

# Stet

## Independent Writers of Chicago

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### IWOCFEST PREVIEW

## If It's August, It's IWOC Party Time!

Where has the summer gone? It seem like only yesterday we were all booted and gloved up to withstand the rigors of the polar vortex, and now we're



fast approaching time to pack away the hot-weather duds and watch the leaves fall. But as always, IWOC has a great last hurrah planned to usher out the season. We're talking IWOCFest!

So on Tuesday, August 12, put on your best casual summer finery and hop on the winged horse for a trip to the scenic rooftop at Pegasus in Greek Town. You'll be delighted to learn we *still* haven't raised the price: \$30 with online registration and Pay-

Pal payment or credit card on the PayPal site; \$40 at the door or payment by check. Regardless of how you pay, you must pre-register, so we can give the restaurant a head count. Please register by Sunday, August 10.

For this hold-the-line price, you'll get all manner of wonderful delicacies — veggie treats too — served family style so you can pig out on your favorites. There will be a cash bar for libations. This is a great occasion at which to introduce writer friends unfamiliar with IWOC or other folks who like to have a good time. So bring anyone you like. The conversation is always lively and the war stories generally at least partially true.

The restaurant is at 130 S. Halsted, and there's **free** valet parking and a for-pay parking lot across the street. Public transportation is nearby too, via the Blue Line or the Halsted bus. The festivities kick off at 5:30. If it rains, not to worry, we'll move the party indoors. So click this [LINK](#) and count yourself in. Nonmembers are cordially invited too. See you there! ■

— Joen Kinnan

## Stet to Change

As editor, I greatly appreciate the fine response we got to the question of whether *Stet* should remain as a PDF or become an e-newsletter. The “keep” votes slightly outnumbered the “switch” votes, but a number of members said they'd be happy with either version. In view of that, the majority of the board felt that we might increase readership by opting for the e-format, which is used by many other organizations today.

So in the near future — but not next month — you'll be receiving the newsletter, not as a link, but as the e-mail itself. There probably will be a little bit of trial and error in the beginning because doing an e-newsletter that meets the standards I've tried to achieve with the PDF will be a challenge and I have no experience in that area.

So you'll have to bear with me until I get the kinks worked out. I'll really need your feedback on how it works on your device, so please let me know what you think. ■

— Joen Kinnan

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# Oh, the Power of the Writer!



**W**hen was the last time you wrote a letter? Wrote, as in actually composed a message longer than a single-paragraph e-mail. Yeah, that's what I thought. It's been months, if not years, for me, too. But what if someone offered you money for your letters? Would you change your mind about writing them?

I would, and I did. I became a hired scribe. An epistler for pay. Fastest keyboard in the West.

I wrote letters for financial, personal product, and food companies, including some of the largest corporations in the world. Well before the days of e-mail, instant messaging, and Tweets, I composed the letters that companies used to keep in touch with the people who bought their products and services. That's when housewives (there's a quaint term you don't hear much anymore) would put pen to paper and tell corporations what they liked about the company – and sometimes what they did not like.

I kind of fell into a whole new world – new to me anyway – of consumer communications when I got a call from a vice president at the country's second (now first) largest bank card (credit card) company. (Yes, there was a time before e-mail when people picked up their own phones (with cords), dialed a number, and talked to other people.) What came to be known as relationship banking was a hot, new concept, and

the bank decided they needed to reorganize their correspondence, make it way more friendly, and become their customers' best friend forever. Guess where the VP found me. You've got it: in the pages of the IWOC Directory.

Over the next few years, I wrote all of the bank card's correspondence to its customers, including its collection letters, which were a hoot to do because I already had some not-very-nice notes of my own to use as models. Some of the letters the bank had been using for years were fuzzy, spotty, and crooked photocopies.

Do you ever wonder whether what you write has any lasting impact? Let me tell you, your writing can be hugely influential. Example: I managed to ban any and all use of the words *credit* and *debit* from every bit of correspondence the bank sent to its customers. Keep in mind my client was a BANK. Why? Simple. Every time a customer wrote in saying they wanted credit for their \$50 payment, the bank wrote back saying it had debited their account for \$50. The customer then wrote back to say no, they wanted credit. The bank replied, saying, that's right, we applied a debit. And so on – and on and on. From the customer's point of view, it was a credit; the bank



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# President's Column CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2.

saw it as a debit because that was 50 bucks it no longer had coming. The customer service folks dug in their heels and refused to budge.

By getting my senior VP to go to a higher-level senior, senior VP, I finally got my way and prohibited the customer service reps (CSRs) from ever again using those two astonishingly confusing words. As a writer, if you can change the mindset of a bank, you can change the world.

That gig got me another and another with consumer-product companies, most of them food-related. I joined ICSA, the International Customer Service Association. I networked like hell. I pitched to Norma Libman, an IWOC friend who was a feature writer for the *Chicago Tribune*. Norma, in turn, convinced her editor that I should be the sub-

ject of a full-page profile in their *Sunday Magazine*, complete with a color photo of me in front of my spiffy, then-new Radio Shack TRS-80 computer (it was a while ago).

The phone started ringing. There



didn't seem to be anyone else who was doing what I did. My client companies, who made the leading products found on grocery shelves, got bigger and bigger.

I found that I could divide incoming letters into five categories: praise, complaint, suggestion, use, and request. Surprisingly, more people wrote to companies to say nice things rather than bad. They sent helpful suggestions for improving

or creating new products. Lots of write-ins wanted freebies for community events. Some couldn't figure out how to use or not use a product and wanted more information. My favorite kind of complaint: "My dog ate [product], got sick, and vomited. You owe me a new rug."

The number of letters a good-sized company received topped 500 per day. Every one of them had to be answered – with one that I had written. Actually, I didn't write every individual answer. Instead, I wrote hundreds of paragraphs that were computer-configured according to need by a CSR – openings, closings, and a whole lot of stuff in between. No CSR was permitted to respond except with my words. Oh, the power of the writer!

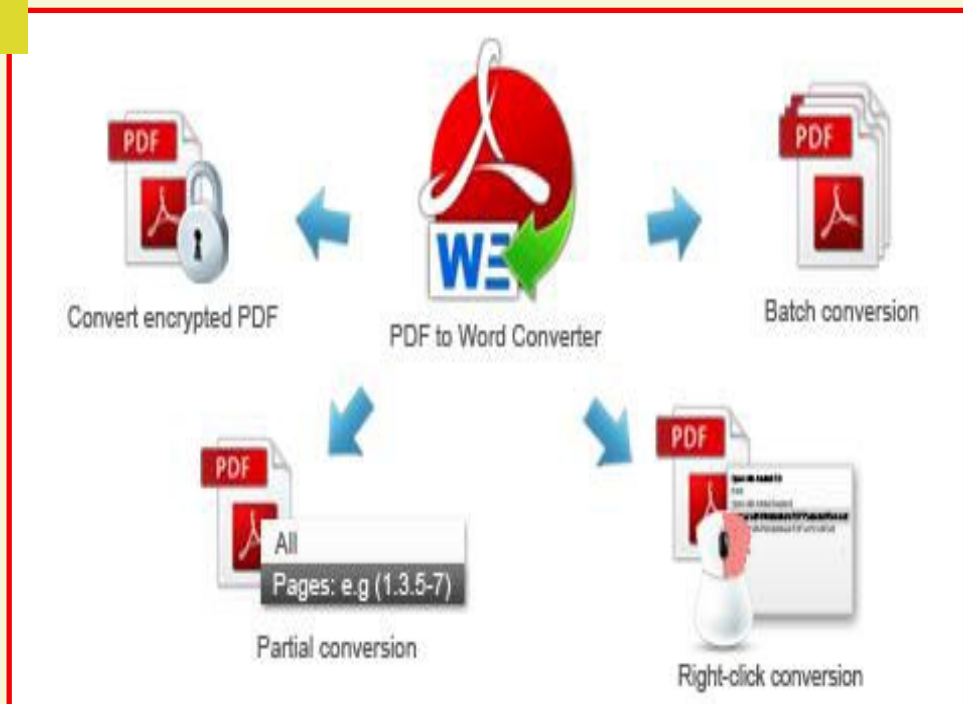
Eventually, with the growing use of personal computers, the volume of postal mail decreased dramatically, and so my letters morphed into on-screen prompts for CSRs. The need was still there, but the medium had changed. Some of my clients moved on, and so did I – back into book publishing where I started.

I suppose you could say I owe it all to IWOC. Well, guess what – I do! ■

## Contributors Wanted for Stet

You'll notice that there generally are not many contributors to *Stet*. Three, this month. I love to write, but you don't see my byline everywhere in this newsletter because I'm a pig. I'd be thrilled to have others who can write well — that is you, isn't it? — give me something other members would want to read. And with the new *Stet* format that's coming soon, there's an added incentive: Google picks up bylined articles in e-newsletters, so voila! the writer rises on the page when searchers type in relevant key words. Plus, other members get to know your work, which could result in referrals. I can use most anything that relates to writers: book/software reviews, tips, relevant websites, news of your achievements, etc. So let me hear from you. ■





## Do you like how-to info?

Sometimes I think I write these tips and tricks and new or useful (I hope) product articles just to exercise my fingers. Do any *Stet* readers actually read them and/or make use of the information? Years ago *Stet* was a 4-pager: this month's meeting, last month's meeting, the president's column, and maybe a little something else. I want it to be more than that, which is why I research topics and products like the PDF converter described below. Since we're going to a new *Stet* format (see related article). I'd like to know whether you find this kind of stuff useful. Also, what else would you like to see? Member profiles? Other news about members? News of other organizations? What else? **Let me know.** ■

— The editor

## Need to convert a PDF to something editable? Here's an app.

The PDF is a wonderful universal format for documents, but here's a not uncommon problem for writers: Your client sends you a PDF document for you to revise and update. You *might* have the full Adobe Acrobat version that includes the editing function — or you might not — but even if you do, it's very cumbersome to edit a PDF. So what are your alternatives? Retype the whole blasted thing in a program you *can* edit? Nay, nay, there's a much easier way: Any-BizSoft PDF Converter is a 6-in-1 PDF utility that will convert a PDF to Word, Excel, PowerPoint, EPUB, plain text, and HTML. Wow! And it's available for both PC and Mac.

But wait! There's more! The conversion contains *all* the original formatting — text, graphics, images, tables, hyperlinks, layout, and other formatting. The latest version

even matches fonts. You can edit data and perform calculations on numbers in PDF tables.

When a PDF document is converted to an Excel spreadsheet, all the text and numbers are fully editable too. You can even read a PDF e-book like a real book on your iPad, iPhone, or iTouch when you convert to EPUB. How does that work? Well, PDF documents have a fixed width that doesn't match well with smaller-sized devices, but EPUB adjusts the screen to the size of your device. Presto! No more endless scrolling from left to right.

The software offers three methods of file conversion: batch, partial, and right-click on an individual file. The utility can even convert encrypted PDFs. Whenever you've finished doing what you need to do to the converted files, you can use

the same program to convert them back to PDFs if you want to.

This sounds like a very useful program to have on hand, and online reviews from *PC World* and *other sites* (as well as users) are generally positive. However, there are many sites from which it is available, and I'm not even sure of the name of the company that makes it or which download sites have the latest version, which I believe is 3.6.0.

Here's what else I've been able to glean: You can download it free for a 15-day trial, and one site says it remains free for noncommercial use. Otherwise, the 6-in-1 (all programs to which one can convert) appears to be around \$48. If you only want to convert to one file type, that seems to cost \$30. Here's my best guess as to a **good download site.** ■

— Joen Kinnan

# Nominating Committee Announces 2014-2015 Slate

For the first time in many years, the IWOC nominating committee's call for candidates for the board of directors has resulted in a broad field from which to select a slate to serve for the 2014-2015 membership year. The committee considered several factors, including eligibility and continuity; met both face-to-face and by conference call; and constructed the following slate of candidates:

President: David Steinkraus

Vice President: Laura Stigler

Secretary: Ann Kepler

Treasurer: Brent Brotine

Parliamentarian: Jim Kepler

Directors at Large: George Becht, Vladimir Herard, Jeff Steele, Betsy Storm, and Cynthia Tomusiak.

All terms are for one year as prescribed by our bylaws. The bylaws allow for additional candidates by nomination, with the nominee's permission, from the membership at large before Sept. 5. Such nomination(s) would result in a contested slate; self-nominations are permitted by the bylaws. No nominations will be accepted from the floor. Voting will take place at our regular meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 9. IWOC board meetings are open to all members and are held two hours before the regularly scheduled monthly programs.

The nominating committee (Sally Chapralis, Jim Kepler [chair], Betsy Storm) is grateful to all the members who suggested names and is hopeful that those who volunteered but were not slated will agree to serve on a committee or task force. There are opportunities on the following committees: membership, public relations, programs, seminars, and social media as well as on single-event task forces. The board is also considering the establishment of an advisory group that would address issues and actions that require more lengthy and thoughtful investigation than the board is currently able to undertake at its monthly meetings. ■

— Jim Kepler

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## The Russians are Coming . . . to Get Your Passwords

Recent reports of yet more big-time theft of usernames and Internet passwords have caused experts to strongly recommend changing **both** monthly and, to prevent wholesale theft of all your accounts, to use different ones for every site. Yikes! Unless you're hyperthymestic, i.e., a person who never forgets anything, who could remember them all? Probably nobody. But cheer up, you can be safe without losing your mind. Get a password management application to do the remembering for you. These programs allow you to store your passwords in one file (usually called a password vault) by creating one ultra-secure master password to serve as the portal to all your other user names and passwords.

Though there are many such programs available, [Dashlane](#) is highly rated by good sources. According to

reviewers, it's very secure and also easy to use. If you only use one PC or Mac, it's free, but if you want to sync your phone, tablet, or other additional device, it's about 30 bucks per year.

First you create your really strong (maybe 12 upper- and lower-case letters, symbols, and numbers) Dashlane master password — which you do have to remember because Dashlane doesn't store it — the app automatically encrypts your existing passwords and other private info using military-grade AES-256 encryption, which has never been hacked. The program puts both new and existing passwords imported from your browser into its vault. Dashlane can also remember your shipping and credit card info so it can auto-fill online checkout orders and other forms.

When you browse the web, Dashlane monitors your activities. Open your

e-mail, for example, and Dashlane will ask whether it should save your username and password. (I presume it does this only the first time.)

It also rates the strength of the passwords you currently use. "Password" used to be the most common password, but it has been dethroned by even more brilliant people who use "123456." When good old Dash hits clunkers like these, it wisely recommends changes.

The one thing I couldn't find out about this or any other well-liked program was whether it would automatically generate new passwords and usernames monthly as the pros recommend. If anybody has this info, let me know. If I have the space next month, I'll review some other password management programs too. ■

— JPK

# Did you know...



**D**isappointed with the search results Google turns up? Do your results seem limited, not specific enough, or inaccurate? Perhaps you need to search the Deep Web. The Deep Web is part of the Internet that is not accessed by traditional link-crawling search engines. Think topic-specific databases that can lead you to academic research papers, government reports, and studies. The information available on the Deep Web is vast. In 2001, the last time an extensive study was conducted, it was estimated that the Deep Web was 400-500 times larger than the Surface Web, so you can image it is significantly larger now in 2014. To access Deep Web resources, you will need to use one of the Deep Web sites or indexes. The good news is many are free. Check these out:

Start with the ["100 Useful Tips and Tools to Research the Deep Web,"](#) produced by the Online College Blog. Truly an extensive list, but you will find that some of the sites no longer exist.

[WWW Virtual Library](#) is another resource. It is well organized and

easy to use and contains categories related to science/math, communications, education, and international affairs, just to name a few.

[Infomine](#) is a database for scholarly internet resource collections. For example, if you want to find out more about violent crime but don't know where to begin, you would type those terms into the search engine box. The results show multiple pages from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, just the government agency that you were looking for but might have forgotten about.

[Gnod](#) is a fun database where you can search for authors, books, and movies to find similar items of which you might not be aware. The mapping interface is especially entertaining, where you could type in say, "J.D. Salinger," and then watch other, related authors pop up in an undulating graphic.

— *Katherine Mikkelsen*

## Testimonial

**"D**uring my eight years as a member, I've benefited in myriad ways by my IWOC affiliation. In particular, my knowledge about emerging topics in the communications field has blossomed in ways that simply wouldn't have been possible without membership and active participation in a professional group like this one. Best of all, I know that if I am stuck on a problem, in need of expertise from another freelancer, or just eager to share experiences with others on the same path, I can ALWAYS call upon an IWOC colleague for support."

— *Betsy Storm*

## IWOC Welcomes New Member Wendy Grossman



## IWOC HAS MEETING PODCASTS

Missed a meeting?  
Want to hear the  
program again?  
Click this pic.



# IWOC Set Stage for Speakers' Careers

The July meeting was something of an IWOC past presidents' family reunion. No fewer than seven former IWOC leaders attended. The meeting was billed as a reprise of what speakers Collin Canright and Ed Zotti — both are among the ranks of the past presidents — gained from IWOC that helped them launch their extremely successful careers. (Beth Bradfish, another early IWOC president, was also scheduled to speak, but she was unable to attend. See note following this article.)

Both Ed and Collin came to IWOC with journalism backgrounds, and both credited IWOC with opening their eyes to the much wider range of writing possibilities available for freelancers.

Today Collin is a financial writer with particular expertise in banking, hedge funds, and the like. His company employs four other writers to help cover the workload. He admitted that when he started freelancing, the pickings were pretty lean, but IWOC taught him that, while good writing was essential, it was equally important to treat one's writing career as a *business*, and this included learning to be a sales person. He mastered cold calling, but today he tar-



Top to bottom, left to right: Collin Canright, Jim Kepler, Roger Rueff, Brent Brotine, Ed Zotti, Sally Chapralis, Joen Kinnan

gets his calls to people he believes will want his services. How does he know? He attends conferences of organizations and businesses devoted to his financial areas of expertise. Afterwards he contacts presenters to suggest they might like to have follow-up materials or materials for people who were unable to attend.

Another thing Collin says he learned from other IWOCers was not to say no to projects that initially were beyond his comfort zone. He accepted most jobs that came his way, relying on advice from more experienced IWOCers and signing up for IWOC skills workshops to gain the necessary skills. Some of these jobs didn't pay particularly well, but they were valuable learning experiences. He says he still occasionally takes jobs at lower rates if the jobs interest him.

Ed is best known as the editor of "The Straight Dope," a column by the legendary Cecil Adams in *The Reader*, other newspaper syndicates, and online, where it has a huge following. "The Straight Dope" has also had incarnations on radio and TV, and Ballantine has published five collections of the popular column.

What with his intimate association with Cecil Adams — a relationship so close that Ed remarked that Cecil is always with him even when he's alone in a room — who knew that Ed is an urban planner with expertise in mass transit? He's currently working on a large project with the CTA.

Ed joined IWOC early on when we did mailings to members, prospective employers, etc., at lick-and-stick parties where we really got to know each other. Ed credits those experiences with teaching him the



value of networking. In fact, Bill Gershon, a co-licker-sticker, recommended Ed for his first freelance job, writing a sales proposal. Today, Ed still specializes in sales proposals, and it's paid off handsomely to

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# IWOC Set Stage for Speakers' Careers

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the tune of a couple million dollars over the years.

Another thing Ed learned from membership in IWOC: It pays to classify yourself as a consultant, not just as a writer. To do that, it's important to gain expertise in at least one area that offers possibilities for consulting, and of course, writing. As readers will note, both Collin and Ed have done that: Collin in finance and Ed in mass transit.

Ed suggested that writers are unlikely to have successful careers if they don't choose something for which they already have a passion.

In other words: *know what you want to write about.*

On the other hand, as both Ed and Collin have demonstrated in their careers, it's also worthwhile to take some chances. Be open to new avenues; become an entrepreneur. As Ed remarked, for many writers, this is becoming critical, especially with the decline in demand for print journalism.

During the Q&A period, there were a number of questions about the importance of using social media to further one's career. Perhaps surprisingly, neither one specifically

uses social media much for career advancement. Collin volunteered that he once got a job from a man in Uruguay who had seen a Twitter Collin sent, but he doesn't typically use social media to get business. Through the marketing agency he operates with his wife Chris, he does, however, manage the mailings of clients who do.

All in all, our two speakers offered pretty similar opinions on the value of IWOC membership, and they gave us many valuable tips on how to make the most of it. The audience was delighted with their presentations. ■

— Joen Kinnan

**“So the writer who breeds more words than he needs, is making a chore for the reader who reads.”**

— Dr. Seuss

*Editor's note: Former president Beth Bradfish was to have been the third speaker at the July meeting, but she was unable to attend because her mother was gravely ill. She subsequently passed away. Our condolences to Beth and her family.*

## In the next issue. . .



- September 9, IWOC monthly meeting and election of officers: Join us as Josh Fisher of the Appoet Team demonstrates Infused technology—a smartphone app that allows you to write short pieces and locate them geographically.
- President's column: Don't miss reading what's on Jim Kepler's mind. It's always entertaining and thought-provoking.
- Helpful tips on software, hardware, and/or just plain biz practices, and much more.

