



# IEEE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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## TECH COMM LEADERS MEET IN SNOWBIRD

BY LAUREL GROVE AND GEORGE HAYHOE

**O**n Wednesday, 22 October, the joint day of SIGDOC 97 and IPCC 97, representatives of five technical communication societies met at Snowbird Conference Center (Utah) to discuss issues our organizations confront as well as opportunities for cooperation.

The societies and their representatives were:

- IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS)  
George Hayhoe and Mark Haselkorn
- Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group on Documentation (SIGDOC)  
Kathy Haramundanis and Stephanie Rosenbaum
- Society for Technical Communication (STC)  
Saul Carliner and Janice Redish
- Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW)  
Sam Dragga and Karen Schriver
- Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC)  
Steven Bernhardt and Deborah Bosley

Saul Carliner led a discussion titled "Meeting of the Minds: The Direction of Technical Communication" to identify issues important to the field of technical communication. The audience was split into groups according to employment in academia, large industry, small consulting companies, and outside North America.

Each group considered four questions:

1. What skill is most important to technical communicators?
2. What concept about the field is most important to master?
3. Where will technical communication be in five years?
4. What is the main issue of concern for the field?

Despite disagreement about the priority assigned to the questions, there was consensus about most of what is important to technical communication. Adaptability and the ability to understand and organize information were identified as a technical communicator's most important skills. The most important concepts were considered to be orientation to users and teamwork. The most important issue overall is for the field to define itself.

The one point on which there was dissension was where technical communication would be in five years. Most of the groups saw a move to greater specialization of individual technical communicators working in teams. The consulting group, however, expects greater diversity in presentation media, with many of the same practitioners working in all.

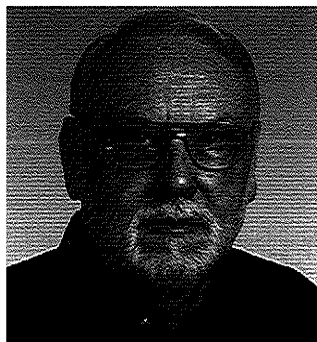
Midway through the day, IPCC/SIGDOC keynoter Karen Schriver spoke at lunch about the issues faced by the academic and practitioner communities in technical communication and challenged attendees to minimize their differences and make the most of the opportunities that can unite them.

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## FROM THE EDITOR



RUDY JOENK

Become a PCS celebrity! Join the ranks of famous *Newsletter* columnists Michael Brady, Joan Nagle, Ron Nelson, and Cheryl Reimold. Add a new dimension to the *Newsletter*. How? Author one or a series of articles on a non-traditional topic.

In addition to our backbone goal of helping engineers communicate better, i.e., making writing good to read, the PCS field of interest includes electronic forms of information and communication, such as Web sites, CD-ROMs, online publishing, interactive TV; user interfaces; usability evaluations; and cross-cultural exchanges.

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article; both longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. If you use a wp program, keep the format simple; for example, one font size, headings flush left. Everything will go through an ASCII filter before recoding in *Newsletter* style for the publishing software.

Use e-mail for transmitting an article. Usually wp codes can be converted from one program to another but this is seldom true for the latest releases; conversion utilities are low on the manufacturer's priority list. My address is in the boilerplate at the bottom of this page.

The deadline for articles is the first or second Friday of the odd-numbered month preceding publication, and we publish in the odd-numbered months. So:

Issue	Deadline
May/June 1998	6 Mar. 1998
July/Aug. 1998	8 May 1998
Sep./Oct. 1998	10 July 1998
Nov./Dec. 1998	11 Sep. 1998
Jan./Feb. 1999	6 Nov. 1998
Mar./Apr. 1999	9 Jan. 1999

Many thanks are due **Laurel Grove**, ace reporter, for her coverage of the numerous IPCC 97 sessions in this issue. And I'm grateful, too, to the several photographers who helped liven up the appearance of this issue.

Three readers, so far, have let me know that the tongue-in-cheek "New Technology Discovery" (a book) described on page 24 of the preceding (November/December 1997) issue probably has been around for at least a quarter of a century except, of course, for the added reference to a CD-ROM. It may have first appeared in the British humor magazine *Punch*.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

ADCOM MEETING	WASHINGTON DC + MARCH 13-14, 1998
IPCC 98	QUEBEC CITY, CANADA + SEPTEMBER 23-25, 1998
IPCC 99	NEW ORLEANS, LA + SEPTEMBER 8-10, 1999
IPCC 2000	CAMBRIDGE, MA + SEPTEMBER 24-27, 2000

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COMMUNICATION  
SOCIETY

## OFFICERS

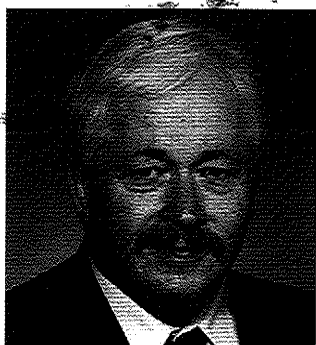
ROGER GRICE, PRESIDENT  
GEORGE HAYHOE, VICE-PRESIDENT  
SECRETARY  
WILLIAM KEHOE, TREASURER

## STAFF

RUDY JOENK, EDITOR

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



ROGER GRICE

## THE DUAL FOCUS OF PCS

I'm always intrigued by dualities. Maybe it's because I like to have a choice; maybe it's because I don't like to have more than two things to choose from.

In Mark Haselkorn's first column as PCS President, he spoke of the two components of technical and professional communication that we, as a professional society, had to satisfy. The first was a service component, through which we served engineers and other Societies within IEEE by helping those technical professionals communicate better. The second was a professional component, through which we served the technical communicators within our Society and strove to help make them better technical communicators.

As I try to develop a vision and a plan for the year, I am struck by another duality: one set of activities focusing inward on the IEEE as an organization and the other focusing outward on the members of PCS. We need both of these focuses to maintain and increase our technical vitality and strength.

## IEEE Focus

One of PCS's strengths and a large, often untapped, asset is that we are a Society within the IEEE—the largest technical professional society in the world. As such, we can take advantage of the services that IEEE offers its members, ranging from travel arrangements and group insurance

rates to technical support and lobbying power. There are a host of IEEE activities for which our members are ideally suited, and during the coming year I would like to see more of us become more involved in those activities so that PCS becomes widely known within IEEE and is seen as a group whose activities are very much in line with those of other IEEE Societies.

## Member Focus

We must also maintain our focus on providing service to our members through our *Newsletter* and *Transactions*; through our conferences, seminars, and other technical activities; and by serving as a leader in technical vitality and professional development. I hope that we will be able to continue our current activities while, at the same time, define more clearly those areas that we want to emphasize and bring into even sharper focus than before.

## The Challenges That Face Us

Like all organizations—professional, industrial, and academic—we face additional challenges in these times of downsizing and belt-tightening. Like many others, we will have to continue to do more with less and step up to the challenges of fiscal responsibility that face us as we work to accomplish more while dealing with constrained resources. The road may not always be easy, but the rewards for succeeding will be worth the effort.

...define more clearly  
those areas we want  
to emphasize.

## IPCC 98 PRIZES GIVEN

The IPCC 98 (Quebec City) committee gave two prizes during the IPCC 97 awards luncheon in Snowbird. Alan Francke of Pacific Bell in San Ramon, California, won two nights' accommodation at the conference

hotel, the Loews Le Concorde. Jay Mead of Galileo International in Englewood, Colorado, won free conference registration. Both are looking forward to coming to Quebec City and the Program Committee is eagerly awaiting their proposals.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEPTEMBER 1997 AdCom MEETING

BY GEORGE HAYHOE

The Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) met on Saturday, 25 October, following IPCC 97 at the Snowbird Conference Center outside Salt Lake City, UT. Four major items were addressed: Society elections, Society publications, international issues, and future conferences.

### Elections

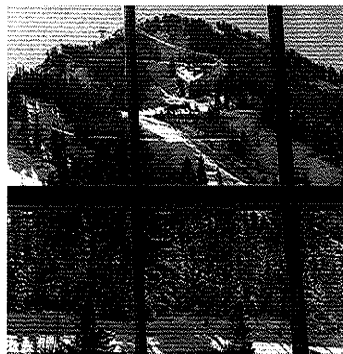
PCS was fortunate to have a slate of nine excellently qualified candidates standing for election for the five vacancies for three-year terms on the AdCom. The candidates were Kim Sydow Campbell, Eduardo Clark, Mark Haselkorn, Andrew Malcolm, George Martin, Lisa Moretto, Steven Robinson, Stephanie Rosenbaum, and Muriel Zimmerman. Those elected are Campbell, Haselkorn, Moretto, Rosenbaum, and Zimmerman.

Elections were also conducted for President and Vice President for 1998. Roger Grice was elected President and George Hayhoe, Vice President.

### Publications

Faced with needing to select a new *Newsletter* editor for the fourth time in

Photo by Laurel Grove



seven years, the AdCom decided that the level of honorarium offered for the position was not sufficient to attract and retain a highly qualified person. For this reason, the AdCom voted to increase the stipend from \$200 to \$750 per issue, a figure more in line with the amount of work required of the editor. Rudy Joenk volunteered to take on the task, and he was unanimously approved by the AdCom.

The AdCom also approved allocation of up to \$1000 to complete the redesign of the *Transactions* begun with the June 1997 issue. PCS will seek approval by the IEEE Publications Board to continue the redesign study beyond the one-year experiment approved earlier this year. The Society will continue to pursue funding possibilities for a full-scale usability study of the new design to be performed either by professional document usability experts or by graduate students, depending on the level of funding available.

### International Issues

The AdCom approved payment of PCS dues to INTECOM (the international council of technical communication organizations) for 1997 through 2000 and provision of travel support for the PCS delegate to annual meetings of the council. The AdCom also made a financial commitment of \$2200 per year in 1999 and 2000 to support INTECOM's Forum 2000 conference, to be held in England in June 2000. (The Idea Market, a highly interactive presentation format featured at previous Forum conferences, was previewed at IPCC 97 and will be a significant part of IPCC 98 in Quebec City.)

Also approved was a renewal of the Society's agreement with the A. S. Popov Society Professional Communication Section. Our eight-year interaction with the professional communication arm of the Russian organization has resulted in joint conferences and publications, as well as the formation of a PCS Chapter in Moscow. As with the commitment to INTECOM, the Popov Society agreement was renewed to emphasize PCS's interest in international cooperation with similar organizations.

### Conferences

IPCC 97 proved to be highly successful in terms of its attendance, favorable comments by attendees, cooperation with SIGDOC, and a very strong technical program. It was also financially successful,

(continued on page 6)

*Active support of  
international activities*

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE



CHERYL REIMOLD

### LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND — A CURE FOR INFORMATION OVERLOAD

**W**e are data-deluged. Information overload has been declared a medical syndrome, the symptoms of which include irritability, attention deficit, and inability to make decisions or complete a task.

According to a 1996 Reuters News Service study, 40 percent of 1300 business people in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Hong Kong, and Singapore believe too much information is hampering their ability to make important decisions. Worse, although half of the respondents say they can't cope with the volume of information they receive, two-thirds say they want even more. There is a growing legion of info-addicts, people who suffer withdrawal symptoms when taken off the Internet. Apparently we have lost the ability to filter out the useful and interesting from everything else. We have become information dump sites.

Paradoxically, our surfeit of information has not improved our communication or understanding of each other. Perhaps we are substituting quantity of data for value, meaning, and depth of understanding. Maybe information overload has led us to shut out any spoken messages that we have not actively sought. Whatever the cause, the problem is great and widespread.

I have been consulting to businesses on communication for many years. Never before have I heard the complaint so frequently and with such urgency: "How can I explain the problem I'm having? They don't listen to me." "People don't want him on their team because he won't listen." "She thinks she knows it all; she never listens to us."

We must start listening to understand. This means focusing on the speaker not as a source of information but rather as an engaging human being worthy of attention and respect. By doing this, we can reconnect with each other and conquer information overload.

#### Make an Active Connection with the Speaker

A victim of information overload passively ingests information until it overwhelms him. By contrast, a person who listens to understand actively connects with another human being.

Imagine that you are standing in a crowd. Someone throws you a thin, silver thread. To catch it, you must focus on the thread and the person who sent it. This is the first step of listening to understand. You concentrate fully on the speaker and the message, with interest and respect, because you want to connect with that speaker. This is the very opposite of passively waiting to absorb more floods of data.

#### Listen Without Judging

According to psychologist Carl Rogers, our greatest obstacle to effective listening is our tendency to judge, and frequently condemn or reject, the speaker's remarks. Even if our judgment is favorable, the act of evaluating shifts our attention from the speaker and her message to ourselves and our reaction. Information overload has made us even more impatient and judgmental.

Listening to understand means replacing judgment with empathy. Don't say (or think), "You're wrong!" Ask instead, "Why do you say that?"

Suppose a new employee bursts into your office, claiming that the people on her project team are all out to get her, sabotaging her work and blaming her for other people's errors. Your instinctive response is a judgment: She's overwrought, maybe unbalanced. You try to disprove her contention, making her feel even more isolated and misunderstood than when she came in.

However, if you listen to understand, you focus on her with interest and respect. Having heard her complaint, you resist the

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*Focus attention and respect on the speaker without judging the information.*

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## HIGHLIGHTS OF ADCom MEETING

(continued from page 4)

generating a surplus likely to be among the highest ever for such a conference.

Plans for IPCC 98 in Quebec City call for increased cooperation with SIGDOC so that joint program offerings will be available all three days. The introduction of the Idea Market presentation format, so positively received at Snowbird, and the conference setting at a modern hotel within an easy

walk of the Plains of Abraham and the old city, should make IPCC 98 successful as well.

Preliminary plans for IPCC 99 (New Orleans) and IPCC 2000 (Cambridge, MA) indicate that the PCS tradition of excellent technical programs in interesting settings will continue into the next century.

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## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

(continued from page 5)

impulse to judge and condemn, seeking instead to understand why she feels that way. In so doing, you validate her, gain her trust, and enable her to clarify the situation for both of you. Then, together, you can explore ways to solve the problem.

### Reflect Your Understanding

If information overload has robbed us of our ability to attend, we must take back what is ours. Reflecting our understanding of a speaker's message can help us do this.

Reflecting means showing the speaker that you have made the connection; you have caught what he was sending out. If he is explaining a method or recounting an event, his message is, "This is what happened." You periodically recap what he has just told you. By contrast, if he is not describing the event but rather pouring out an emotional response to it, his message is, "I'm upset!" or "I'm excited!" Then your comments should reflect your understanding of his unhappiness or his joy.

Reflecting your understanding is not interrupting, but rather clarifying and reassuring. It is an act of connection, not truncation.

To reflect, you must attend closely to the speaker. If this is difficult, start with small

pieces; reflect frequently. Gradually, you will be able to attend for longer and take in more. You will be forging stronger bonds of connection with others and breaking the bonds of information overload. Listening to understand is a powerful, rewarding act of effective communication. Managers and staff members who practice this skill have more productive departments, as they know what the people in the group want and need, how each person functions best, and how to work with the others to achieve harmony and mutual respect.

This type of listening requires attention, patience, an open mind, and an interest in other people. These qualities, the very opposite of those associated with information overload, may well form the filter we need to sift useful knowledge from unnecessary facts. They may free us from capture by the Web and enable us to dance over it at will, leaving when we have found what we need.

*Cheryl Reimold has taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for 17 years. She is the author of five books and more than 200 articles. Her firm offers customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. PERC Communications, 6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583, (914) 725-1024, fax (914) 725-1165.*

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*Listening to  
understand is a  
powerful, rewarding  
act of effective  
communication.*

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## FLOCCINAUCHINIHIPILIFICATION

## LINGUA FRANCA

BY MICHAEL BRADY

The ascendancy of English to the throne room of international languages has puzzled scholars ever since it displaced Latin and then French. The statistics are clear: More people learn English in China than live in the U.S.A. As *The Economist* smugly reported (October 25, 1997), one in three continental Europeans now speaks English well enough to get along in conversation, which makes English the *lingua franca* of the European Union, not to mention the official language of the giants of European multinational companies, such as ABB (electrical and electronics) and Iveco (trucks). But how and why did this second-rate tongue of the poor and quarrelsome peasants on an island off the west coast of Europe become a global language? Theories abound, many scholarly, some political, and most unreadable.

There's at least one refreshing exception. Bill Bryson, an American from Des Moines, Iowa, who has lived in rural Yorkshire, England, for 20 years, has so thoroughly and amusingly surveyed the English language that his works have won raves in England. In *Mother Tongue* (London and New York, 1990, Penguin paperback, ISBN 0-14-0143505-X) he chronicles the language from its Anglo-Saxon roots to its global span. In a sequel, *Made in America* (London, 1995, Minerva paperback, ISBN 0-7493-9739-X), he traces the American component in language and popular culture, and in so doing de-mythologizes his homeland.

Though Bryson's pen is light—in book shops his travel books are usually on the humor shelves—his scholarship is thorough. *Mother Tongue* has 10 pages of notes and selected bibliography, and *Made in America* has more than 30. Both books are meticulously indexed. These are the references on writing as it should be: living, communicating, and fascinating.

Every anecdote is stripped to its memorable essentials. Consider English gram-

mar: Why is it so maddeningly illogical? Simple (*Mother Tongue*, p. 128): "...its rules and terminology are based on Latin—a language with which it has precious little in common." And what is arguably the single most important event in the development of English as we know it today? Simple, again: it's a non-event, the reluctance of 18th century British and American scholars and public figures to establish an academy or a government bureau to oversee and regulate the language, as was done in France. English lives with a lack of stultifying authority. Hence its growth.

Nowhere has English grown more rapidly or been more dynamic than in the U.S.A. As the frontier pushed westward and the waves of immigrants came in the 19th century, the language bent to suit the changing country. More than 50 languages influenced English. Americans use "dumb" in the sense of stupid because that's the meaning in German, and often include the definite article "the" because that's the way the Irish did it: "in the hospital" in the U.S.A., "in hospital" in Britain. Spelling is haphazard in all countries that claim English as their mother tongue, despite the efforts of those who compile dictionaries, from Webster to Oxford. And idioms shroud their origins: "stiff upper lip," believed on both sides of the Atlantic to be typically British, is an Americanism. As Bryson remarked in a full-page interview in *Newsweek* (March 6, 1995), "The British unknowingly use thousands of American words daily. One of them is "moron."

In Bryson's view, there is no superior form of the language. Variety is one of the great attractions of English; increasing homogenization is one of its greater enemies. Writers everywhere take heed: Bryson is as thought-provoking as he is funny. *Mother Tongue* and *Made in America* are page turners for all who practice the craft of communication in English.

Spelling is haphazard  
in all countries that  
claim English as their  
mother tongue.

## STUDENT ACTIVITIES COORDINATOR: CALL FOR VOLUNTEER

BY BETH WEISE MOELLER

*Assist in forming  
student chapters*

The IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) is searching for a new Student Activities Coordinator. The SAC is to be responsible for maintaining relationships between the PCS Administrative Committee (AdCom), student clubs and chapters, and Student Activities Coordinators in other IEEE Societies. The SAC needs to be willing to work with all student clubs and chapters and to be a resource for colleges and universities wishing to establish student clubs or chapters.

Ideally, the PCS SAC will have the following qualifications:

- Be affiliated with—or willing to start—a student club or chapter at that location

- Be associated with a college/university with a technical or professional communication degree program
- Understand the challenges facing professional communicators in the business world
- Hold IEEE and PCS memberships (full Member or above preferred)

This position reports to the PCS Chapter Coordinator and carries no stipend. Anyone interested should contact Dr. Beth Weise Moeller by phone (518) 587-9594, fax (518) 584-5218, or e-mail [beth@imediaconsult.com](mailto:beth@imediaconsult.com), on or before February 15, 1998.

## TECH COMM LEADERS MEET

(continued from page 1)

After lunch, the summit's participants shared their visions of the future of technical communication, and by day's end had agreed to recommend to their governing boards ongoing discussions (to be expanded to organizations outside North

America) and a number of cooperative projects.

A full report of the summit's recommendations will be published in a later PCS *Newsletter*.

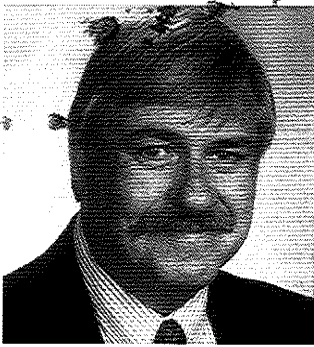
Photo by Timothy Broshman, IEEE



From left: Kathy Haramundanis, Stephanie Rosenbaum, Nina Wishbow, SIGDOC; Sam Dragga, Karen Schriver, ATTW; Steven Bernhardt, Deborah Bosley, CPTSC; Mark Haselkorn, George Hayhoe, PCS; Saul Carliner, Janice Redish, STC.



## MASTERS OF STYLE



RONALD J. NELSON

BRIDGING THE OLD AND THE NEW:  
HENRY PETROSKI

In the third edition of her now standard textbook *Technical Communication*, Rebecca Burnett (Carosso) discusses an often overlooked but crucially important concept: known-new analysis. That concept is covered at greater length in the fifth edition of Joseph Williams' superb *Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Lesson Five: Cohesion and Coherence). The idea is simply this: Before presenting new information of any kind, one must lay the foundation of the old. That way the writer builds a bridge spanning any potential gap in knowledge. And that determination to connect with the reader is at the heart of audience analysis, an essential concern for every professional communicator.

One of the most creative of verbal bridge-builders is Henry Petroski, A. S. Vesic professor of civil engineering and professor of history, as well as chair of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, at Duke University. There is a satisfying continuity to Petroski's published contributions, appearing as they regularly do in the journal *American Scientist* and in his many books, including *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* (1989), *To Engineer Is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design* (1992), *The Evolution of Useful Things* (1992), *Design Paradigms: Case Histories of Error and Judgment in Engineering* (1994), *Engineers of Dreams: Great Bridge Builders and the Spanning of America* (1995), *Invention by Design: How Engineers Get from Thought to Thing* (1996), and *Remaking the World: Adventures in Engineering* (1998).

Petroski's recent *American Scientist* columns include "Fax and Content" (Nov.-Dec. 1996), about the history of facsimile transmission; "The Fixed Link" (Jan.-Feb. 1997), about the Confederation Bridge over the Northumberland Strait between Prince Edward Island and the Canadian mainland; "Santiago Calatrava" (March-April 1997), about the Spanish architect-engineer whose designs and

sketches are works of art and whose completed bridges, railroad stations, and other structures are (sometimes controversial) masterpieces; and "Design Competition" (Nov.-Dec. 1997), about the tradition of such elite activities and the various entries for the Tyne River footbridge at Gateshead, England.

These columns are remarkable accomplishments from which the professional communicator can learn. For example, Petroski has an engaging habit of settling subject matter into historical and other contexts, thereby conveying to the reader a reassuring feeling of familiarity. Moreover, his essays have a stylistic grace characterized by absolute clarity, beauty of phrasing, and thorough, unpretentious presentation of topic. The professional communicator can glean useful writing tips from these columns, such as the proclivity rarely to begin consecutive sentences with the same word, thereby guaranteeing sentence variety.

Petroski's books also yield riches to the receptive reader. With an underplayed enthusiasm attesting to his utter immersion in subject matter—one does not need exclamation points to convey involvement—he transforms common objects like forks, pencils, paper clips, zippers, aluminum cans, buildings, and bridges into fascinating objects of contemplation. The old becomes new. In *Engineers of Dreams*, for example, he documents the lives and bridges of James Buchanan Eads (the St. Louis bridge) and Othmar Hermann Ammann (the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge, the Triborough Bridge, the George Washington Bridge), among others. Petroski devotes whole, extensive chapters to each bridge builder, thoroughly researching each of them and their monumental structures. Petroski's writing elegantly pays tribute to these engineers and their works. Witness part of his preface to the book:

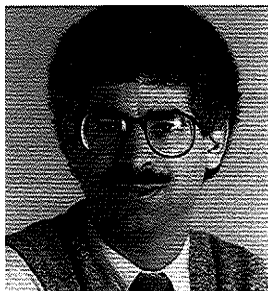
This book tells the stories of engineers who have dreamed and engineers who have toiled, of bridges of celebrity and

To be able to search out  
such slightly surprising  
yet magnificently apt  
wordings is an identifying  
characteristic of the  
sophisticated writer.

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## PCS PAST PRESIDENT HASELKORN TO COORDINATE NSF'S Y2K EFFORTS

The National Science Foundation has appointed former Professional Communication Society President (1996-1997) Mark Haselkorn to coordinate its external efforts to address the year 2000 computer problem.



*Mark Haselkorn*

Haselkorn, professor of technical communication at the University of Washington and an IEEE Senior Member, will lead an effort to study the extent to which National Science Foundation-funded researchers are

prepared to deal with the year 2000 bug and help them develop strategies to tackle potential problems.

"Although the responsibility for addressing this issue rests with our grant recipients and their institutions, we felt that the year 2000 problem was serious enough to appoint someone to provide expert assistance," said Steve Williams, director of resource management staff for the NSF's division of information systems. "Mark Haselkorn is conversant with the year 2000 problem because he's already providing leadership on the issue, he's a good communicator, and he knows the grantee community."

Haselkorn, an expert on human-computer interaction and real-time information

systems, began studying the year 2000 problem in early 1995. Haselkorn is chairing a joint IEEE Technical Activities/Standards committee to draft a technical information statement on the issue. The draft TIS, in progress, can be viewed at [www.mindspring.com/~pci-inc/Year2000/y2ktech.htm](http://www.mindspring.com/~pci-inc/Year2000/y2ktech.htm). (IEEE volunteers interested in contributing to the drafting of the TIS can contact Haselkorn via e-mail at [m.haselkorn@ieee.org](mailto:m.haselkorn@ieee.org).)

"My focus has not been so much on the technical fix but on risk analysis, contingency planning, impact mitigation, the role of policy-makers, and the larger context of which the year 2000 problem is only a symptom," Haselkorn said. "My role with the NSF will be to help shepherd external researchers through this problem with as little disruption in their activities as possible. I'm passionate about this problem because so many myths are being circulated about it and I want to help people understand the true nature of the problem and how to respond to it."

Haselkorn's duties will include: leading an inventory of the current situation of the NSF's external researchers with regard to the year 2000 problem, increasing awareness and understanding of the problem, reviewing NSF plans and resources to address the problem, helping formulate NSF's strategic position on year 2000 issues, and identifying opportunities for interactions with governmental and professional organizations on the problem.

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## ADCOM MINUTES AVAILABLE

The minutes of the 1997 Administrative Committee meetings are available at:

<http://www.ghayhoe.com/PCS/Mar1997.html>

<http://www.ghayhoe.com/PCS/July1997.html>

<http://www.ghayhoe.com/PCS/Oct1997.html>

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There is probably no hell for authors in the next world—they suffer so much in this.

—Bovee

# MASTERS OF STYLE

(continued from page 9)

bridges of burden, and it is about the nature of technology in a human context. Some renowned engineers and some famous bridges have tended to overshadow their contemporaries and neighbors, but the full range of stories reveals that the lesser-known engineers have been of no less importance in shaping our built environment. Indeed, the personalities of all kinds of engineers, with their faults and foibles coexisting with their dreams and designs, have played as much of a role as has their technical know-how in bringing familiar bridges to fruition.

As he observes, "When we see in the stories of bridges the full dimensions of engineers and engineering, we also see more clearly the inextricable interrelationships between technology and humanity. As no person is an island, so no thing is an island. Certainly no bridge is an island."

The careful reader—and professional communicators must be careful readers—senses the cogency of the word "burden" (how it extends "toiled"), the phrase "built environment," and the sentence "Certainly no bridge is an island." To be able to search out such slightly surprising yet magnificently apt wordings is an identifying characteristic of the sophisticated writer. And mustn't we all stretch our abilities toward sophistication if we expect to improve as persons and as writers?

Petroski gets caught up in his topic—an admirable trait, in my opinion. His chapter on the development of the zipper (from *Invention by Design*), for example, recounts the difficulties of the problem to be solved:

One of the many time-consuming and often frustrating tasks faced daily in the nineteenth century was the fastening and unfastening of the many buttons or hooks and eyes found on articles of clothing, including high-button shoes. With so many fasteners spaced so closely together, it was not uncommon for someone dressing quickly or inattentively to skip a button or a hook, only to find

an extra button hole or eyelet at the bottom of a vest or the top of a blouse, requiring a lot of undoing back to the mistake and then redoing.

Although Elias Howe, Jr. (of sewing machine fame), was awarded a patent for "certain new and useful Improvements in Fastenings for Garments, Ladies' Boots, and other articles to which they may be applicable" in 1851, he apparently did not attempt to rid his invention of its flaws or to market it. As a result, Whitcomb L. Judson—"a portly individual who had grown tired of bending over to lace up his high boots"—devised a "clasp locker or unlocker for shoes," which he patented in 1893. It is he who is generally credited with the invention of the zipper. (The interested reader might want a copy of Robert Friedel's *Zipper: An Exploration in Novelty* [New York: Norton, 1994].)

Petroski's 434-page definitive book *The Pencil* delightfully interweaves history (for example, Henry David Thoreau's family's business was pencil making) with trade secrets, the world pencil war, designing pencils, producing them, competition, and the quest for perfection, as well as with virtually any other imaginable aspect of the topic. He concludes the book with a surprisingly extensive bibliography and appendices on "How the Pencil Is Made," by the Koh-I-Noor Pencil Company (used by the extraordinary contemporary artist of Pittsburgh scenes, Nevin Robinson), and on his own pencil collection. Petroski believes that a focused study of any such artifact can be more beneficial than diffuse, cursory studies of past and present technological innovations: "Because all engineering, past and present, has a common feature to its fabric, the method of engineers and of engineering is embodied in everything ever made and thus is accessible through any single artifact."

Thanks to Petroski's uncanny knack of bridging the old and the new, we are privileged to emerge from his writings the richer and more appreciative of the world around us.

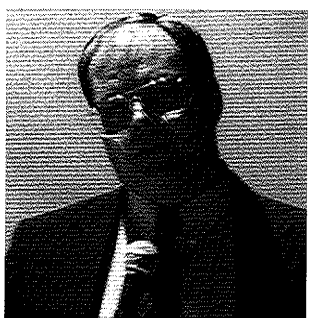
*Invention by Design is  
reviewed by Michael  
Goodman in IEEE  
Trans. Prof. Commun.,  
vol. 40, no. 4, Dec. 1997,  
pp. 313-314.*

## REFLECTIONS ON IPCC 97

BY KARL L. SMART

The lights are out. The rooms are empty. Everyone has gone home. The International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC) is over for another year. Months of preparation have culminated in a few short days of activity. Like the creator of any product, I wonder how the conference was received and valued by its consumers: you, the conference attendees. I invite you to provide us feedback on the conference by completing an online evaluation form (click the survey link on the PCS home page: <http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html>). PCS is interested in responding to your needs and developing better conferences.

Photo by Timothy Brothman, IEEE



Karl Smart

This year's conference was unique in many respects. Building on the tradition of back-to-back SIGDOC and IPCC conferences held in 1994 and 1995, IPCC 97 had

a day of joint conference sessions with SIGDOC on Wednesday. We hope conference participants enjoyed and benefited sharing sessions and insights with our colleagues from SIGDOC. Nearly 80 people took advantage of attending both conferences.

For some, this may become known as the "snow conference" (somehow fitting for the location at Snowbird). Beginning the second day of the conference, we experienced an unusual late fall snow storm (Ron Blicq claims that IPCC 98 is saving all the sunshine for Quebec City!). More than one foot of snow fell Thursday and Friday of the conference. Nearly 30 PCS members who attended the SIGDOC conference, however, enjoyed the more traditional blue sky, sunny, near-60-degree (F) October weather of Utah. The snow did seem to improve attendance at conference sessions, and for some international attendees, this was their first time experiencing snow.

In the advance material advertising IPCC 97, I suggested that the technical communication field faces many important crossroads. I posed several questions I hoped conference participants would consider:

- How do we define ourselves as technical communicators?
- How do our current problems resemble those of the past?
- What skills remain essential despite new tools, techniques, and delivery mechanisms?
- How do we leverage new technologies and changing work environments to prepare for the future?

Reflecting on the conference, I feel that we did address many of these issues, with sessions that explored such topics as HTML, the World Wide Web, usability, visual design, training for technical communicators, and working within organizations.

For me, two of the most significant events of the conference week were a plenary "meeting of the minds" session facilitated by Saul Carliner and a challenging keynote speech by Karen Schriver. After some introductory remarks, Saul divided conference attendees into four groups. Each group had a short time to discuss and reach a consensus on four questions (see "Tech Comm Leaders Meet in Snowbird," p. 1 in this issue of the *Newsletter*).

Although I will not discuss the specific responses to these questions, I think the responses of the groups surprised many. Even with differences within and among the groups, we saw significant commonality: among those self-employed, those employed in industry, and those working in academia. For me, the session stressed the need we have to trust each other, to be optimistic, and to have faith in our future and the future of our field.

Building on issues Saul raised, Karen's speech, "New Literacies: New Challenges for Communicators," provided concrete suggestions for us to build on as technical

(continued on page 17)

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*The session stressed the need we have to trust each other, to be optimistic, and to have faith in our future and the future of our field.*

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# IPCC 97 ♦ SNOWBIRD, UTAH

Some scenes from last October at IPCC 97.

Set in the Wasatch Mountains east of Salt Lake City, the location offered a mix of productive communication and spectacular views.

*Photography by: Timothy Brosnahan, BEE™, Laurel Grove, Mike Magyar, Andrew Malcolm, Janet Rochester, and Michael Steehouder.*



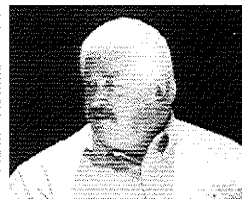
Lisa Moretto



Adrenne Forzese



Roger Grice



David Farkas



Bill Kehoe



Thea Van Der Geest



Alan Manning



Judith Ramey



Kristin Dukay



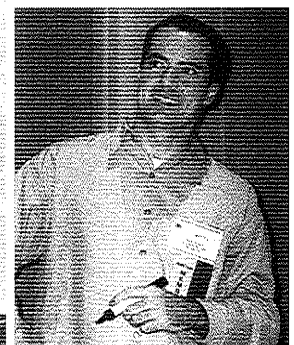
Rob Houser



Marj Davis



Scott DeLoach



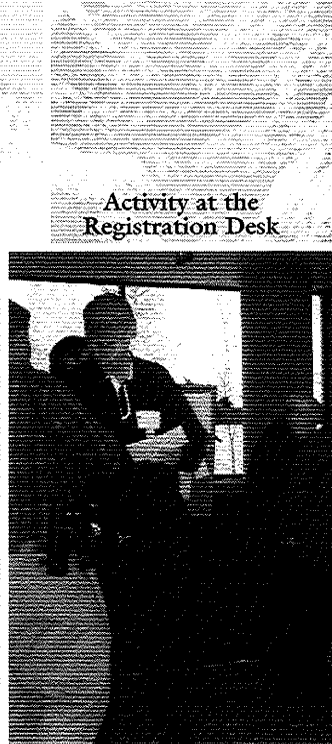
Ron Blicq



Beth Moeller Karl Smart



Activity at the Registration Desk



AdCom Meeting



Professional Communication Society

## ACCREDITATION—IPCC 97

Accrediting college programs was clearly on people's minds at IPCC 97. At one session, Marj Davis of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, proposed that PCS encourage universities with ABET (Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology)—accredited engineering programs to seek accreditation of their technical communication programs through ABET.

Prof. Davis showed that, whereas there are a large number of technical communication programs in colleges and universities that also have engineering programs, only a few of the technical communication programs are housed within the engineering programs.

PCS established a committee to look into the possibility of developing an accreditation program specific to engineering-related technical communication programs after IPCC 95. The committee, which is

led by PCS's Michael Goodman of Fairleigh Dickinson University, consists of academic technical communicators from several engineering schools.

Goodman described the committee's proposing development of an accreditation program to IEEE, receiving IEEE approval, and taking the proposal to ABET. ABET is supportive of the proposal, if 15 institutions show themselves to be interested in pursuing accreditation.

Developing that support is the committee's current task. The feeling of the participants was that the universities should begin the process of having their programs accredited, that there was no known objection to their becoming accredited programs, and that once the process had begun, a bandwagon effect might result, bringing in more programs.

At this session, members of academia and industry were about equally represented.

Photo by Timothy Brodhagen, BSE



From left: Janet Rochester, Karen Tylak, unidentified, Marj Davis, Laurel Grove, Michael Goodman.

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.

—Mark Twain

## TEAM COMMUNICATORS—IPCC 97

On Thursday, October 23, a session on teams in technical communication featured papers by Art Elser and Rob Houser, both of whom addressed communicators' extending their activities beyond documents. Elser tracked the change that followed the introduction of desktop publishing, when suddenly technical communicators moved from being part of a team of specialists to being "super writers" responsible for all aspects of document production. According to Elser, with the broader range of communication products now being produced, the variety of skills needed has increased. Because the chances are that no individual has them all, technical communicators can expect to again be part of teams.

Next Houser described the operation of teams combining technical writers and

trainers, which gave communicators the opportunity to meet and observe users, and gave trainers ways to provide information that would support users in the classroom and beyond.

The participants concluded that despite the loss to learning time resulting from rotation of staff through teams to develop the different skill sets needed, team members and the company benefit by opening up more creative solutions to problems. Even technical communicators who are not in a position to establish a team can take responsibility for themselves and create virtual teams of experts on whom they call for advice or guidance.

In a later session, Jim Ramsay made similar points, finding that technical writers working with engineers benefited the skills of both.

## IPCC 98: A NEW TYPE OF CONFERENCE

BY LISA MORETTO

Friday afternoon at IPCC 97 in Snowbird was devoted to introducing conference attendees to a new way of presenting information and participating in sessions. The new format is called an Idea Market and it will debut in North America at IPCC 98 in Quebec City, Canada, September 23-25, 1998. Ulf Andersson from Sweden developed the Idea Market which is part of the Forum concept and is popular at European conferences.

At Snowbird people learned the difference between a traditional paper session and the interactive Idea Market. They also had the opportunity to structure a presentation in this new format and participate in a 45-minute Idea Market.

Imagine a large room (perhaps a ballroom) with 10 presenters—known as activators—each standing beside two flip charts. One chart has a list of questions or concepts related to their topic, the other chart is blank. Participants may roam around the room and exchange ideas with the activa-

tors. There are no chairs so people are not locked into listening to one topic. It is the activator's responsibility to encourage discussion and interaction. Often activators come away from an Idea Market having learned more about the topic than they knew before.

Miki Magyar attended the session in Snowbird and is very excited and encouraged about the Idea Markets in Quebec City. It "expands the range of possibilities for conference sessions," she said. "It takes the progressions one step further by forcing interaction." She noticed that because an Idea Market allows participants to share their ideas, each activator needs to listen and facilitate the discussions rather than only present information.

For more information about the Idea Markets at IPCC 98 in Quebec City or to submit a proposal for either a paper session or an Idea Market, contact Lisa Moretto at [RGI\\_Lisa@compuserve.com](mailto:RGI_Lisa@compuserve.com). The deadline has been extended to February 15.



## HIGHLIGHTS OF PACE WORKSHOP

BY JANET ROCHESTER

The annual Professional Activities Committees for Engineers (PACE) Conference and Workshop was held over the Labor Day 1997 weekend in St. Petersburg, Florida. The event brought together IEEE members (about 280 this year) interested in engineers' professional vitality and non-technical concerns.

While most attendees were already involved with IEEE professional activities at some level, two of the six workshop tracks focused on the needs of young professionals. These tracks, Career Strategies, and Surviving and Thriving in the Corporate Jungle, complemented the other four tracks—Services, Image, Outreach; Government and Industry Relations; Professional Vitality; and PACE Leadership Training—to provide a wide variety of learning opportunities. Between sessions, during meals, and late into most evenings,

the attendees continued the networking and learning process.

Pre-conference workshops and tutorials provided intensive training in HTML, Process Management and Improvement, Making Action-Getting Presentations (taught by PCS members Ron Blicq and Lisa Moretto). A special training session was presented for new PACE leaders. All the workshops and the conference itself provided CEU credits.

It is always a pleasure to record recognition for our members: Leann Kostek, PCS Membership Committee chair, received one of three IEEE-USA Citation of Honor awards. She was recognized for her work in the successful development of the GOLD (Graduates of the Last Decade) and Young Professional programs to encourage younger people to join and remain in IEEE.

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*PCS involved...*

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## KEYNOTER—IPCC 97

Karen Schriver spoke to IPCC and SIGDOC attendees at a plenary session over lunch on Wednesday. In her talk, "New Literacies: New Challenges for Communicators," Schriver identified the issues confronting technical communication at its present crossroads as self-definition and identification of essential skills.

Photo by Timothy Brodman, IEEE



*Karen Schriver*

research must be fostered. She noted that there has been little research into the content of the profession, that is, into what

To prepare for the future, Schriver argued that the relationship between practitioners in industry and academia must improve and the development of

technical communicators actually do. Such research is necessary to determine what it is that constitutes expertise in technical communication.

Practitioners in industry (as all too often opposed to those in academia) frequently criticize research as merely confirming the obvious. Schriver described a study by Norman Gage in which communicators found exactly contradictory results to *both* be confirmations of the obvious. The lesson is that technical communicators must recognize that the "obvious" merits testing.

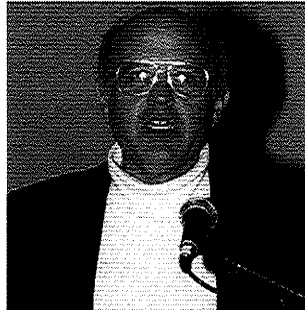
On the other hand, Schriver recognized that academic researchers often fail to show the applicability of their results. Research could enable both students and technical communicators in industry by increasing their knowledge, but so far has not. Schriver recommended mining the vast reserves of research already completed, especially that done outside North America.



## INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN—IPCC 97

In a session on instructional design, Robert Krull of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, winner of PCS's Goldsmith award, compared the ways that software tutorials teach to the methods used by instructors of music and dance. He identified three levels along a continuum from great control by the developer and little user control, to great control by the user and almost no preparation by the developer.

Photo by Timothy Breckman, BEE™



Robert Krull

At the one end, often referred to as "directed practice," tutorials involve much repetition, little problem diagnosis, and rudimentary feedback to the learner, who follows a pre-

scribed path. The developer invests a great deal of effort in planning the tutorial, and learning time may be reduced because the user need not make up situations to test.

At the other end of the continuum, the "journey of discovery," tutorials are almost nonexistent, with learners expected to happen upon solutions. The developer assumes learning is its own reward, lets the user define paths of learning, and provides

no practice problems. Consequently, cost is low. However, learners are often demotivated by the lack of direction and overwhelming number of possibilities. The requirement to learn through struggling, while it may mean deeper learning, may also inflate the amount of time lost to learning.

Between these two extremes is what Krull referred to as "guided exploration." Learners are guided to paths but not forced along any particular one. Some practice is required, and diagnosis and feedback are needed, because the developer cannot predict where the learner will go.

The advantages of this style are its allowing the learner control and giving feedback that lets the learner grow. For learning, the advantages seem great. Unfortunately, Krull noted, in addition to the greater demands placed on the developers, who must consider and accommodate many alternatives, learners resist making the additional mental and physical effort required.

Krull suggested that developers use a mix of approaches, for instance, using wizards, from which users will not learn, to guide people through tasks they do rarely or that may change with every version of the software, and using tutorials only for core tasks.

## REFLECTIONS

(continued from page 12)

communicators. Karen gave suggestions in the following five areas:

- Improving relations between practitioners in industry and in academia
- Fostering the development of research
- Envisioning a course of professional development for people who work in industry and academia
- Valuing visual and oral communication
- Cultivating international relationships and cross-cultural awareness.

We are working to get a copy of Karen's talk on the PCS Web site or in one of our organization's publications.

As a final note, I thank the committee members who gave countless hours of volunteer service in making the conference happen. I also thank those of you who attended, for it is really you who attend who make the conference. I look forward to meeting you again at IPCC 98 in Quebec City.

*Professor Smart, Brigham Young University, was general chair of IPCC 97.*

## A TASTE OF QUEBEC 2

BY CHERYL REIMOLD

**I**PPC 98 is only eight months away! From September 23rd to 25th, in Quebec City, you will be able to sample some of the world's most spectacular dishes, even as you nourish your brain's "little gray cells" during the exciting conference sessions. Make your plans now to attend.

And now... PCS presents the second part of the French gourmet menu offered by Quebec chef extraordinaire, **Jean Soulard**. We hope you enjoyed the appetizer (see the preceding issue of this *Newsletter* if you missed it). Here's the main course. You can taste the original prepared by Chef Jean Soulard himself when you come to IPCC 98.

### CHICKEN SUPREME WITH SESAME SEEDS AND SWEET PEPPERS FOR FOUR

#### The chicken

- 4 chicken breasts
- $\frac{2}{3}$  oz butter
- 2 oz sesame seeds
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- salt and pepper to taste

#### The sauce

- 2 red peppers
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup cream
- salt and pepper to taste

#### The trimmings

- 1 green pepper
- 1 yellow pepper
- 1 red pepper
- 8 green onions
- wild rice (optional)

To make the sauce, plunge two red peppers into boiling water for 1 to 2 minutes. Peel, cut in half, and remove the seeds and white parts. Cut into small pieces.

In a pan, boil the pieces of pepper and cream together for 4 to 5 minutes. Then put the combination into a food processor and process until you have a smooth sauce. Add salt and pepper to taste. Keep sauce warm.

Remove the skin from the chicken. Melt the butter and coat the chicken with it. Press the sesame seeds firmly on the chicken, making sure they adhere.

In a casserole dish, saute the chicken in the olive oil on a very low flame for 3 to 4 minutes. Turn it and finish the cooking in a 350-degree oven for about 15 minutes.

Cut the green, yellow, and red peppers in half, take out the seeds, and then julienne. Saute with a little butter in a non-stick pan for 4 to 5 minutes.

Cook the green onions in boiling salted water for a few minutes. Pour some red pepper sauce on each plate and put the sesame-coated chicken on it. Arrange two green onions and the julienne of peppers harmoniously on the plate. Decorate with a few sesame seeds. Serve with wild rice if desired.

This dish is gorgeous as well as tasty! Enjoy it—and we'll see you in Quebec, September 23-25. *A bientot....*

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**I**t usually takes a person longer to say what he thinks than to tell what he knows.

— *Construction Digest*

CALL FOR PAPERS

# IPCC 98

## A CONTEMPORARY RENAISSANCE: CHANGING THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE

QUEBEC CITY, CANADA • SEPTEMBER 23-25, 1998

——— *Come and Participate!* ———

**T**he IEEE Professional Communication Society (PCS) invites you to the 1998 International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC) to be held during International Communication Week at Quebec City, the "City of Romance" on the shores of the St. Lawrence River in Canada.

Our theme, "A Contemporary Renaissance," covers all aspects of the changes in communication that we are all experiencing, from new tools, products, and methods of communicating to new concepts for reaching, teaching, and learning from each other in a new world of shrinking boundaries between countries and disciplines.

We expect this conference to burst with new ideas, and we hope you will come to Quebec and contribute! Proposals from all disciplines (technical and practical) are welcome. You can present a 15-20 minute paper, run a workshop or a panel, or participate in an "Idea Market"—a small group session in which the presenter uses a flip chart and a few bulleted points to trigger discussion. This is the Fourm 95 session format. (We will group approximately 10 Idea Market presenters together at a time.)

Just send us a 300-500-word proposal for whichever format appeals to you, along with a short bio of the presenter(s). Indicate whether you will present in English or French.

Choose your own new idea or select one of the following aspects of A Contemporary Renaissance:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. An Explosion of Artistic and Intellectual Activity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding the way we communicate, both artistically and intellectually</li> <li>• Using the World Wide Web to communicate ideas</li> <li>• Translating documentation and writing for an international audience</li> </ul> | <p>2. A Revival or Rebirth of Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing the way we perform tasks we've done in the past (teaching, writing, training, managing people, managing projects)</li> <li>• Defining today's Technical Communicator</li> </ul> | <p>3. A New Way of Working: Changes in Our Workplace and Communication Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing information</li> <li>• Dealing with information overload</li> <li>• Distributing information to a wider audience</li> <li>• Communicating with a multi-cultural audience</li> <li>• Developing distance-learning techniques</li> <li>• Telecommuting and working from home</li> </ul> |
|---|---|---|

PROPOSALS ARE DUE FEBRUARY 15, 1998

Please send proposals to: Lisa Moretto • 6001 South Kings Hwy, Unit 767 • Myrtle Beach, SC 29575  
phone/fax: (803) 238-9417 • e-mail: [RGI\\_Lisa@compuserve.com](mailto:RGI_Lisa@compuserve.com)

For online information, check: [www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html](http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html) and [www.quebec\\_region.cug.qc.ca](http://www.quebec_region.cug.qc.ca)

## ALIAS THE AdCOM

The Administrative Committee (AdCom) invites comment from PCS members about any of the Society's activities. All the AdCom members have a standard-form electronic alias at the IEEE that automatically forwards e-mail to the member's actual electronic address.

You can address the whole AdCom at [pcs.adcom@ieee.org](mailto:pcs.adcom@ieee.org), or any of the members individually at the addresses listed in the table. The year in parentheses marks the end of the member's three-year term.

If you would like to obtain (or update) an alias of your own, go to the PCS home page,

<http://www.ieee.org/pcs/pcsindex.html>; click successively on Administrative Committee and [ieee.org](http://www.ieee.org) alias; and supply the information requested there (you need your IEEE membership number).

If you would like to hear from the AdCom occasionally, subscribe to the PCS Members List by sending the following message to [majordomo@majordomo.ieee.org](mailto:majordomo@majordomo.ieee.org):

subscribe pcs-members yourname@youraddress end

Members are always welcome at AdCom meetings. The next meeting is March 13-14 in Washington, DC.

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S

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