

## From *Disabled* to *Enabled*: Meeting Special Needs to Ensure Accessibility

**Abstract:** This enlightening and practical progression is not just for technical communicators with special needs. It can enable any of us to create communication products that are more accessible to people with special needs by heightening our awareness of the barriers to accessibility so that we can build solutions into the product design process. Members of STC's Special Needs SIG focus on both the technical and philosophical aspects of meeting this challenge. Table hosts make brief presentations and then moderate discussions on how to harness technology to accommodate specific disabilities and improve product accessibility. The objective is twofold: (1) explain how a particular special need (e.g., hearing impairment, visual impairment, mobility restriction, fibromyalgia, the natural deficits that accompany aging) can impede the practice of technical communication and what can be done to accommodate the disability; and (2) show how we can make our products more accessible to end users with disabilities, such as visual or auditory impairment. Other topics include the role of telecommuting as a career enabler for technical communicators with special needs, using online resources to help meet special needs, and dealing with the philosophical burdens of sustained advocacy for the cause of universal enablement. Following the discussion is a brief question-and-answer session in which the presenters address the audience's concerns relating to special needs and solicit their suggestions for the Special Needs SIG's future initiatives.

### Plan for Progression:

#### Introduction (5 minutes)

- Introduction of table hosts and their topics. Dan Voss, Special Needs SIG manager

#### Progression (75 minutes: Attendees select three 25-minute sessions)

- "The 'Dead-End Syndrome': Applying the Principles of Usability and Technical Communication to Improve Accessibility at Major Hotel/Conference Facilities." Fabien Vais, Montreal Chapter
- "The 'Starfish Chamber': Working for a World Where Everyone Counts." Dan Voss, Orlando Chapter
- "What's Wrong with Being 70?" Andy Malcolm, Rochester Chapter\*
- "Traveling 'Route 508': A One-Way Street to Universal Accessibility." Gloria Reece, Atlanta Chapter, and Kathy Bine, Washington, D.C., Chapter
- "Have Modem, *Won't* Travel: Telecommuting for Technical Communicators with Disabilities." Helen Marty, South Arizona Chapter
- "Taming the Disability Beast: Job Accommodations for Employees with Hearing Loss." Lori Gillen, Boston Chapter, and Judy Vinegar, New Mexico Kachina Chapter
- "Acquiring Reasonable Accommodations: Learning to Live and Work with Fibromyalgia." Pauline Horn, Southwestern Ontario Chapter
- "But I Don't *Have* a Disability! Strategies for Preparing Writers to Research and Design Accessible Documents." Gail Lippincott, Lonestar Chapter
- "Our SIG's 'e-Lifelines': Tapping Online Resources to Help Meet Special Needs." Cynthia Lockley, Washington, D.C., Chapter, and Mike Murray, Orlando Chapter
- "508 in Plain English: An Author's Survival Guide." Representative(s) of eHelp Corporation, San Diego, CA

\* Presenter, who is on the STC Board, has a conflict with an STC Forum but has provided a "self-service" table-top demo on his topic ... so you are welcome to gather at the table, review the presentation, and discuss the topic!

#### Question-and-Answer and Discussion (10 minutes)