

# Carolina Communique

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The Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Chapter, STC

July 1995

## Michelle Reports from Washington, D.C.

*This is the first in a series of summaries Michelle Corbin Nichols wrote about the seminars at the 1995 STC Annual Conference.*

### Moving Beyond Help

*Presenters:* Francine Hyman & Jonathon Price

Francine Hyman of Communitec, Inc., distributed a table that outlines different types of online help systems as defined by interaction type, interruption level, and context-sensitivity level. Examples, information sources, and what information to include were also presented with each type of online support system. This table was the session's most valuable item.

Online *help systems* can be defined in many ways. This article describes some of the many possible kinds of online information/support systems. For a complete copy of the table ("Moving Beyond Help") write

Communitec, Inc.  
P.O. Box 3467  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

The following list summarizes the types of online support systems and their interaction styles:

1. *Tooltip* — Textual label for a control or an icon that displays its name when a cursor moves over.
2. *Status bar help* — Descriptive information (longer than tooltips) about a menu, tool, selection, or progress that informs a user about the identity of an item.

3. *Tip of the day* — Additional "Did you know?" information that tells the user about an interesting product feature or function.

4. *TipWizard* — Additional information that suggests to a user a more efficient way to perform the task in progress.

5. *CueCards* — Step-by-step instructions that remain on-screen to guide a user through tasks but which a user does not interact with.

6. *Advisor* — Guidelines, rules, and suggestions that remind the user of information needed and that the user can turn off.

7. *What's This? command* — Contextual information that explains to a user what any on-screen object is. Also called *Bubble help*.

8. *Context-sensitive help and Online User's Guide and Reference Help* — Guidance and reference information that explain to a user how to use a product and its interface elements.

9. *Embedded demos* — Simulation of the application in step-by-step information that shows a user how to perform a task. Seen commonly as computer-based training or product tutorials.

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## New Online Competition

*[Outgoing President Diane Feldman calls for expanding Chapter competition to include online products.]*

### Calling All Online Communicators

Online Help systems, computer-based training, information retrieval systems, computer-delivered presentations and demonstrations: much of the material technical communicators produce today never appears on a printed page.

Our Chapter is likely to be a leader in the development of online communication, since we work in one of the premier centers for software development and other high tech industries. However, we have no way of gauging how much of this material our members are producing, nor any way to recognize their efforts of distinction, because our Chapter does not sponsor a competition for online communication.

The annual competitions are among the most valuable services the STC provides. These contests

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society for technical communication  
Carolina Chapter - Central North Carolina

## Carolina Communique

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The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communique* monthly to provide reliable and timely information to Chapter and Society members. We encourage other STC chapters to reprint the material in this publication—provided they credit us and send a copy of the reprint.

We also invite our readers to submit material for consideration in the *Carolina Communique*. Send articles and letters to the editors at

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## Other Professional Groups

### Special Interest Groups of the ACM: SIGCHI

by Michelle Corbin Nichols

The Association of Computing Machinery (ACM) is the longest standing society for the computer industry. There are many related arms or special interest groups, including SIGDOC (Special Interest Group for Documentation) and SIGCHI (Special Interest Group for Computer-Human Interaction). SIGCHI has a local chapter here in town called TriCHI.

The TriCHI chapter meets monthly, on the last Tuesday of the month, from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm, at BNR unless otherwise noted. Speakers from around the Triangle area come to talk about different areas of the human-computer interaction field. Past topics included indexing, Internet tools, and low-fidelity prototyping. If you are not a member of TriCHI, the price per meeting is \$2.00 to cover expenses.

To join the ACM or SIGCHI or TriCHI, here is a breakdown of annual membership dues:

ACM membership \$82.00  
ACM student membership \$25.00  
SIGCHI membership \$57.00  
If an ACM, SIGCHI member \$30.00  
If an ACM, SIGCHI student member \$10.00  
TriCHI membership \$15.00

## Tools of the Trade: FrameMaker and Interleaf

The most popular modern word processors currently in use are WordPerfect and Word for Windows. However, you should be aware that the best paying—and often the most interesting—jobs for technical communicators require using FrameMaker or Interleaf. This is because these programs are designed to handle

## From the Editors

[Michael Lamar ended a two-year service as the Carolina Chapter's newsletter editor on June 30, 1995. With this issue of the Carolina Communique, Michael Uhl, John Stuart, Raquel Bradley, Laura Johnston, Michelle Corbin Nichols, and Christine Thompke take over for a one-year term of service. Several of the regular contributors to this newsletter join the new team.]

Hey...We're the new guys, and we're here to bristle. We're not the John Boy and Billy show, but we are here to keep you informed and to have fun along the path.

We want to publish a newsletter every month, on time, and fill it with stuff you can use. If you feel you want to react, holler. We've each published STC newsletters before, and *we think* we know what we're doing. (Mike, I feel the noose tightening...)

We're wired and goin' online: we've got cybersynergy—we're even gonna put this rag on the Web. (John, can you say World Wide Web? HTML? hyperlink?)

We're gonna give you detailed information on employment tips, cool Web sites, informative Internet listservers, ftp sites, meeting announcements, and regular stuff too.

We're all online, on the phone, and on the ground running. Feel free to contact us about the news that matters to you.

Mike and John

large, complex documents. You don't need a lot of imagination to further extend this line of thought: large, complex documents typically describe large, complex products or processes. The more experienced writers who are qualified—and compensated—to create this kind of documentation choose these tools.

...from p. 1...Beyond Help...Michelle's Report

offer us the opportunity to recognize the best work of our peers, to set standards to which all of us can strive, and to enhance the professionalism of technical communication. If our members are producing outstanding examples of online communication, it behooves us to sponsor a competition at the local level that can showcase their work.

Establishing a competition is not an effort to undertake casually—particularly one that requires the coordination of equipment, entries, and judges. It will be well worth the effort, however, *if* the demand is there. Before setting out to start a competition, we need to know from you whether the need exists. If you are producing online communication, and would enter a Chapter competition, please take a moment to fill out the following questionnaire. *We can proceed only if we hear from enough of you, so please respond immediately.*

...from p. 1...Beyond Help...Michelle's Report

10. *Embedded practice* — With embedded demos, task-oriented information and program that monitor, guide, and perform a task for a user but that allows a user to interact with a product and to practice the current task.

11. *Wizard* — Automates a task for a user through a set of dialog boxes, streamlining the process where possible to complete a complex task for a user.

12. *Checker* — Compares a task a user performs against some standard.

13. *Searchable reference* — A hardcopy document put online, with some redesign for retrieval and the display tool selected.

## Employment News

[Michael Uhl ended a one-year tenure as the Carolina Chapter's job bank manager on June 30, 1995. He files this final report as job bank manager.]

It's been an emotional roller-coaster this last year as the Chapter's job bank manager. I felt joy when someone I helped found a job, and sadness when someone called me for help, upon losing their job.



Perhaps my most important lesson is that in the modern job market, speed is of the essence. And speed now necessarily comes through the application of technologies such as e-mail, the Internet, fax machines, and World Wide Web. On July 22, I will be present at this Chapter's Summer Conference. In my presentation there, I will share many of the lessons of job hunting that I have learned over the last several years—and especially this past year. I hope to see many of you there.

YES, I would like to enter my work in a Chapter Online Communications Competition.

My entry would probably be in the following category:

- HELP Information that explains how to use a product.
- DEMO/PRESENTATION Information that describes or demonstrates the main features of a product.
- TUTORIALS/TRAINING Online information that teaches a specified range of tasks with specific objectives for the user to accomplish.
- GUIDE/REFERENCE/BOOK Online information that might usually appear in a handbook or reference publication.

My entry operates on this platform:

- DOS- or Windows-based PC
- Macintosh
- OS/2
- UNIX
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to be a judge in the Online Communication Competition.

I would like to make the Online Communication Competition a reality. Let me know how I can help.

Clip and mail this form to:

Diane Feldman  
196 Ridge Trail  
Chapel Hill, NC 27516  
feldmand@smtp.wg.com

If you prefer, you can call in your response to Diane at 929-0793. If you don't get an answer when you call, leave a message on the answering machine. LET US HEAR FROM YOU!!!!!!

## Chapter Leadership

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## June Meeting

Members of the Carolina Chapter met June 9th in the North Carolina Museum of Art's north dining room in an unusual Friday meeting. A small group of colleagues took time to socialize and tour the museum's general collection. Comparing notes and viewing art provided a pleasurable addition to our regular fare.

To introduce the museum's collection during a brief tour, our docents (volunteer guides and teachers) highlighted some of the important works in each room we explored.

The group had also planned to tour the library, but discovered the research library opens only during business hours.

It is my hope that we continue to meet during the summer months. Say, does anyone have any plans for August?

## Technology Information

### Useful World Wide Web Sites

*by Michael Andrew Uhl*

For those of you with World Wide Web access, here are some Universal Resource Locators (URL) I hope you find useful.

Looking for a new job in NC? The North Carolina Employment Security Commission has its own Web page: **[www.esc.state.nc.us/](http://www.esc.state.nc.us/)**

On page 2 Michelle mentioned SIGCHI; their home page URL is **<http://www.acm.org/sigchi/>**

For that heavy Microsoft user in your life, check out the MS home page: **[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)**

Has an acronym got you stymied? Get lost in **[www.ucc.ie/info/net/acronyms/acro.html](http://www.ucc.ie/info/net/acronyms/acro.html)**



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