to medical/technical writers and self-employed individuals is led by a participant. Past discussion topics have included troubleshooting Microsoft Word problems, time tracking, writing for mobile devices, retirement options for the self-employed (presented by two local financial planners), working remotely, contracts and letters of agreement, LinkedIn.com, new Internet technologies, visual communication, and dictation software. Jan Niehaus, president of Communication by Design and a regular attendee, says, “TechWrite STL has attracted a group of talented and resourceful writers, editors, book developers, publishers—all professionals who generously share their experience, suggestions, referrals, and sometimes projects.” Participants always leave with new information and ideas. Jo Seltzer, a regular attendee, says, “I have, of course, learned a lot from the luncheons. But getting to know other freelance writers and feeling that I could call upon them for information or support is what I value most. Being a freelancer can be isolating, so I welcome a regular forum—and the new friends.” Alice Fugate says, “I always find our lunch meetings helpful.... Our meetings are a great way to share information with colleagues, get feedback, and appreciate new perspectives. Even if the specific topic we’re discussing that day doesn’t seem relevant to my situation, I find that I always come away with something new. And, they’re just plain fun.” Patrick Dorsey comments, “Aside from the insights and tips I’ve picked up on everything from research to editing to crafting tag lines, what TechWrite STL provides me the most is a sense of community. Writing by its nature is a very solitary pursuit—even in tech writing, writers only interact with SMEs to gather information before returning to an isolated spot to compose whatever project they’re on. But at six meetings a year, I get the opportunity to share experiences, gripe about types of clients, learn something new about writing or the writing business, and just talk with other professional writers facing and solving some of the same issues I encounter in my work. It’s valuable, and I just wish I had the daylight in my schedule to attend every time.”

Lisa and Joanne have remained coordinators of the series, taking turns finding topics and discussion leaders, arranging dates and locations, and notifying the members and collecting RSVPs. By taking turns, neither feels overwhelmed and there is always a backup in case something happens. An unexpected benefit has been the network of writers and editors we all now have to turn to for advice and support. In September 2007, Joanne “practiced” her AMWA annual conference presentation at the luncheon and received excellent feedback that allowed her to improve the presentation. In early 2012, Lisa had some contract issues with a client and she was able to get a “reality check” from other members. In between meetings, members of both groups often email each other for advice and opinions. Both leaders actively solicit new local technical writers to join the mailing list.

When we describe this group, many people don’t believe that we actively refer jobs to each other instead of competing for them. In most cases, we each have our own area of expertise so we don’t overlap. In fact, many members have paired up to work on projects together where neither one had the expertise to do the entire thing alone.

Overall, this connection has proven beneficial for everyone involved, and the group as a whole is much stronger than either group would have been on its own.

See www.stc-stlouis.org/cicsig.html for a full list of past meeting dates and topics.

LISA BALBES is a freelance technical writer, specializing in documentation for medical devices and scientific software.

JOANNE MCANDREWS is a freelance medical writer in St. Louis, specializing in medical publications and regulatory writing.
**REFERENCES**


**“Stan Higgins was one of STC’s most prominent members and one that the Pittsburgh Chapter can be proud to claim. I knew him well; in fact, he steered me to a couple of my early jobs and set me on the path to a great career in technical writing.”**

—Janis Ramey, STC Fellow

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