who needs a copyeditor?” but rather, “Why would I ever want to write without one?” ▲

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## Emerging Technologies: An Online Project Information Solution



by [Don Huntington](#)  
EBSTC Member

Over the past decade or so, I have been perfecting an online method for reporting project status that has the wonderful qualities of being both unobtrusive and always available. I have learned that by maintaining an online page for every project I'm working on, I can provide all interested parties a tool for knowing exactly what I believe the project status to be at any time they are interested in knowing it.

### The Power of Effective Status Reporting

All of us who are post-novice in the technical communication business are familiar with the power of effective status communication. We also like project status to be reported in a somewhat efficient way, as well.



However, how often have we all been involved in seemingly interminable project staff meetings in which 90 percent of the communication seemed irrelevant and the 10 percent that we desperately needed to know was missing or only ineffectually communicated to us? The person we needed was not in attendance, or failed to bring the information we needed—or any of a thousand other things went wrong.

It is a joyful thing, therefore, to provide an uninterrupted channel of communication through which others can see exactly the information they want to know about our projects—and can see it any time they wish.

I have been providing this wonderful service simply by creating an online web page that reports the current status of every project I am working on.

Such a page provides a number of wonderful benefits.

### Anytime-Anywhere Information

In particular, status information on a web page is not limited by time or location. All interested or concerned people have to do is punch in the URL to access the information any time, day or night.

The web page solution also provides an effective tool for discussion and coordination. When discussing a project with a client, boss, employee, whomever... you can open the page on your computer while they open the same page on their computer and you can discuss together the schedules and issues that you currently display. This works as effectively when you are in different rooms (or continents) as when you are sitting side by side.

### Maintainable Information

One great thing about online information, of course, is that you can change it at the drop of a hat. And, as my buddy, the guru, likes to put it, "You can carry around a great big box of hats." I've often been on the phone with a client or manager, going through the details of the delivery, making changes in real time as we revise the information. By the time we hang up I've already uploaded the revised file.

Such felicitousness of communication (if you will permit my exuberance) serves to protect me against the most serious problem I think we face—the problem of unpleasantly surprising the people we work with. I've learned that most people are forgiving if we are going to miss a deadline as long as four things happen right away:

- They know about the problem as soon as we know it.
- They know exactly why the problem is going to happen.
- They know exactly what we are going to do about it.
- They know exactly what the revised schedule has now become.

The web page solution provides an effective way of meeting all of those requirements.

### Just Do It!



I encourage you to try creating status-reporting pages for your project web site. The solution has immeasurably increased the economy and proficiency of my project tracking and reporting. I have never used this with a boss or client without them commenting on how much they appreciated being kept informed about the project details.

Next issue I'll report some details on things I've learned about design, formats, contents, details of implementation, and use.

I'll provide a template for such a page and will show you a technique for using this solution that might change your professional life. ▲

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## Online Writing: Style Guides to the Rescue

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by [Scott Wallace](#)  
 EBSTC Member



Think of it as the perplexicon of technology—that vocabulary of slippery new technical terms that can turn a web document into an editorial minefield. These are words that, until they've been around long enough to find their way into glossaries and/or style guides, can confound our attempts to spell, punctuate, capitalize, and use them correctly.

The first two articles in this series addressed a number of such words—Web/web, dialup/dial up, logon/log on, backup/back up, and others—many of which are treated differently depending on the parts of speech they occupy in a particular context.

Some of the issues confronting the writer, however, have to do not with individual words but with broader questions of editorial style. Consider, for example:

- Should you enclose web site names in quotes? Italicize them? Neither? What about the titles of individual articles on a site?
- What's the right way to cite material from online sources?
- How do you indicate the location of a file several levels deep in a multilayered web hierarchy?
- Do you italicize URLs and e-mail addresses? Include *http://* in a URL?
- Should you use the U.S. or international forms for dates and times? Measurements? Currencies?

The style guide you use should address related issues like these that arise in the course of your work. If your employer (or client) has a style manual, you're obligated to use it. But if the company doesn't have a style guide, or if its style guide isn't up to the task, you need to adopt one that meets your needs—or append the one you're using or distill your own from other sources.

### To Choose, Adapt, or Create?

Ideally, you'll find a published style guide that works for you. Choose one that's a good fit for your audience. For example, if your company develops software for the Windows platform, you'll use the *Microsoft Manual of Style* (see [Style Guide Resources](#)). If you're writing about an Apple or Unix application, however, you won't find a similar reference work. You'll need to do some research.

Should you find that you need to refresh an existing style guide, or cobble together one of your own, take your cue from other materials published by reputable sources for your intended audience. Start with those produced by and for the company you're working for. If you're targeting Apple users, read Apple product documentation and peruse the Apple web site; visit the sites of other companies that develop products for the Apple operating system.

Alternatively, learn if there's an industry association or professional organization in the field you're working in that has a style manual you could adopt, or adapt. If such a group exists but doesn't have its own style guide, study print and online materials it publishes.

If you're creating your own style guide, a computer dictionary or technology glossary—especially one developed for your industry—is an excellent starting point.

## Making Style Invisible

There's nothing more essential to good writing than finding the right style. You'll know you've found the right style for your audience if it's "transparent"—that is, if your readers are unaware of it. A style that's transparent to the tattoo-and-earring set would be jarringly obvious to the pinstripes-and-wingtips crowd, and vice versa. Transparent style doesn't draw attention to itself. Style that does comes across as self-conscious and contrived. That's not good writing. There's a lot of editorial terrain between the *Chicago Manual of Style* and *Wired Style*. Our job as web writers and editors is to know what part of that terrain our readers are most comfortable on. It's from there that we can communicate most effectively.

**Resources** Check out this list of [Style Guide Resources](#). ▲

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## Online Writing: Style Guide Resources

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by [Scott Wallace](#)  
EBSTC Member

Resources from [\*Style Guides to the Rescue\*](#).

Think of these as supplements to, not substitutes for, your trusty *Chicago*, *AP*, *Oxford American*, or other reputable print style manual.

Most of the style guides you'll find online and in the technology section of your favorite bookstore are not editorial style guides. They're guides for developers that focus on HTML and how it interfaces with various aspects of web design. Some of these include chapters on editorial matters, but none I've encountered is worth buying solely for that.

### Online Resources

#### [Citation Styles: Online.](#)

Using the MLA, APA, CBE, and Chicago styles to cite and document online sources—web sites, e-mail, discussion-forum postings, and more. From Bedford/St.Martin's.

#### [Create a Web Site Style Guide.](#)

11 guidelines for developing your own style guide. Edit-Work.com's own Site Style Guide [<http://www.edit-work.com/about/presentation.html>] includes both editorial references and presentation specifications (layout, fonts, colors, link styles, logo use, etc.)

#### [Editing a Website: Extending the Levels of Edit.](#)

Adapting the three editing levels to hypertext documents. From The Communication Circle.

#### [Using Style Sheets for Web Copyediting.](#)

Sometimes a style sheet is all you need. Edit-Work.com suggests 20-plus things yours should address.

#### [Web Style](#), 2nd edition.

Available online and in print, this replaces the *Yale Style Manual*, which I've recommended for years as essential reading. At minimum, read the chapters on editorial style, site and page design, and typography.

#### [WebStyle Guide.](#)

After three years, still the Web's most comprehensive style guide for online writers and editors. By EBSTC's Scott Wallace.

#### [Writing for the Web: Editorial Review of Web Pages.](#)

Every content project needs a good editor—especially those destined for online publication. From Sun Microsystems.

### Books

[The Columbia Guide to Online Style.](#) Todd Taylor and Janice R. Walker. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998. ISBN 0-12311-0789-7. Both a language and design manual. Part 1: citing electronic reference sources. Part 2: production, including "The Logic of Document Style" and chapters devoted to network and print formats.

[The Microsoft Manual of Style](#). Microsoft Corp. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Press, 1998. ISBN 1-57231-890-2. Guide used by Microsoft and other companies developing online help, user documentation, and web publications for Windows. The companion CD includes an electronic version of the book, plus Microsoft's Computer Dictionary.

[Wired Style: Principles of English Usage in the Digital Age](#), revised, updated edition. Constance Hale (Ed.). New York: Broadway Books, 1999. ISBN: 0-76790-372-2. Ten "Principles for Writing Well in the Digital Age," a style FAQ, dictionary, and more. Easier to use, and less cloyingly pretentious, than the 1996 edition. ▲

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## What Does Video Capture Have to Do With Writing?

by [Linda Schaltz](#)  
 EBSTC Employment Manager

I must admit that when asked to write on the subject of Camtasia, I was at a bit of a loss. It's not that I don't have experience using the tool, but I wasn't sure how to approach the topic. I've decided to put on my Employment Manager's hat and present from that direction.

I have been telling job seekers for some time now to diversify their skills. In this tight economy, most of us can't afford to be technical writers exclusively. Practicing what I preach, I can honestly say it's been a while since I've done just writing. I do web design, web content management, presentations, white papers, and of course, video capture for training. All of these skills were learned on the job and it's been wonderful being paid to learn something marketable.

### What is Camtasia?

Camtasia is a really easy tool to learn. And it's fun, as long as you don't dread the sound of your own voice. For those who may not know, a video capture tool like Camtasia captures each screen change, keystroke, and mouse movement that takes place on a screen. It also has the capability of providing voiceover and captioning. In a nutshell, you're making a movie!



### Script, Rehearse, You're a Movie Producer!

What does every good movie need? A script! Hey, we're writing here! As most of you already know, technical writers have to know the systems about which they are writing anyway, so it's no stretch to script how to use whatever it is that needs using, step-by-step. Just remember to keep it simple and conversational. (That's a little more challenging than you might think!)

Now that you've got a script, you must rehearse—no kidding! I recommend that if you are going to be using Camtasia, you also convince your employer to purchase Dub-it. Dub-it allows you to capture voice in a separate take. It also allows the addition of music. If you use Camtasia alone, you must record both at once, and that's not easy unless you have a photographic memory! Imagine, if you will, looking up at the screen and then down at the script and then up at the screen and then...well, you get the picture. It can be dizzying!



Once you have your video clip recorded and are happy with the way motion and sound are synchronized, you can produce a movie using the Camtasia Producer (included with the software). This allows you to string together multiple video clips to create variations on a theme. Watch out, Steven Spielberg!

For a professional feel, add an introduction and ending. I use PowerPoint to create a slide presentation to capture, to continue the "movie" feeling, but I'm sure there are other ways as well. You're limited only by your imagination!

### For More Info

For anyone interested in learning more about Camtasia, please feel free to [contact me](#). I'll be happy to give you more details and send you a sample presentation.

You can also download a free 30-day trial at [TechSmith](#), the company that develops Camtasia. ▲

## Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?



by [Susan Harlan](#)  
 EBSTC President-Elect

See the article Susan Harlan wrote on "[Trends in Technical Writing](#)" for the September/October issue of Devil Mountain News.

### The Bottom Line

Last year after attending the STC Annual Conference, I wrote a story summarizing information from a variety of experts in the field who were talking about the business aspects of technical writing. It was the first time I'd heard the terms offshoring and ROI (return on investment). These speakers seemed to be talking about the future or someplace other than Silicon Valley where my focus had been on writing procedures with technical accuracy and also learning Dreamweaver.

That wasn't even a year ago, yet these terms and the conditions they represent are now the challenges that many of us are facing. It's not just the field of technical writing, either. In the past six to nine months more corporations have looked at their bottom line, their ROI, and decided that expenses could be decreased by employing people offshore who are also talented workers and working at rates that are substantially less than here.

Two months ago, a member of the Silicon Valley Chapter was laid off from a large Silicon Valley corporation along with 80% of their technical writers. The corporation decided to offset documentation expenditures by offshoring this work to India, where English is spoken and technically apt writers are available. Many companies in the Bay Area are now offshoring technical writing and other positions to India and the Philippines.

Here are some facts on offshoring:

- A recent study by Forrester Research Inc., which tracks trends in the information technology industry and is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, estimates that U.S. employers will move 3.3 million white-collar service jobs offshore in the next 15 years for a total of \$136 billion in wages.
- About 550 of 700 service job categories may be impacted, including technical writing, art and design, business operations (customer service and accounting), office support (home loans and insurance claims processing), sales, life sciences (medical and lab testing)—even management.

### What's the Purpose of this Article?

Is this written to create fear, or cause you to think of moving into another profession, or to just give up? No! None of these. We need to think outside of the box once again and focus on a creative, new approach.



It's also a good time to get a more recent copy of the book, *What Color is Your Parachute?* by Richard Nelson Bolles, the #1 job-hunting book, that includes discussion of informational interviews and transferable skills. We may never return to the bliss of the year 2000, but the one line from a speaker at the Annual Conference that keeps returning to me is this: "*Good writers are always needed.*"

Remember that! An important fact is that not all writing can be offshored.

Right now we're talking about the larger corporations and then those with contacts or roots in countries that have the worker resources. In the future, of course, global resource companies will be able to provide services to all sizes of companies, so that not just large corporations will be affected.

Yet, globalization means geographic distance and some cultural distance, so that a writer located in the Bay Area is able to talk with SMEs (subject matter experts) face-to-face, and this will still be needed for some projects. In this first year of expansive offshore outsourcing, we have not yet seen (or heard) results of these efforts. Does this documentation pass a usability test? It is possible that some companies, or at least some departments, might find that this process does not contribute to the bottom line.

## Tap into Local Needs

See [Susan's sidebar](#) on what the Willamette Valley Chapter is doing to address these issues.

Current data shows the growth of offshoring will increase at a significant rate, but there are still some local employment needs. This is where you and I fit in. We will find opportunities here, and while the remuneration may decrease further and the competition may increase, we also are going to rely on some new job-searching skills. How do I meet this challenge? Perhaps this is the time to take some business classes that will introduce you to ROI, metrics, and case studies. Are you able to write a simple business plan for your goal of finding your next job?

Networking is very important in the job search process now and will continue to be in the future. If you're an active member of STC, that's a good start. Our chapter has a Networking SIG for people looking for work, which provides more contacts and resources. Are you also participating in community groups? These can be state-run UI (unemployment insurance) groups, or a Chamber of Commerce, or a small personal support group. The more people you talk with and the more frequently you reach out in the community, the better your networking results.

In a paper to be presented at the 2003 STC Annual Conference, Silicon Valley Chapter member **Marie Highby** and SVC President **Beau Cain** offer additional suggestions for technical writers "to stay viable in the market." These include:

- Stay up-to-date with an ever-changing array of programs.
- Develop organizational skills and business knowledge required for implementing enterprise-wide systems.
- Learn to think visually and communicate via graphics and design as well as words.

## Improvise Your Skills

Job opportunities will not be automatic with these skills, but you will be competitive in the marketplace. Who will be hiring? The San Jose Mercury News article on February 23 states that "young companies in new industries are hiring." This includes biotech firms and those with web-related products. The Mercury News also cites a survey from Lee Hecht Harrison that found "additional hiring among hospitals, health-care providers, medical device companies and aerospace and defense firms."

It is important to look for writing opportunities—technical and other types—in different job areas, and this means different types of employers. Some of our experienced East Bay members are improvising, refocusing on how to use their writing skills, and are currently employed.

East Bay member and former president **Diana Wilcoxson** offers some personal advice on how to handle the current job market. After some networking, a positive first meeting, and then some good luck, she is now working with the Bailey Team, a RE/MAX real estate firm in Danville. She says, "I couldn't ask for anything more. It is a varied and exciting position, which enables me to use the skills I have—writing advertisements, flyers, postcards, magazine articles, a newsletter, a web site—as well as personal relationship skills. I would encourage people who are thinking of

making a transition to think seriously about what they really like to do outside of technical communications and see where their skills could be used."

Another EB member, **Dave Gardner**, is active in the Medical Writers SIG in Santa Clara, and he is now selling cars in Tracy. That's not all he does, of course. He explains that he "sometimes takes time off for some other functions—such as the one in Pleasanton put on by a law firm and an IT group on How to Write a Business Plan and How to Communicate with Venture Capitalists. I met a bunch of prospects there (not for my car lot activities, but for my writing gigs). We really enjoyed networking with all the folks there before and after the meeting. It was a good place to exchange business cards and get info on new directions for careers. I also attended a seminar on biotech a few weeks ago on FDA and NIH regulatory requirements and 'How to Write Grant Proposals for the NIH.'"

## Offering Solutions

These stories show that some of our East Bay members are thriving in what others call difficult times. Our chapter is focusing on what will best help our members in their job search and career focus. As President-Elect of the East Bay Chapter this year, I have worked with our current President **Melody Brumis** to offer some direction and solutions in job-searching and career questions. Your suggestions for future meeting topics and other services or events are welcome. Please send me an [email](#). ▲

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## Willamette Valley Chapter Update

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by [Susan Harlan](#)  
EBSTC President-Elect

*This article is a sidebar to Susan's article [Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?](#) in this issue.*

### **The New Reality**

**Jean Richardson** is the Mentoring Manager for the [WVC chapter](#) in Portland, Oregon, and the person who drove the effort to create a successful Retooling seminar in January 2002. That seminar helped many people see the alternatives available to them as Technical Communicators. She recently sent a report on what their chapter is doing now:

"Since the Retooling workshop we have continued to work on keeping technical communication a vital career option for our membership. Last spring a group of very senior technical communicators discussed the topic of how technical communicators respond to change. They labeled the phenomenon 'professional resiliency.'

"This group also put together a proposal for restructuring our SIGs to provide a stronger sense of community. We will implement a pilot of the proposal in May. In April, our chapter is meeting with the Mid-Valley Chapter of STC to collaborate on a program related to job search skills.

"Recently, our Contractors SIG hosted a particularly empowering program on labor trends for technical writers. The speaker was an Oregon state economist. The news was quite sobering. We are not in a temporary downturn but a fundamental restructuring of the market. What has been a gut sense for many of our members was confirmed by data: We must actively redirect our skills, expectations, and marketing efforts in response to our new reality." ▲

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## Editor's Message

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by [Ashwini Tharval](#)  
 Managing Editor

Welcome back! Hope you enjoyed reading the last issue.

### What's in Store

This issue takes a look at some of the trends in technical writing. **Elaine Parrish**, in her article [Copyediting—Who Needs It?](#) writes about the importance of copyediting and why it should not be neglected. **Don Huntington** talks about his unique way of reporting project status to clients by creating a simple web page in [An Online Project Information Solution](#). **Linda Shaltz** gives us a peek at Camtasia in [What Does Video Capture Have to Do With Writing?](#) **Susan Harlan** discusses the effects of outsourcing on technical writers and suggests a different approach to job hunting in [Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?](#)

### Deduct Your STC Dues

Did you know that your STC dues are tax deductible? Check out our [Society News](#) page for information on how to go about doing this.

### A Bit of Humor

A colleague of mine sent this funny email and it really cracked me up. You've probably read it somewhere before, but I hope it still brings a guffaw. : )

The following were answers provided by 6th graders during history tests. Watch the spelling! Some of the best humor is in the misspelling.

Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients. Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the ten commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.

Solomon had three hundred wives and seven hundred porcupines.



The Greeks were a highly sculptured people, and without them we wouldn't have history. The Greeks also had myths. A myth is a female moth.

Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. They killed him. Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.



In the Olympic games, Greeks ran races, jumped, hurled biscuits, and threw the java.

Julius Caesar extinguished himself on the battlefields of Gaul. The Ides of March murdered him because they thought he was going to be made king. Dying, he gasped out: "Tee hee, Brutus."

Johann Bach wrote a great many musical compositions and had a large number of children. In between he practiced on an old spinster which he kept up in his attic. Bach died



from 1750 to the present. Bach was the most famous composer in the world and so was Handel. Handel was half German, half Italian, and half English. He was very large.

It was an age of great inventions and discoveries. Gutenberg invented removable type and the Bible. Another important invention was the circulation of blood. Sir Walter Raleigh is a historical figure because he invented cigarettes and started smoking. Sir Francis Drake circumsized the world with a 100-foot clipper.

Queen Elizabeth was the "Virgin Queen." As a queen she was a success. When she exposed herself before her troops they all shouted "hurrah."



The nineteenth century was a time of a great many thoughts and inventions. People stopped reproducing by hand and started reproducing by machine. The invention of the steamboat caused a network of rivers to spring up. Louis Pasteur discovered a cure for rabbits. Charles Darwin was a naturalist who wrote the Organ of the Species. Madman Curie discovered the radio. And Karl Marx became one of the Marx Brothers.

**Enjoy the Issue** Well now, don't forget to copyedit!

Hope you enjoy this issue. Please [send](#) your comments or feedback.

Till next time,  
Ashwini ▲

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## President's Message

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 by [Melody Brumis](#)  
 EBSTC President


Main Entry: **Renaissance man**

Function: *noun*

Date: 1906

: a person who has wide interests and is expert in several areas

(Source: [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#))

I finally get to write about my favorite mythological beast—the Renaissance Technical Communicator. By definition, the Renaissance Technical Communicator—RTC for short—has wide interests (some useful to their career, some not) and is expert in several areas. The RTC has been termed mythological because for years now I've heard that we must become "specialists." Where I sometimes get stuck in an interview is when they ask, "What is your specialty?" Like a short-order cook, I may answer if it's Tuesday, then turkey; Wednesday, then hot pastrami; etc.

Since the newsletter's topic is Trends in Technical Communication, I will go retro and say the RTC, like bell-bottoms with wide belts, is back. How do I know? I know because I am one. I also know because while I've heard titles referring to specialists—like APL writer—bandied about, I've never met one.



OK, so work with me here. If in fact the RTC is back and—key point here—working, then what do you need to know to be one? I researched this by IM'ing another RTC, and these are our findings:

### RTC Requisites

- **Technical Writing** (strong research, editing, analysis, and production skills)
- **Web Skills** (including graphics—the in-house graphic artist is mythological)
- **Online Help** (HTML Help or whatever the latest fad is; keep up with fads)
- **Communication** (e-mail, IM, VM, conversational, get along with everyone)
- **Management** (be able to manage yourself, your project, and/or your team)
- **Attitude** (be able, willing, and ever-ready to do what others do not want to do)



## Are We Becoming Extinct?

You may now say—hey, this is interactive!—"I have all that and I am still not working." All right, perhaps, and I am just saying perhaps, you have not emphasized your RTC abilities. Like many a good and strong Server Writer, which I am slowly becoming (see definition: "expert in several areas"), you may emphasize that you are a specialist, not an RTC. Companies, in tough times like we're in now, may only be able to hire one FTE (or contractor) to write about a variety of subjects, post documents on the Intranet, and develop the online Help.

If you can do all that (and take the minutes at meetings too), great! If not, you may want to take time to develop your RTC Requisites. Although I promised myself that I wouldn't proselytize (one big word I never get to use) about STC in this article, you may want to exhibit your skills by taking on a volunteer task. A good web site, say, is still a good web site and portfolio piece, pro bono or not. So now, finally, I've been able to expound on the RTCs who are slowly surfacing from the primordial ooze. One STC friend asked me this week if I thought technical communicators were becoming extinct. I said no, but perhaps the specialists we all tried to become are gone, for now. ▲



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## Chapter Meeting Information

### Upcoming Meetings



The happy winners of fabulous prizes including [Robert Fish's](#) book, *The Woman Who Walked to Paradise*, at the February meeting.

Pictured are:

Back: **Marsha Workman, Ken Evans, Debra Elmore, Gail Guzman**

Front: **Gwaltney Mountford, Liz Miller**

Attending meetings is a great way to learn new things and connect with technical writers around the East Bay. And coming this March, there's another great reason to attend—*free copy of Dreamweaver!* Try your luck at the EBSTC raffle on March 13, and among other great prizes, you might win Macromedia Dreamweaver!! More information will soon be posted on the chapter web site.

East Bay programs are usually held at Crow Canyon Country Club in San Ramon. For details on meeting location and reservations, see the [meetings page](#) on the chapter web site.

Date	Speaker	Topic
March 13 <b>Note</b> , this is the second Thursday!	<b>Kristine Hahn</b>	<i>Add Life to Web Sites with Dynamic Features</i>  Learn how to jazz up your sites with dynamic features using nothing more than Dreamweaver and public domain software. Kristine is a senior technical writer who has written many manuals about programming, administering enterprise applications, web mapping, and web-based digital design.
April 3	<b>Holly Gallup</b>	<i>Writing for Small Spaces</i>  Learn how to pack as much information into online help as possible, from the Palm Pilot to the Pocket PC. Holly is a documentation consultant with over 20 years of experience in technical writing, editing, user-interface design, and project management

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## Chapter Activities: Join the Networking SIG



by [Susan Harlan](#)  
EBSTC President-Elect

### A Lively Group



Are you a technical writer looking for your next job? Are you exploring the field of technical communication? Or, do you simply want to take a lunch break with other professionals? The EBSTC Networking SIG may be a resource for you.

The EBSTC Networking SIG meets monthly for an informal lunch at a local East Bay restaurant. Participants are encouraged to share recent job hunting successes as well as future goals. Several participants have found active employment through the group, demonstrating the power of networking. In addition to the lunch gathering, our networking group carries on lively online discussions at a Yahoo Groups site. To join in the Yahoo Groups discussion, you must attend a lunch meeting.

If you'd like to learn more about our group, contact [Susan Harlan](#). ▲

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## Chapter Activities: Congrats to New Members

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Let's welcome our new and reinstated members! The chapter has 210 members as of January 31, 2003.

- Athena Chiladakis
- Steven Crouch
- Kylee Hayden
- Rebecca Ingraca
- Francis Kelly
- Karen Mullally

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## Meeting Report: January 2003



by Sherry Weaver Smith  
EBSTC Member



Nancy Mulvany

When **Nancy Mulvany** asked January STC meeting attendees who enjoyed indexing their projects, she wasn't surprised at the small show of hands. She commented, "I wasn't born this way. Indexing is an acquired taste—much like malt whiskey." We all began to acquire a taste for it after Nancy's humorous presentation regarding indexing tips and career opportunities in the field.

Nancy Mulvany wrote *Indexing Books*, a key resource for many technical writers. She is the owner of [Bayside Indexing](#), a consulting firm focused on indexing.

### How to Create an Effective Index

The overall objective of a good index is to serve as "the interface between reader and author," according to Nancy. To create an index, you must "understand the author and anticipate the reader." To achieve this, you must go beyond identifying a few keywords and putting blind faith in the indexing features embedded in software tools such as Framemaker. Here are Nancy's tips for creating an index beyond keywords.

- Peruse the table of contents first to get a sense of where the material is going
- Identify conceptual relationships in the material by looking for the hierarchy of what is important
- Draw on your sense of language to anticipate how a reader might look something up; indexed items and cross-references might not even exist as language in the text
- Consult the author for clarification if needed
- Use software tools such as Cindex, Macrex, and SKY Index that do the following:
  - Alphabetize correctly
  - Enable you to get a sense of how the index is evolving as a unified whole
  - Format according to multiple specifications (useful for working with more than one publisher)

### Career Opportunities

If you learn these skills, the next step is to try to break into the field. Indexers almost always work as contractors, since few organizations have the volume to sustain a staff indexer. Indexers contract with publishing companies or technical companies. Publishing company production editors, the usual point of contact, are usually reluctant to try new indexers. However, if you contact publishing companies, your letter is likely to last longer than those of freelance editors.

Networking is important; try attending a meeting of the [American Society of Indexers](#). Learn indexing skills and meet other interested indexers by taking [UC Berkeley Extension's](#)



course on Basic Indexing offered each summer.

Once you get started in the field, it is important to evaluate prospective jobs before signing a contract. Rates can vary from \$3–\$6+ per page. The average number of pages you can index in an hour also varies, from 6 pages per hour (university press titles) to 50 pages per hour (technical books with a specific audience). When you do the math, you will realize how critical it is to estimate the complexity of the work in advance. Always request a sample to assist in estimating.

## Future of Indexing

Indexers' skill sets will become increasingly important as more and more of us seek better ways of navigating the World Wide Web. Web sites increasingly feature indexes; see the [American Society of Indexers](#) for an



example. Other applications of indexing are creating taxonomies to power search engines and identifying metatag keywords to help bring targeted visitors to a web site. According to Nancy, it is clear that indexing, both for books and online materials, is a skill that will continue to be in demand. ▲

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## Networking

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There are six active Northern California STC chapters. Each chapter meets on a different Wednesday or Thursday so you can attend all the meetings. Contact the respective presidents for more information or visit the chapter web site.

<b>Wednesdays</b>	<b>Chapter</b>	<b>President</b>
Week 1	<a href="#">Sacramento</a>	<a href="#">Charlotte A. O'Hara</a>
Week 2	<a href="#">Berkeley</a>	<a href="#">Kathryn Munn</a>
Week 3	<a href="#">San Francisco</a>	<a href="#">Marc Smircich</a>
<b>Thursdays</b>	<b>Chapter</b>	<b>President</b>
Week 1	<a href="#">East Bay</a>	<a href="#">Melody Brumis</a>
Week 3	<a href="#">North Bay</a>	<a href="#">Chris J. Muntzer</a>
Week 4	<a href="#">Silicon Valley</a>	<a href="#">Beau Cain</a>

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## Director-Sponsor Report: How Do You Spell Success?

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**April 2003**

**Bonni Graham**, Director-Sponsor of Region 8, sends us this letter from **Linda Oestreich**, STC Fellow, Houston Chapter, about the meaning of success and how it can change over time.

### Fellow STCers,

I just returned from a delightful visit to the Texas A&M campus to speak to the College Station Student Chapter. As students, the chapter members are at the beginning of their careers. They might join the field of technical communication or follow one of a thousand other career paths. How will they determine whether they have succeeded? I don't know, but I believe they most likely will succeed.



Success is something we feel about ourselves. Some people equate success with money, some with power, some with fame. Some people define success as being content in who they are and what they do. The criteria for success can differ, depending on the context in which you consider them and the focus you bring to them. Although we can define success from many different viewpoints, I have chosen three to consider here:

### Time of Life

When I was first on my own, my priority was to have fun. Later I changed my outlook to do things that would support my family and enhance my professional development. Still later I began to do things that would help me gain a connection with the world and would in some way help others around me. Can you see how each phase of my life has reflected very different success factors?

### Making Money

This success factor incorporates the trappings of our lives—the neighborhood we live in, the car we drive, and the impression we make on others by the things we have collected. Somewhat incongruously, family obligations show up again. Making money to support a family is success of a different kind than making money to drive an expensive “status” car.

### Feeling Fulfilled

Various things feed our personal, introspective selves. The things that fulfill me on a spiritual level also make me feel successful. Interestingly, strong family connections again show up as an important aspect of that sense of fulfillment.

### The Spirit of Success



Although *family* shows up for me in each area, *career* (and thus STC) doesn't show up at all! As I think about this fact, I realize that *career* is there but it's there indirectly. I need a career to have professional development. I need a career to make money. I need a career to feel fulfilled. It turns out that I need a career to help me have the means to do other things, but the career itself is not the actual thing that shows up when I think of success.

I believe success is what we want it to be. And we usually want it to be something different than we did last year—or 10 years ago. I also believe we can be successful in some areas of our lives but not in others, and it is up to us to figure out if that's OK. Some of us have challenging, difficult work lives but have fulfilling relationships, strong bonds with family members, and a good sense of self. To me, such a person is more of a success than the person who makes millions of dollars but has no friends, no contentment, and weak (or no) family bonds.

Alex Noble wrote, "Success is not a place at which one arrives but rather is the spirit with which one undertakes and continues the journey." I believe he was right. May your journey bring you the spirit of success.

*Blessings, Linda O. ▲*

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**STC's Mission** "Designing the Future of Technical Communication"

**Don't Lose Touch with STC** The Society office encourages all STC members to update their membership information with home addresses, home phone numbers, or home email addresses. Many members provide only their work contact information, and the office often loses track of these members when they change jobs. To update your membership information, complete the STC [address change form](#) or contact the office at (703) 522-4114.

**Deduct Your STC Dues** If you pay taxes in the United States, your STC dues are tax deductible. You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways.

### Charitable Expense

All STC members who pay taxes in the United States can deduct at least a portion of their STC dues if they claim this portion as a charitable donation. IRS publication 526 (rev. 2000) defines this option:

*You may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to a qualified organization. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive.*

As a 501(c)(3) organization, STC is a qualified organization. The only determination that you need to make is the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive. STC's tangible benefits can be estimated at \$30 (\$15 for the Society's quarterly journal, *Technical Communication*, and \$15 for the magazine, *Intercom*). The difference between the cost of membership (\$110 for the year 2001) and tangible benefits (\$30) is \$80, and you may claim that amount as a charitable contribution.

### Business Expense

Employees and self-employed consultants may claim the full amount of dues as a business expense.

### Miscellaneous Expense

Those who do not fall into the categories defined above may claim the amount of the dues as a miscellaneous deduction. (For miscellaneous deductions that can affect your taxes, the total amount of miscellaneous deductions must exceed 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.)

If dues are deducted as a charitable expense, business expense, or miscellaneous expense, they must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 2001 can be deducted only on 2001 tax returns. If you have any questions, contact your local IRS representative or an accountant.

### Money, Not Time

In the past, the STC office has received questions concerning the deduction of time or services donated to STC. Please be aware that, while dues, contributions, and out-of-pocket expenses may be deducted, personal services cannot be claimed. ▲

## Educational News


 by [Jacquelyn Lee](#)  
 EBSTC Education Manager

[Prepare for the Future](#)  
[Content Management Strategies Conference](#)  
[XML for Writers](#)

### Prepare for the Future

In the past year many of us have faced tough and challenging times. This year we continue to face similar challenges. As Education Manager, I believe through faith, hope, and determination—and a bit of knowledge—we can overcome tough times. Besides faith, we can begin to take steps to position ourselves in today's market. Learning new and marketable skills is a key strategy to fight back, and places us in a good position for today's employers.

This month we are offering a beginner's Dreamweaver web-design course for a small fee to STC members. The course will cover basic web design commands and features. Dreamweaver is a great skill to gain since it is a requirement for employment for some of the major corporations, as well as a fun application to learn. Not only will you learn web design, but training development skills and other graphical Internet technologies.

The course will be offered on a first come, first served basis. Look for more information about this offer in the coming weeks online. Remember that the future belongs to those who prepare for it!

<b>What</b>	Beginning Dreamweaver Course
<b>Instructor</b>	Kris Hahn
<b>When</b>	Saturday April 26, 2003 9:00am to 4:00pm
<b>Where</b>	Magnolia Room at Carr America 4450 Rosewood Drive Pleasanton CA 94588
<b>Cost</b>	\$35.00
<b>To reserve a spot</b>	Contact <a href="#">Janet Bran</a> for instructions
<b>For more information</b>	Contact <a href="#">Jacquelyn Lee</a> EBSTC Education Manager

### Content Management Strategies Conference April 28–29, 2003 Washington, DC

**JoAnn Hackos** and the Center for Information-Development Management announce the Content Management Strategies Conference. The conference will focus on content management and single sourcing.

Speakers include industry expert consultants, tools developers, and people working on content-management and single-sourcing projects. Attendees will learn about providing usable information, developing the information model, planning for dynamic delivery and personalization, implementing industry standards, collaborating for reuse, and ROI (return on investment) measuring. In addition, they will hear case studies from companies that have successfully implemented content management or single sourcing.

A post-conference workshop will be held on April 30, 2003, where attendees can learn the steps to take in implementing their own single-source solution. Dr. JoAnn Hackos, an internationally recognized expert and consultant, will present the workshop.

Exhibitors include leading content management vendors, such as Documentum, Arbortext, Progressive Information Technologies, X.Systems, and Software AG.

Find more information at the [conference web site](#).

**XML for Writers**  
**March 20–21, 2003**  
**Reno, NV**  
**Instructor: Tina Hedlund**

Learn basic concepts that you, as a technical writer, need to understand in order to write documentation using XML.

In this newest of the **JoAnn Hackos** seminar series, learn how XML editors work within the context of a well-thought-out information design, which includes an information model (information categorization framework), information types (subject matter–related categories of information, like procedures), and content units (the most basic building blocks of information types, like paragraphs).

With a clear understanding of the information design and an understanding of how the structure of the information design is applied in XML, technical writers will be well on their way to creating well-structured XML (and maybe enjoying it!).

More information is available at [XML for Writers](#). ▲

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## Employment News

### Job Connections: Bringing People Together

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<b>What</b>	Job Connections
<b>When</b>	Saturdays 9:00am to 11:00am
<b>Where</b>	Community Presbyterian Church 222 West El Pintado Road, Danville

Job Connections is an outreach of [Community Presbyterian Church](#), Danville, California. The purpose of this group is to support and encourage displaced professionals and others in their pursuit of new positions or careers.

Job Connections operates as a non-fee referral service to recruiters and hiring managers in the East Bay and Tri-Valley areas of Northern California. Job Connections meets weekly, on Saturday mornings, at Community Presbyterian Church, 222 West El Pintado Road, Danville, from 9:00am to 11:00am. Signs are placed throughout the church grounds directing visitors to the meeting room.

Job Connections programs and activities are centered on a five-phase career process involving:

- Self Assessment
- Determining Career Options
- Preparing Detailed Plans
- Job Search
- Excelling at Your Job

Their programs are directed at presenting information and helping members to develop/maintain skills to be more successful in the job search and career management.

#### For More Information

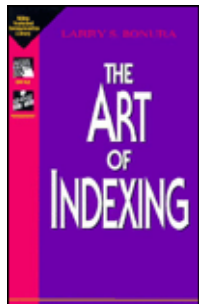
The Job Connections Leadership Team—Ray Bamdad, Ford Bell, and Joe Bonacci—welcomes EBSTC members to visit the [web site](#) for more information. Questions, comments, or suggestions may be directed via email to [JobConnections@CPCDanville.org](mailto:JobConnections@CPCDanville.org).

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## Book Review: The Art of Indexing

by Paul Hayward  
MISTC



*The Art of Indexing*, Larry S. Bonura, John Wiley & Sons, 1994, ISBN 0-471-01449-4

*ISTC, Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators, based in the UK, is a member organization of INTECOM and the largest UK body representing professional communicators and information designers. For more information, visit the [ISTC site](#).*

### The Importance of an Index

The reader of a technical document all too often needs to find the answer to a problem in a hurry. In this book, Bonura suggests that the steps a reader might take to find the answer are:

- Ask a friend or co-worker for help.
- Look in the manual for a few seconds, at most.
- Call technical support or customer service.
- Find a work-around or hack it out.

In this scenario, the index is the shop window of the manual in the few seconds it takes readers to decide whether it can be of service. If the index places the required information at the reader's fingertips, then the support desk may be saved a call. As the index is often used as the initial point of access to the material, it is an essential component of any technical document.

### Creating an Index

Bonura refers to the type of information that helps to solve a problem as "how-to" information. And the type of index that contains this sort of information (like a good user manual) is task-oriented, not function-oriented. But how can you discover what type of questions your readers are likely to ask? To respond to the need for how-to information, Bonura proposes the "answer-the-questions" approach. This, he says, requires most indexers to change their mind-set: "You have to think 'What question would a user of this product have that is answered by the text?' and avoid thinking 'This text is about something.'" To achieve this, Bonura suggests creating a list of customers' questions by listening to product support calls and visiting customers to talk to them about beta trial or existing products.

Bonura's book is an exhaustive treatment of indexing. Topics covered include choosing the topics for index references, techniques for developing indexes (both manual and electronic), formatting, editing, indexing standards, and general indexing tips. In this book you'll find such useful information as how to estimate an index for both size and time, and how to test it for usability. Does your last index measure up to one of Bonura's tests: namely that it should have a double-column page for every 20 pages of text?

### A Minor Flaw

A drawback of Bonura's book is that it is so exhaustive that it can be exhausting! The book is so comprehensive that you sometimes have to wade through some rather obvious information before arriving at the nuggets of wisdom. For example, we are told that "a well-developed index significantly improves a document's usefulness," that the inability to find information can lead to "customer dissatisfaction with documentation," and that a good indexer must have an orderly mind, be motivated and dedicated.

**Conclusion** This problem apart, the book is well written. Chapters are split into manageable chunks, with the longest only spanning eight pages—digestible even for readers with the shortest attention spans! The chapters are split into short sections with plenty of bulleted lists. Each chapter begins with a quotation about indexing from sources ranging from computing magazines to Shakespeare (surprisingly). I think that the book will be a useful addition to your reference library, if only to be used in the way that customers often use technical manuals—that is, for dipping in to find information. To this end, you could do no better than to dip in to the Appendix, which contains a sample indexing style guide that summarizes much of the useful material from the book.

And by the way, in case you're wondering, the book has a fine index. ▲

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## About Devil Mountain Views

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### DMV Basics

The East Bay Chapter newsletter is named after a local landmark, Mount Diablo, in Northern California. With a few exceptions, all distances in California are measured from that point, called the Mount Diablo Meridian. The East Bay Chapter serves the cities along the 680 corridor and the east/west part of 580. City-wise it's Vallejo to Pleasanton, Tracy to Oakland and Fremont. We have members from each of those places.

### PUBLICATION POLICY

We are always interested in sharing technical communication trends and information with our readers. For details, contact the Managing Editor, [Ashwini Tharval](#).

### PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Devil Mountain Views is published bimonthly (September, November, January, March, May).

### ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Sept/Oct 2002–August 2, 2002  
Nov/Dec 2002–October 2, 2002  
Jan/Feb 2003–December 2, 2002  
Mar/Apr 2003–February 2, 2003  
May/June 2003–April 2, 2003

### REPRINT POLICY

Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to Devil Mountain Views and the author, and two copies of the publication are mailed to [Ashwini Tharval](#) or the mailing address listed below.

### MAILING ADDRESS

Ashwini Tharval, Managing Editor, 316 Countrybrook Loop A, San Ramon, CA 94583-4483.

### Copyright Statement

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that 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. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Devil Mountain Views also reserves the right to edit articles to fit its stylistic standards and space constraints. Articles are edited, copyedited, and proof-read before publication. The newsletter also reserves the right to not print articles deemed unfit for publication.

Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors. The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC, 2002.

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**DMV History** **Note:** We will update this section as our chapter archives are updated. If you were a Managing Editor during a timeframe that is missing from the history, please [let us know](#).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Notes</b>
<b>2002–2003</b>	Managing Editor: Ashwini Tharval
<b>2001–2002</b>	Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format.
<b>1999–2001</b>	Managing Editor: Teresa Washburn
<b>1997–1999</b>	Managing Editor: Kelly Walker
<b>1996–1997</b>	Managing Editor: Melody Brumis. Name changed to <i>Devil Mountain Views</i> . Susan Moxley won the contest held to rename the newsletter. In July 1996, a spoof issue called <i>East Bay Flame</i> is published.
<b>1995–1996</b>	Managing Editor: Bruce Robinson. The <i>Twig</i> is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i> .
<b>1994</b>	Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i> .
<b>1962</b>	The <i>Pacifica News</i> was published in the fall in the year the <i>Pacifica</i> chapter was founded. (The chapter was renamed to <i>East Bay</i> in 1982 under President T.R. Girill.)

**DMV Awards**

Year	Award
2001–2002	Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition. Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude.
1998–1999	Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition. Managing Editor: Kelly Walker. ▲

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