

# Dateline Houston

Volume 41, Issue 3

*Designing the future of technical communication*

November 2001

## Web Design “Secrets”

by April Cooper, Technical Writer, NetIQ Corporation

**Y**ou may know something about creating web pages. What you may not know is that you can design web pages by using image-editing software.

### Understand the Concepts

An image editor, such as Adobe Photoshop or Paint Shop Pro, lets you do more than touch up a photo. You can also lay out a web page if you understand a few basic concepts first:

- **HTML**—Know how web pages work, which means understanding the underlying code. If you rely on a what-you-see-is-what-you-get (WYSIWYG) editor, you must view the HTML source to troubleshoot or clean up extraneous code.

Before you lay out a web page in an image editor, you must plan how you will place the images within the constraints of HTML.

- **Web images**—Not just any image will do! Images for the web must be resized, optimized, and saved in a browser-recognized format, such as GIF or JPEG. All images must be converted to 72 DPI to match the output of a monitor.

As a general rule, the total file size of images on a single web page should not exceed 20 KB, which takes about 10 seconds to download when using a 28.8 Kbps modem.

If you have designed a few web pages before, you are ready to try your hand at web designing by using an image editor.

It helps if you have some artistic talent, but you can improve through practice!

### Design the Web Page Image

Design how the entire page will look in your image editor. Design the menu, graphics, and content area on one large image, roughly the viewable size of a web page, such as 600 by 500 pixels.

*Do not* place the content of your web page in the image, except for previewing purposes. You will place the content later when you build your web page by using HTML.

### Slice the Image

Slicing an image is cutting one image into smaller images, or parts, to place into a web page. Slice the image along the menu buttons, masthead, or any

master graphics that will be placed in the same location on all your web pages.

Plan how the sliced parts will fit in the web page. Later, you may need to use HTML table tags to align the images and create space for content.

You can slice the image along straight lines, as if on a grid.

Be forewarned: one large image placed in a table cell can affect the sizing of an entire column. Although slicing an image requires no knowledge of HTML, this is the step where your knowledge of HTML and its limitations will pay off!

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## Dateline Houston

*Dateline Houston* is the newsletter of the Houston Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Ten issues are published each year (September through June).

### Newsletter Staff

Managing Editor: Rebecca Taylor

Layout Editor: David C. Pacheco

Coordinating Editor: Cathy Bettoney

Story Editors: Melanie Boston, Jamie Diamandopoulos, and Jim Hunt

Staff Writer: Lisetta Lavy

### Administrative Council

President, George Slaughter  
gslaughter@flex.net

Vice President, Dorothy Murray  
Dorothy\_Murray@email.msn.com

Treasurer, Wayne Schmadeka  
Wayne\_Schmadeka@bmc.com

Secretary, Sahar Othman  
saharo@netzero.net

Past President, Deborah Long  
deborah.long@enron.com

Director of Communications,  
April Cooper  
april\_c\_cooper@yahoo.com

Director of Competitions,  
Suzanne Stuckly-Taboada  
Suzanne\_Stuckly-Taboada@bmc.com

Director of Membership, Linda Oestreich  
Linda\_Oestreich@bmc.com

Director of Planning, Ron Kirk  
rkirk@wt.net

Director of Programs, Paul Mueller  
answersforall@pobox.com

Director of Satellites, Heather Shelly  
Heather\_Shelly@bmc.com

Director of Volunteer Resources,  
Mary Gwynne  
Mary\_Gwynne@bmc.com

STC Houston  
PO Box 42051  
Houston TX 77242-2051  
713-595-2100 ext 8803  
[www.stc-houston.org](http://www.stc-houston.org)

[www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

# From the President About Those STC Senior Members

by George Slaughter, Information Developer, BMC Software

**R**ecently we put out a notice that congratulated our newest STC senior members. Since then we've received calls and e-mails from several of you, wondering whether you were a senior member, or whether a friend of yours was a senior member, and what it takes to get noticed like this.

This column will address your concerns. It's good to see that you're paying attention!

### Qualifications

You become a senior member when you've been a member for five consecutive years. If you drop membership and rejoin, the five consecutive years starts over.

In the past, STC Houston has listed new senior members in our newsletter. (In fact, last month's *Dateline Houston* contained the complete listing for August and September.) This practice will continue, of course. This year, we want to honor senior members even more by listing them in messages posted to our online chapter mailing list (the listserv).

The STC headquarters web site, [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org), has an online membership directory that you can access for information about your membership and when you joined STC. You can use the directory to find your friends and colleagues as well.

### Years versus Experience

While you can become a senior member by holding STC membership for five consecutive years, you can develop senior-level skills and experience much sooner than that. In fact, you can do it right now by volunteering to become active at the chapter level.

STC has numerous honors and awards at Society and local levels. These honors and awards can be proof positive that you've met your goals of developing your skills and creating partnerships for success. You'll be reading about these awards in future newsletters as we hold our annual competitions.



George Slaughter



# From the Vice President

by Dorothy Murray, Freelance Technical Writer, Editor, and Digital Publisher

At the June transition meeting, George Slaughter announced the three *big kahunas* of his presidency: the STC Region 5 Conference, the technical publications competitions, and the Spring membership drive.

The first big kahuna was held October 11–13 at the Hilton Houston Westchase & Towers. By all accounts, it was an unqualified success. One enthusiastic attendee claimed that the “world-class” Houston conference compared favorably with STC annual conferences.

Conference manager Nicole Wycislo began assembling the steering committee two years ago. After the committee negotiated a hotel contract, financial manager Deborah Silvi prepared the first of many budgets, and program managers Linda Oestreich and Paul Mueller began contacting potential speakers.

For the keynote speaker, they enlisted Dr. John Lienhard, author and voice of “The Engines of Our Ingenuity,” a

National Public Radio series about machines and the people who create them.

Soon, hospitality manager Cindy Pao began organizing the kick-off reception with a Southwestern theme, complete with mariachi band and piñatas.

Publicity manager Kate Compton kept in touch with other Region 5 chapters and regularly updated the conference web site with the latest news.

Jewel Darby designed the conference logo, the “conference at a glance” card, and the artwork for programs, CD covers, and signage.

Lori Buffum produced the layout for programs and signage that directed attendees to the right meeting rooms.

Publications manager Rebecca Taylor produced the preliminary program and conference program, and Nathan Taylor produced the conference proceedings on CD.

Melanie Flanders arranged for the sale of polo shirts and distribution of

speakers’ gifts; she also arranged for Blue Willow Bookshop to set up a book stall, which was very popular.

Registration managers Robin Scott and Susan Stotzer kept track of conference registrations and produced and stuffed the conference bag.

Arrangements manager Dorothy Murray selected menus and organized student room monitors from the University of Houston–Downtown and Houston Community College.

And corporate sponsorship manager Jeff Staples obtained donations from leading companies to make the conference a financial success.

While the first of the big kahunas was being organized, April Cooper redesigned the chapter web site, and *Dateline Houston* moved online.

Keeping up with the trend to move everything to the Internet, STC Houston invites you to regularly visit [www.stc-houston.org](http://www.stc-houston.org) for the latest breaking news.

## Web Design “Secrets”

*continued from page 1*

You can slice an image by using a special program or plug-in, such as Ulead SmartSaver Pro, that lets you specify the cutting lines.

When the images have been sliced, save them to a folder containing your web site files.

### Place the Images by Using HTML

Create your web page by using HTML. You can use a WYSIWYG, HTML, or simple text editor to write the code. Knowing your HTML table and image tag attributes will save you the time spent troubleshooting code.

A few helpful, lesser-known image tag attributes are `vspace` and `hspace`, which can be used to control the white space around images.

For more information about HTML tags and attributes, visit [www.w3.org](http://www.w3.org).

*Dateline Houston* periodically publishes feedback from chapter members.

To have your letter to the editor considered for publication, contact editor Rebecca Taylor at [rebecca.taylor@compaq.com](mailto:rebecca.taylor@compaq.com).

*STC Houston wishes you a Happy Thanksgiving!*

# Jewel Darby, November Volunteer of the Month

by Paul Mueller, Information Development Manager, NetIQ Corporation

**J**ewel Darby is the STC Houston Volunteer of the Month for November. During the day, Jewel is a senior information developer at NetIQ Corporation. At all other hours, she is our graphics guru, helping the chapter put its best-looking foot forward.

Jewel is always willing to do everything she can to help the chapter be successful.

Jewel helped with many of the graphics requirements for last month's Region 5 Conference. She created the conference logo, and she worked closely with the rest of the Publications committee to provide a consistent graphical look across the conference publications.

Her efforts, as well as those of the entire Region 5 Conference publications team, gave our conference the polished, professional look and feel of a Society-level event.

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*Her efforts gave our conference the polished, professional look and feel of a Society-level event.*

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Jewel and the publications team ensured that the conference theme was everywhere.

Jewel's graphics included the program cover, proceedings CD insert and label, schedule-at-a-glance handout,

conference signs, and various other projects that found their way to Jewel's desk.

One comment that we received during the conference was "This conference looks so professional. The logo is on everything, including the session evaluation forms."

Jewel has also helped the chapter with other graphics needs. Recently Jewel learned that we needed signs for a meeting, and she quickly created works of art that gave us the polished image that we want to present. These signs also were used at events in The Woodlands and at our monthly meeting.

We are pleased to honor Jewel Darby as the STC Houston Volunteer of the Month for November.

## Job Forum

Although our nation faces its highest unemployment rate in years, the STC Houston Employment committee (led by Gary Foster) remains very active and will be there to support your needs.

At our membership meetings on the second Tuesday of the month, we hold an open forum meeting starting at 5:30 p.m. until the meeting at 6:30 p.m. Everyone is welcome.

We discuss job searches, resumes, interview techniques, and general tips and tricks on how to land that new job.

We also like to hear from the people who were just hired and what they did to land the job.

For more information, contact Gary at [gifoster@swbell.net](mailto:gifoster@swbell.net).

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# From the Editor: Getting to Know You

by Rebecca Taylor, Technical Writer, Compaq Computer Corporation

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**F**or *Dateline Houston*, this has been a year of changes. On a positive note, this is our first season to distribute the newsletter electronically. On a sad note, we're sorry to see Rhonda Sloan, managing editor, and Lisa Muenchow, coordinating editor, step down. They have been tremendous assets to the team and we all wish them well in their future endeavors.

As the new managing editor of *Dateline Houston*, I am inheriting a strong publication with a superb reputation and an extremely talented

production team. The managing editor is only the tip of the iceberg on such a committed team. So, before I go further, I'd like to pay homage to the *Dateline Houston* staff.

I'm sure you'll agree that our layout editor, David Pacheco, does an absolutely outstanding job making our newsletter shine! Producing a published deliverable for technical writers has got to be one of the hardest jobs in the world, and our editors do a superb job of readying the articles for the newsletter. So, the next time you see Melanie Boston, Jamie

Diamandopoulos, and Jim Hunt, be sure to thank them for sticking their editorial necks directly in the path of your eagle-sharp eyes!

I'm excited about becoming your managing editor and working with such an exceptional team. I hope you'll consider becoming part of this team by contributing articles. Or perhaps you would like to participate as an editor or coordinator.

Your help and expertise is always needed! Please feel free to e-mail me at [rebecca.taylor@compaq.com](mailto:rebecca.taylor@compaq.com) any time with questions or ideas.

## Book Review: Technical Writing 101

by George Slaughter, Information Developer, BMC Software

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*Technical Writing 101: A Real-World Guide to Planning and Writing Technical Documentation*. Alan S. Pringle and Sarah S. O'Keefe. Research Triangle Park, NC: Scriptorium Press, 2000. 258 pages, with appendices and index. \$34.95.

**S**urely you have been asked what a technical writer does. Alan Pringle and Sarah O'Keefe have produced an ideal textbook to answer the question.

Pringle and O'Keefe begin by defining the field. Then they talk about the processes of planning documentation, gathering information, working with editors, and production. Their discussions of indexing and single-

sourcing serve as good introductions to those topics.

*Technical Writing 101* does not discuss usability. For the beginning technical writer (the target audience for this book), perhaps such an omission could be justified; beginning technical writers might not notice the omitted topic. Yet usability is an important issue in our field. The book suffers, albeit not very much, from not discussing usability.

The appendixes are particularly interesting. They include information on getting a job as a technical writer, resources for the technical writer, and even a sample documentation plan. To be sure, other prominent books, such as JoAnn Hackos's *Managing Your*

*Documentation Projects* (Wiley, 1994), feature sample documentation plans.

The difference here is that Pringle and O'Keefe are writing for beginners in the field, while Hackos addresses more experienced writers looking for help in documentation management.

People often ask me, as chapter president, about how to get into the technical communication profession. Now I can tell them not only to attend STC Houston meetings and create partnerships for success, but also to read *Technical Writing 101* and get a good primer on what technical communicators do. The book is a good introduction to our profession.

### 2002 Region 5 Conference!

As you know, STC Houston recently hosted a successful regional conference. Now it's Oklahoma's turn! The Region 5 Conference 2002 will be hosted by STC

Oklahoma ([www.stc-ok.org](http://www.stc-ok.org)). The conference will be held in Oklahoma City. Keep an eye on the web site for more information!

# Membership Perks: Renew Today!

by Linda Oestreich, Senior Technical Editor, BMC Software, and STC Fellow

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As many of you know, STC membership is based on a calendar year. We get our dues renewal notices about this time of year, and we have until February 28 of the next year to pay our dues. But STC has a few nifty perks that you might not know about.

If you are a new member, you can get up to 15 months membership for the price of 12! Anyone who registers in October, November, or December 2001 enjoys membership until 2003!

If you have a friend or colleague who's been thinking about joining the Society, now's the time to tell them to do it! They'll save money, and you'll get points for giving them the tip!

Another nifty thing STC has now is online membership renewal and registration. It's easy to do and saves the Society that 34-cent stamp! Of course, that 34 cents usually happens two or three times (reminders have to go out, you know), and two or three times the 20,000-plus members in the Society—well, all of a sudden, we're talking big money!

So, go to [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org) and renew now. I just renewed, and it took only about three minutes.

Another perk of renewing early is that you'll be among the first folks who get to vote in STC elections. Each year, members can vote only if their membership is up to date. And, this

year your vote will help choose the new director-sponsor for Region 5.

Our current director-sponsor, Suzanna Laurent, has served us for three years and will be moving on to new challenges and opportunities. Only folks in Region 5 can vote for the director-sponsor of Region 5, so your current membership is important!

OK, you have two things to do: First, tell all your tech writing buddies that now's the time to join up so they can save some money. Second, go online today to renew your own membership. That way, you'll be in the first wave of folks to vote for the new STC board members. Good luck!

# STC Houston Competitions Get Underway

by Erika Frensley, Lead Information Developer, BMC Software

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October 19 was the deadline for submitting entries to the STC Houston competitions. We've accepted more than 140 entries and will be sending them to the Southwestern Ohio chapter for judging. We're

still accepting volunteers for judging the Southwestern Ohio entries.

Competitions managers are Jessica Dickerson ([jessica\\_dickerson@bmc.com](mailto:jessica_dickerson@bmc.com)) for technical publications, Dean Liscum ([dean\\_liscum@bmc.com](mailto:dean_liscum@bmc.com)) for online documents,

and Rene Gedaly ([rene\\_gedaly@bmc.com](mailto:rene_gedaly@bmc.com)) for technical illustrations. If you want to volunteer, send an e-mail to one of these contacts.

Judging began November 3, and judging evaluations must be turned in on December 8.

# Networking Opportunities

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The Houston chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators is holding its monthly program meeting from 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on November 15 at The Briar Club. For more information, go to [www.iabchouston.com](http://www.iabchouston.com).

The Association for Women in Computing is holding its monthly meeting from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on November 28 at the Hilton Houston Westchase & Towers. Reservations are required, so visit the Houston chapter's web site for details: [www.awchouston.org](http://www.awchouston.org).

The next meeting of the Association of Authors and Publishers will be held on November 15.

For more information, go to [www.authorsandpublishers.org](http://www.authorsandpublishers.org).

# Director-Sponsor Report

by J. Suzanna Laurent, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

Following the terrorist acts of September 11, the September 2001 STC Board of Directors meeting was held by teleconference—instead of face-to-face in Atlanta, Georgia, as originally planned—on September 21.

*Background:* All board meetings consist of three passes:

- An *action* pass, during which motions are brought forth to the board. For each motion, the board either approves it (with or without modifications), rejects it, or requests that the motion be restated and brought forth at a later date. Also during this pass, actions taken by the Executive Council since the last board meeting are announced.
- A *discussion* pass, during which various topics are brought forth for board consideration and discussion. Many discussion items results in action items for board and/or committee members, generally with the expectation that a motion or further information will be brought forth at an upcoming board meeting.
- An *information* pass, during which board members provide information not otherwise covered in the reports they provided to the rest of the board prior to the meeting. This is also the time for board members to ask for clarification of information presented in other members' reports.

During the action pass, the board approved:

- final budget for Fiscal Year 2002
- dues structure (effective January 1, 2002)
- new mission statement for the Society-level Technical Editing Special Interest Group (SIG): "The Technical Editing SIG provides

opportunities for members to expand their editing and proofreading expertise by serving as a forum for information exchange, professional support, and interaction among the SIG, STC, and the editing community at large"

- dissolution of the following chapters:
  - Fitchburg State student
  - Eagle (Denton, Texas) student
  - Saskatchewan
- merit grants:
  - \$3,000 to the Northern New England chapter for a scholarship program at the University of Massachusetts
  - \$2,000 to the Atlanta chapter to create a new résumé database
  - \$1,235 to the Central Ohio chapter to support its new High School Learning Program
- loans:
  - \$3,000 to the Southeastern Michigan chapter for the Region 4 conference
  - \$3,000 to the Canada West Coast chapter to host the Region 7 Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia in November 2002, subject to formal approval of the conference budget
- financial recovery/special need grant of \$715 to the Netherlands chapter to cover past-due costs incurred for the March 2001 membership meeting and ensure the future of the chapter
- increase of the stipend for the Industry Fellowship for Faculty and for the Teaching Fellowship for Practicing Professionals to \$4,000 each

- appointment of Julie Bommarito as program manager for the 2004 STC Annual Conference to be held in Baltimore, Maryland
- award of a Journal Editor Fellowship to Rhonda Stanton



*Suzanna Laurent*

The Executive Council approved the following items since the May 2001 board meeting:

- Pacesetter awards for the Orlando chapter and the Mercer University student chapter
- formation of the University of Wisconsin–Stout student chapter with a \$150 start-up grant
- formation of the Single Sourcing SIG with a proposed first-year budget of \$1,400

To learn more about decisions made during this or any other board meeting, or to have a motion or discussion item brought forward, please contact me.

*For Suzanna's previous director-sponsor articles, please visit [www.pages.prodigy.net/slaurent](http://www.pages.prodigy.net/slaurent). You can reach Suzanna by e-mail at [slaurent@prodigy.net](mailto:slaurent@prodigy.net).*

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

# Houston Hosts Successful Region 5 Conference!

**W**ell, we did it! And, what's more, we did it in true "Texas style." From the preliminary programs that went out in the mail to whet our appetites with some of the finest speakers in the industry . . . to the piñatas that burst forth with surprises after the first night reception . . . to the mini-bookstore stocked with titles suggested by chapter members . . . to the traveling exhibit of Society-level award-winning entries . . . to the lively networking lunches . . . to the rooms filled with pearls of wisdom for eager listeners . . . a grand time was had by all. Kudos to the volunteers who made this happen and made Houston proud.



*Dr. John H. Lienhard, second from right, presented his historical perspective on "Inventing Ourselves: Frankenstein, Faust, and Pygmalion."*

*STC Houston  
President  
George  
Slaughter gives  
a warm welcome  
to fellow Texan  
Judy Glick-  
Smith, our  
Society  
President*



*(photos by  
Deborah Long)*



*One of many  
conference attendees  
browses through a  
wide range of  
professional technical  
communication books  
available for purchase*



*Mariachi  
players add a festive  
note to the opening  
reception, where guests  
enjoyed scrumptious  
Southwestern fare*



*Conference Manager Nicole Wycislo (accompanied by Cindy Pao, George Slaughter, and Suzanne Stucky-Taboada) gives a sigh of relief as things get off to a good start*

# November 13 Program Meeting

## Window Control for Browser-Based Help

Developing Help systems for web-based applications can be a frustrating experience because HTML 4.0 has no Help-specific technologies built in. Creating secondary windows and pane help requires some techniques that are based on scripting languages.

Silke Fleischer of eHelp Corporation, the maker of RoboHelp and RoboInfo, will lead this program. Fleischer's presentation will demonstrate techniques to create new Help windows, control windows, and embedded Help.

You will see how the window control process can be divided into manageable pieces. The underlying JavaScript will be explained in detail and can be used for your own projects.

The presentation will provide information about eHelp products, including RoboHelp 2002.

For more information, go to [www.stc-houston.org](http://www.stc-houston.org).

**Date:**

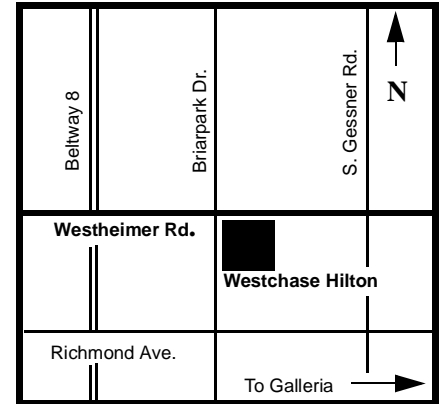
Tuesday, November 13

**Time:**

5:30 p.m. networking (hors d'oeuvres)  
6:20 p.m. announcements  
6:30 p.m. program

**Cost:**

\$10 (members)  
\$13 (non-members)  
\$3 (student and unemployed members)  
\$6 (student non-members)



**Drawing:**

A drawing for various prizes is held at the end of each program meeting. Proceeds benefit the Marx Isaacs Student Scholarship Fund.

### Calendar of Upcoming Events

Date	Time	Event/Topic	Location	Contact
Nov. 6	6 p.m.	Administrative Council meeting	Kitba Consulting Services 2900 Wilcrest, Suite 270	George Slaughter gslaughter@flex.net
Nov. 13	5:30 p.m.	program meeting	Hilton Houston Westchase & Towers 9999 Westheimer Road	Paul Mueller answersforall@pobox.com
Nov. 25	EBD*	deadline for January newsletter	N/A	Rebecca Taylor rebecca.taylor@compaq.com
Dec. 25	EBD*	deadline for February newsletter	N/A	Rebecca Taylor rebecca.taylor@compaq.com

\*end of business day

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**Submissions**

Newsletter contributions are due by the 25th of each month in Microsoft Word or FrameMaker format. All submissions are subject to editing. Send submissions to Rebecca Taylor at [rebecca.taylor@compaq.com](mailto:rebecca.taylor@compaq.com).