

Devil Mountain Views

Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC

Supporting technical communication in the
San Francisco Bay Area since 1962

November / December 2011

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- **Membership Update:** Currently 43 members.



Feature Articles

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[The End of the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair](#)

[Roz Rogoff](#), a former East Bay member and past chapter President, now blogs for the San Ramon Express. Roz wrote a blog post about the presentation by Nadine Horner of LLNL and our own T.R. Girill at the November meeting. Nadine gave us a behind-the-scenes look at the history of the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair, and T.R. showed us some of what he helps students learn about successfully presenting technical information.

[Stories of Social Media Sticking in Unlikely Places](#)

Blogger [Anne Gentle](#) posted some thoughts on the topic of how social media have become a part of a product's documentation. She shows that it isn't so much something that a company decides to do, it's more that social-media-savvy users have caused the evolution of the help and documentation process by how they look for help.



Award of Merit
2008 — 2009
STC
International
Newsletter
Competition

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

For information about STC, go to the [Society's Web page](#).

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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](#).

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Devil Mountain Views is published bimonthly, five times a year (January, March, May, September, November) with occasional e-news.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Jan/Feb 2011 issue — December 2, 2010
Mar/Apr 2011 issue — February 2, 2011
May/Jun 2011 issue — April 2, 2011
Normally no July/August issue
Sept/Oct 2011 issue — August 15, 2011
Nov/Dec 2011 issue — October 2, 2011
[Jan/Feb 2012 issue — January 10, 2012](#)

WRITER'S TEMPLATE

If you are submitting an article, please download our [template](#) to use as a guideline for writing your article.

REPRINT POLICY

Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to *Devil Mountain Views* and the author, and a link to the article is sent to the [Managing Editor](#). If the newsletter is printed, please send two copies to the mailing address listed below.

MAILING ADDRESS

Joe Humbert, 7001 Sunkist Drive, Oakland CA 94605

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Product Types: Only advertisements for products or services related to technical communication can be placed on the EBSTC Web site and *Devil Mountain Views*.

Format: Ads must be in either GIF or JPG format.

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336 X 280 = \$150

468 X 60 = \$120

160 X 155 = \$80

120 X 60 = \$50

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Payment: Payment must be received by the [East Bay Chapter treasurer](#) before the ad is run. Payment can be made by check.

Inquiries: If you have questions or want to start your ad, please contact the [Managing Editor](#).

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

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DMV Staff **MANAGING EDITOR**
Jane Olivera

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Joseph Humbert

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Susan Moxley

Chapter Officers For a complete list of officers, see the EBSTC Web site's [Leadership](#) page.

PRESIDENT
[Gwaltney Mountford](#)

PRESIDENT-ELECT
open

TREASURER
[Joseph Humbert](#)

V.P. PROGRAMS
open

V.P. ARRANGEMENTS
[Lori Cooke](#)

SECRETARY
[Helen Cheung](#)

DMV History **Note:** We will update this section as our chapter archives are updated.

- Awards given in one year reflect the work of the editors from the previous year.
- In 2009, the chapter changed their fiscal year to coincide with the calendar year.
- If you were a managing editor during a time frame that is missing from the history, please [let us know](#).

Year	Notes
2011	Managing editor: Alliene Turner (through Aug 2011), Jane Olivera
2010	Managing editor: Alliene Turner
2009	Managing editor: Alliene Turner Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition

2007–2008	Managing editors: David Eicher (Sept 2008), Joseph Humbert (January 2008), Alliene Turner (May 2008) Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2006–2007	Managing editor: David Eicher Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2004–2005	Managing editor: Becky Rude Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2003–2004	Managing editor: Becky Rude Guest managing editor: Gwaltney Mountford Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2002–2003	Managing editor: Ashwini Tharval Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication awards in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2001–2002	Managing editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format. Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1999–2001	Managing editor: Teresa Washburn Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1997–1999	Managing editor: Kelly Walker Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1996–1997	Managing editor: Melody Brumis Newsletter 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.
1995–1996	Managing editor: Bruce Robinson An offshoot, the <i>Twig</i> , is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i> .

1994	Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1962	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.) ▲

The top table lists a quick index.

The main table lists the issue date, the author(s) for the featured article(s), and the article name.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jan 2009 - current • Sept 2007 - Dec 2008 • Sept 2006 - June 2007 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 2004 - June 2005 • Sept 2003 - June 2004 • Sept 2002 - June 2003 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 2001 - June 2002 • 2000 • 1999
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Date	Author	Article Name
Current Issue: November / December 2011	Roz Rogoff Anne Gentle	<i>The End of the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair</i> <i>Stories of Social Media Sticking in Unlikely Places</i>
September / October 2011	Jane Olivera T. R. Girill	<i>Optimizing Your Portfolio: Are You Ready for a Bidding War for Your Services?</i> <i>Technical Writing Visits Turlock</i>
August 2011	Joseph Humbert Lori Cooke Melody Brumis	<i>What's All the ePub, Bub?</i> <i>The Future of Technical Communication</i> <i>Spotlight on: Lori Cooke</i>
May / June 2011	Lori Cooke T. R. Girill Gina Gotsill Gwaltney Mountford	<i>XML Implementation on DITA</i> <i>Sharing Literacy Strategies at the 2011 NSTA Conference</i> <i>Trends in Technical Communication</i> <i>Allan Francke Donates His Tech Comm Library to East Bay STC</i>
March / April 2011	Lori Cooke Adrienne Tange Melody Brumis Alliene Turner Meredy Amyx	<i>What is Web 2.0?</i> <i>Write on Time: The Top Five Most Important Business Lessons We Learned Last Year</i> <i>Member Spotlight: Jeanie Egbert</i> <i>I Feel So Violated (and Dumb)!</i> <i>Grammar School: Past Participles</i>

<p>November / December 2010</p>	<p>Lori Cooke Melody Brumis Meredy Amyx Ellis Pratt</p>	<p><i>Technical Writers in an Agile Environment</i> <i>Write on Time: How to Network at a Conference</i> <i>Grammar School: Pariticiples</i> <i>What Every Business Can Learn from a Haynes Manual</i></p>
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<p>September/October 2009</p>	<p>Tom Johnson Adrienne Tange T.R. Girill Alliene Turner</p>	<p><i>Is This Meeting Really Necessary?</i> <i>Write on Time: Differentiating Your Company by Certifying Your Business</i> <i>EBSTC Technical Literacy Project Through the Eyes of History of Science</i> <i>Book Review: How to Read a Book</i></p>
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<p>May/June 2002</p>	<p>Don Huntington John Gallagher Ashwini Tharval & Dipali Godbole Scott Wallace Becky Rude</p>	<p><i>It Takes a Sexually Stimulated Man...</i> <i>Cross-Cultural Interactions</i> <i>Home Away from Home</i> <i>Writing Effective Online Copy</i> <i>Spotlight on Wallace Clements</i></p>
<p>March/April 2002</p>	<p>Faraz Hoodbhoy Roz Rogoff Dan Day Ashwini Tharval Scott Wallace Adrienne Tange</p>	<p><i>3G for Everyone</i> <i>Accessibility = Usability</i> <i>Characterizing Materials on the Nanoscale</i> <i>Technology Unraveled</i> <i>Web Usability</i> <i>Spotlight on Coralyn K. McGregor</i></p>
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<p>November/December 2001</p>	<p>Linda Shaltz Angelina Nachimuthu Terri Winters Liz Miller Bill Ardis Adrienne Tange</p>	<p><i>Fight or Flight?</i> <i>Online Job Search: Some Tips and Techniques</i> <i>Resumes That Shine</i> <i>Punch Up Your Portfolio</i> <i>Diary of a Consultant</i> <i>Spotlight on Sue Phelan</i></p>
<p>September/October 2001 (1.3 MB PDF)</p>	<p>Don Huntington Ashwini Tharval Patrick Lufkin Patricia Smith Rosalind Rogoff Richard Lederer</p>	<p><i>Grasping the Essentials in Writing for an Online Audience</i> <i>An Introduction to XML</i> <i>Touchstone 2001 Seeks Entries, Volunteers</i> <i>Joys and Pitfalls of Contracting and Consulting</i> <i>Reinventing the Wheel</i> <i>Devouring Words</i></p>
<p>January/February 2000 (1.5 MB PDF)</p>	<p>Lenore Weiss Rosalind Rogoff Andrea Ames</p>	<p><i>Stranger in Paradigm</i> <i>Is It Live or Is It Memorex?</i> <i>Director-Sponsor Report: 1999 Region 8 Conference</i></p>
<p>November/December 1999 (1.9 MB PDF)</p>	<p>Lenore Weiss & Judith Herr Dana Chisnell Judith Herr Lenore Weiss Judith Herr Judy Skinner</p>	<p><i>Technical Literacy Program at Fremont High School</i> <i>STC Outreach -- Where You Come In</i> <i>Art of Leading of an STC Chapter</i> <i>Lenore Visits a Class at Fremont High</i> <i>What Do You Want to be When You Grow UP?</i> <i>Eating Tomato Soup With a Fork</i></p>
<p>September/October 1999 (3.1 MB PDF)</p>	<p>Jane C. Frazier Patricia Smith T.R. Girill Lenore Weiss</p>	<p><i>Employees and Business Process: The Power of the Shared View</i> <i>Pictures of Verbs... Graphic Novels</i> <i>Book Review: Dynamics in Document Design</i> <i>Time to Volunteer</i></p>
<p>July/August 1999 (583 KB PDF)</p>	<p>Lu Rehling Lenore Weiss Alice Gallagher Rosalind Rogoff Anahita Wager Smith</p>	<p><i>It's Our Future, So Let's Make the Most of It</i> <i>Creating Partner Documentation</i> <i>Today's Technical Communications Job Market -- Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions</i> <i>Technical Training: Help Authoring Tools</i> <i>Using Knowledge Management to Organize and Deliver Information</i></p>



President's Message: The Year In Review



by [Gwaltney Mountford](#)

*STC Associate Fellow and
co-owner of [The Mountford Group](#) .*

As I write this, the final touches to the ballot for next year's officers are in progress. When you read this, you will probably already have voted. The point being, this is my last column as your president. I thought I'd use it to sum up the year and recognize the people that contribute to our chapter's ongoing success. And to look ahead to next year.

I love being president---it is a lot of fun, made more so by the contributions of dedicated volunteers who want to shape the chapter's future and ensure its present success. And by our members, who appreciate that effort.

The Projects

This last year we started some big projects and completed some smaller ones. In the works is the major effort of porting our website to WordPress, with Adrienne Tange heading the initial team of Jane Olivera, Lori Cooke, and Joe Humbert. When completed, it will facilitate updates by multiple authors, thus sharing the burden of keeping the website up to date.

Another major project is organizing a Jobs Day to be held in late April. The team, headed Marlene Vasileff, with Cheryl Voloshin and Cynthia Herrmann, is in its planning phase, tackling the logistics and setting the event agenda.

We are midway through the development of the Strategic Plan (2012-2015). Melody Brumis, Lori Meyer, Don Benesh, and I have defined the mission statement and goals (which were approved by the board) and are now working on the actions needed to realize the goals. We plan to have this finished in January.

This year we re-instituted the speaker evaluation form, thanks to Thea Vaughan's effort to update the old one. Our updated chapter brochure is just about ready for publication, thanks to Ashwini Tharval. And Romy Sinha is wrestling a membership survey into a new vendor's software. (She had completed one for Survey Monkey, but it only allowed 10 questions, and we want to know so much more.) This survey will help chapter leaders provide programs you want to hear in a venue that works best for you.

The People

Besides projects, the chapter is kept vibrant and supportive of its members through the ongoing efforts of its board and managers.

Joe Humbert, our Treasurer, keeps us fiscally responsible.

Lori Cooke, as VP of Arrangements, ensures that our elegant meeting place is conducive to our meetings and provides good food.

Secretary Helen Cheung makes sure that all those decisions we make at board meetings don't get lost.

Adrienne Tange, Immediate Past President, provides continuity and underlying support to current leaders.

Richard Mateosian, Nominating Committee, makes sure we have future leaders.

Romy Sinha, our Membership Manager, works hard to attract and keep members with appearances at classes and welcome letters to those new members.

Cheryl Voloshin, our very active Jobs Manager, ferrets out job opportunities, rather than waiting for someone to inform her.

Liz Miller, our Hospitality Manager, welcomes us all at our meetings with her energy and Tie of Badges.

Communication is what keeps a chapter alive and it takes many forms:

You are reading this year's 5th issue of Devil Mountain Views thanks to past Managing Editor Alliene Turner, current M.E. Jane Olivera, Contributing Editor Susan Moxley, and Associate Editor Joe Humbert.

And Joe also manages our website, where you find out what's new and sign up for meetings.

Lori alerts you of upcoming meetings and Cheryl's job opportunities with eblasts.

And Ann Adams gets the word out about our meetings through social media and her network.

June Schaeffer, our Chapter Archivist, keeps our history intact. And T.R. Girill looks to the future with his Technical Literacy project, which helps build technical writing skills in high school classrooms.

And finally, our chapter members contributed to the success of this year's Summit, held in Sacramento. Melody and Adrienne wrote articles and blogs, publicizing the event. Richard, Helen, Lori, Judy Herr, and Patrick Lufkin volunteered during the event or supported the planning effort. And, for our members who could not attend the Summit, Helen, Jane, Cynthia, Lori, Romy, Adrienne, and Joe shared what they learned at our June meeting.

Wow! This is a lot of people who have contributed to the chapter's success this year. It is a great team, one that you can all take pride in. And it has been a joy working with them.

Looking Ahead

So what lies ahead for the chapter in 2012? It's a bit hazy, but I see a ported website, the results of the membership survey, a new team of leaders working with the completed Strategic Plan, a fabulously successful jobs day, and a big, big party in June!

Yes, we turn 50 next year (I know, we don't look a day over 45). And we don't intend for that milestone to go by unnoticed. As consolation for not being able to be president, I get to organize the party, so I'll be looking for a team in January. But the milestone will be noticed not just with a party---we'll be publishing our chapter members' reminiscence in newsletter articles throughout the spring. So think about what this chapter has meant to you, and share stories about events, incidents, members, or leaders that will help tell our 50-year story.

In closing, I want to thank you all for a terrific year and wish you great success in the coming one.

As always, we invite you to our [chapter meetings](#):

- January's program is "Development Techniques for User Interface Text and Web-based Content in SmartPhone Applications" featuring Joe Welinske.

If you have ideas for programs, please contact the [Program Manager](#).

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, I'd love to hear from you. Email me at mgm@mountfordgroup.com. I hope I will see you at our January meeting.

Regards,

Gwaltney Mountford





*by Jane Olivera
DMV Guest Managing Editor*

End of the Year? Already??

With this issue of the newsletter, we're coming up on the end of 2011. For me, at least, it's been an eventful year, with changes and challenges, some good and some difficult. I'm looking forward to 2012 – a year that will certainly have its own challenges, but hopefully mostly the good kind. (I wouldn't want a year with no challenges – I'd be bored!)

This time of year many people create resolutions for the New Year. I've never been one for resolutions, I suppose because I'm really bad at keeping them, or even remembering what they are after a few weeks. Because the past year started with a difficult work situation and included a few more difficulties, I think I'll remind myself about the good things from the past year and focus on the potential a brand new year brings. The local Presbyterian church holds a labyrinth walk on New Year's Eve, complete with a way of to symbolically leave behind the negative of the passing year. I like the idea of leaving behind all the stresses and bad times of this past year and clearing the way for exciting challenges and pleasures to come.

About the Issue

This issue ended up having a blogging theme. I spent some time combing the Web for articles I thought would be interesting to the membership to reprint in the newsletter. Although I didn't find suitable newsletter articles, I did find that there is a wealth of technical communication blogs on the Web. Many bloggers, writing about all different areas of technical communication. Most of the blogs have a "blogroll" that points to other blogs they admire.

If you're interested in looking at some of the blogs, Mindtouch comes up with a list of the 25 most influential bloggers (you might have seen their booth at the STC Summit last May). This newsletter reprints a post from one of the 25 – see below. The list is well worth a look and a little exploration. I also found Mindtouch's description of how they rank bloggers and determine which are the most influential quite interesting. I discovered there are social media sites I had never heard of!

Another short newsletter – two articles:

Roz Rogoff, a former East Bay member and past chapter President, now blogs for the San Ramon Express. In [The End of the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair](#), Roz wrote a blog post about the presentation by Nadine Horner of LLNL and our own T.R. Girill at the November meeting. Nadine gave us a behind-the-scenes look at the history of the Tri-Valley Science & Engineering Fair, and T.R. showed us some of what he helps

students learn about successfully presenting technical information.

We also have a post from blogger [Anne Gentle](#) on the topic of how social media have become a part of a product's documentation. She shows that it isn't so much something that a company decides to do, it's more that social-media-savvy users have caused the evolution of the help and documentation process by how they look for help. Check out [Stories of Social Media Sticking in Unlikely Places](#).

Many thanks to [Susan Moxley](#), editor extraordinaire, for all her careful editing. Thanks also go to [Joe Humbert](#). For some time he has done double duty, or rather triple duty. He is not only the chapter's Treasurer and our Webweaver, but until recently he has also published the newsletter to the Web.

A new year is starting, and I would love to see articles written by our members! The next DMV deadline for the Jan/Feb 2012 issue is January 10, 2012, but sooner is better. Send your articles or ideas for articles to me at jane.olivera@att.net.



Past Meetings

September 8, 2011 "**Listen!**" with Rich Maggiani

Rich Maggiani, STC Fellow and Board member, reminded us (with his usual style and humor) of one of our most important core skills, what it really means, and how to be successful at it. You can access his slides from his site (<http://www.solari.net>) under About Us > News > 2011 news releases.

October 6, 2011 "**Let's Talk DITA**" with Liz Fraley

With the 5.4 release in 2010, Arbortext added support for DITA 1.2, which introduced the "keyref" feature. Keyref provides a powerful indirect addressing mechanism as well as the possibility for sophisticated conditional profiling/processing of content. For example, with the keyref feature, if reference needs to be updated, for example if the topic is relocated, the path only needs to be updated once rather than every time it occurs.

November 3, 2011 "**Behind the Scenes at the Science Fair**" with Nadine Horner and T.R. Girill

The Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair (TVSEF) completed its fifteenth year this spring. At a time when (according to a recent New York Times article) many regional science fairs shrunk or failed, TVSEF featured more projects from more students on behalf of more local teachers than ever before. TVSEF director Nadine R. Horner will reveal how she applied her MBA skills to run this local science fair like a business, managing funds, sponsors, venue upgrades, volunteers, and safety issues behind the scenes while reaching out to promote more student and teacher participation on the public side.

Because effective communication with all fair stakeholders dovetails with the goals of the EBSTC technical literacy project, the evening will end with a look at the customized risk-management and poster-design aids that EBSTC's T. R. Girill prepared for the TVSEF website.

December 1 , 2011 "**Don't Quit Your Day Job—But...**"

Features current or past technical communicators who have morphed into fiction writers:

Camille Minichino writes the Periodic Table mysteries (**The Hydrogen Murder**, **The Helium Murder**, **The Oxygen Murder**, etc.) under her own name as well as the Miniature Mysteries series writing as Margaret Grace. She has just launched a new mystery series featuring a college professor.

Ann Parker writes the Silver Rush mysteries (**Silver Lies**, **Iron Ties**, **Lead**

Skies, and a new book in the series just out, **Mercury's Rise**).

Bruce Robinson just published **Legends of the Strait**, set in Benicia during Prohibition. Bruce is a former member of EB STC. In the mid-90's he resurrected the chapter newsletter and continued as Managing Editor for a number of years.

Upcoming Meetings

Attending meetings is a great way to learn new things and connect with technical writers around the East Bay.

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.

January 5, 2012 "Development Techniques for User Interface Text and Web-based Content in SmartPhone Applications" with Joe Welinske

You can help your mobile team improve your apps by understanding the basics of mobile application creation. This session will cover iPhone/iPad and Android but can be generalized to other mobile platforms. This session is technical in nature but does not require any experience with programming.

Planned in 2012

Speaker and Topic to be announced, February 2

Trends in Technical Communication, March 1

Linda Urban (topic TBD) April 5

Speaker and Topic to be announced, May 3

East Bay Chapter's 50th Anniversary Celebration, June 7



Networking

- [Northern California STC Chapters](#)
- [East Bay STC Network \(Yahoo! Groups\)](#)
- [East Bay STC LinkedIn Group](#)
- [East Bay STC Facebook](#)
- [Professional Development SIG](#)

Northern California STC Chapters



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.

Wednesdays	Chapter	President
Week 2	Berkeley	Richard Mateosian
Week 3	San Francisco	Leah Scampoli
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	East Bay	Gwaltney Mountford
Week 2	Sacramento	Prescott Williams
Week 3	North Bay	Chris Muntzer / Michael Meyer
Week 4	Silicon Valley	Daniel Doornbos

East Bay STC Network



Connect with your fellow East Bay members by joining this Yahoo! Groups network.

Voice your opinions and your ideas for making this Chapter more responsive to your needs. The more members who sign up the greater our network will be, the better our Chapter will be.

For more information and to join, click [East Bay STC Network](#).

East Bay STC LinkedIn

Connect with your fellow East Bay members by joining this LinkedIn group. News and announcements can be posted and shared here. Find the group at

<http://www.linkedin.com/groups?gid=1996708>

East Bay STC Facebook Page



Connect with your fellow East Bay members on Facebook.

Connect with this page and join:

<http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/group.php?gid=121062021259929>

Professional Development SIG

The EBSTC Professional Development SIG supports and encourages our personal evolutions as we transform ourselves to remain marketable.

Monthly Meetings

Generally, we meet two weeks after our chapter meeting.

What	EBSTC Professional Development SIG meeting
When	Third Thursday of the month at 11:45 A.M.
Where	Willow Tree Restaurant, 6513 Regional Street, Dublin, 925-838-9111



Congratulations to Our New and Senior Members



Welcome to our new, transferred, and reinstated members! We hope to see you at our next [chapter meeting](#).

No new members since the October 2011 newsletter

We honor those members who have become Senior Members this year. Senior Members have been STC members for five years.

None so far this year.

Currently we have **43** members.

The End of the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair



Roz Rogoff

Roz is a former member, supporter, and chapter president of the East Bay STC. She has been writing for the San Ramon Express since April of 2009 and posts her blog, The San Ramon Observer, on Mondays and Fridays.



After 15 years the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair has outgrown the Tri-Valley. Next year the TVSEF will be split up by County. Middle and High School students in Alameda County will participate in the Alameda County Science and Engineering Fair at Chabot College in Hayward. Students in the San Ramon Valley Unified School District will head to Pittsburg in March, 2012 for the [Contra Costa County Science & Engineering Fair](#) at Los Medanos College.

Nadine Horner gave a presentation on the Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair (TVSEF) at the November meeting of the East Bay Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) at the Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville.

Horner is the External Relations Officer for Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Six years ago she took over as Director of the TVSEF and made a lot of changes. At that time the Science Fair was held at the PG&E Conference Center in San Ramon.

Horner wanted a larger facility where all of the projects could be exhibited in one hall instead of multiple small rooms. This meant standing up to the 800 lb. gorilla in our midst, Chevron. According to Horner, the Chevron representative wanted to keep it at the PG&E Conference Center or among the cars in the Blackhawk Auto Museum.

Horner was worried that Chevron would take their money out of the Fair, but she also felt it would be better for the students to move the event to a more suitable location. The Robert Livermore Community Center had just opened and Horner moved the TVSEF there as the first major use of the facility.

The Chevron representative pulled out, but other regional companies filled the gap. Years later Chevron asked why they were not included and they have since returned as an "Albert Einstein" Sponsor.

Horner was concerned that the application package was too complicated. She recruited 52 teachers to simplify the process, which increased the number of applicants. This year, when most Science Fairs were cutting back, over 400 students participated in the TVSEF

with 262 projects.

Horner's presentation on the TVSEF seemed like an unlikely topic for a group of Technical Writers, but T. R. Girill, Horner's co-presenter, is a retired Tech Writer from Lawrence Livermore Labs and an STC Fellow.

Girill described how he helped students "posterize" their projects to make the displays easier to follow and understand. Girill is a master of chunking complex content and turning it into comprehensible information. He coached students on how to break up long winded descriptions into topics, with titles, graphics, charts, text, pictures, and lists. The accompanying photo gives an example of how these poster displays communicated the content of students' projects.

So how did I wind up at a presentation on the TVSEF on November 3rd? I used to be a member of the East Bay Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Fourteen years ago I moved to San Ramon to take a job as a Technical Writer at a software company here. Even though I had years of experience as a systems trainer, which required writing instructional materials on how to use computerized business systems, I did not have actual experience as a Technical Writer. So I joined the local professional organization for Tech Writers, the East Bay Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

I dropped out of STC years ago after leaving my Tech Writing job, but I stayed on the email list for meeting notices. This month's presentation on the 2011 Tri-Valley Science and Engineering Fair (TVSEF) sounded like it would make a good column for my Observer blog, so I reserved a seat for the program. I haven't been to an East Bay STC meeting since the 2010 Christmas party, but it was nice dropping in again for this presentation and to see my old (and we are all so old now) colleagues.

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Roz posts her blog, The San Ramon Observer, on Mondays and Fridays.



Stories of Social Media Sticking in Unlikely Places



by Anne Gentle

Anne Gentle blogs at [Just Write Click](#). She is listed by [Mindtouch](#) as one of the top 25 [Most Influential Technical Communication Bloggers](#)

Saying, “No one reads the manual” just doesn’t hold water any more. Social technology has intersected even the classic user manual. There’s always someone who will read a book. But their true motivation may be a desire to become an expert on a forum or on Twitter, building an expert’s reputation or reciprocating assistance because they know they can rely on the social web to pay it forward.

The way to amplify knowledge is through social media, social networking, and social relevance tools, gathering a wider audience and working in an economy whose payment is in links and more links. To find a fix for a problem with a cell phone, some chose to go to the phone’s web site and download a manual. Others naturally search on YouTube for troubleshooting hints.

Social media for troubleshooting, training, or trying software or gadgets? Sure. Does this scenario sound familiar?



“The darn thing won’t sync up again,” she grumbled as she tried to unload the latest running data from a sensor in her shoe. The data should travel from the shoe to the iTunes software through her iPod which was connected to her computer so that the data would be uploaded to a third-party website. As you might guess, her first troubleshooting attempt started with the error message within iTunes itself, but after seeing a message from iTunes that told her to reboot the router, she instead opened up a browser window. Without even opening a new window, she searched on Google in a browser plugin. A helpful community posting from a year ago helped her get the data about her five mile run from her shoe to the website.

Google is a new entry point to every help system that is, well, helpful. From Google users can view videos, download PDF files of the manual, and read forum posts from people who have come across this problem before. Sometimes Google links go directly to a company’s set of manuals, but more often than not, Google is the entry point to user-generated or community-collected content from blogs, forums, or wikis.

Bloggers who build a reputation as an expert in Adobe products can now be found even more easily with the Community Help search tool, which is a curated collection of blogs, video tutorial sites, and other social media-centered sites. Searching within the Community Help on keywords such as “footnotes” offers up a list of links to Indesign experts who maintain blogs and

offer how-to tips and advice.

If people are listening on Twitter to come to other user's aid, even microblogging and instant messaging applies to the new aggregate troubleshooting guide. Social support communities crop up when social media tools are used to collect questions and answer them or point people on the social network to others who can answer their questions.

Documentation communities are built upon content systems such as wikis that lower the barrier to contribution by giving any page an Edit button. Rather than waiting for a long publishing process to finish, readers can become authors and editors at the click of a button. And the publishing system itself notifies users when new content is brought on board.

Social and community techniques are a sensation everywhere, even for the boring, unsexy systems applied to customer support and technical documentation. You'll be glad for it the next time your favorite portable gadget does an unfamiliar flip flop.

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