

# Mid-America Chapter News

AMERICAN MEDICAL WRITERS ASSOCIATION  
MID-AMERICA CHAPTER

FALL 2009

## Welcome

By Donna Coffman, MD

A RELIABLE SOURCE HAS INFORMED ME that the conference in Dallas was terrific, as usual.

IN THIS EDITION OF THE NEWSLETTER, we have an entertaining reflection on an educational trip to China by Larenda Mielke.

THE BIG BUZZ THESE DAYS IS....DRUM roll please...H1N1. This influenza A virus has gotten a disproportionate amount of attention due to its higher rate of contagiousness and the greater impact on children and pregnant women than is typical for influenza. The hallmarks of the infection are high fever and marked muscle and joint aches. Many affected individuals also complain of cough and some, particularly children, have gastrointestinal symptoms as well. The vaccine has been available off and on (based on available supply) for a few weeks now, so hopefully, the pandemic will soon be under control. Your best protection is to wash your hands frequently. Contact with school-aged children puts you at particular risk for catching the infection.

## Table of Contents

President's Letter	Page 1
AMWA/STC news	Page 2
Member News	Page 3-4

## President's Letter

by Joanne McAndrews, PhD

I enjoyed seeing many of you at the AMWA annual conference in Dallas last month. Our chapter dinner on Thursday October 22 was particularly fun and delicious. During dinner that evening, some of the Kansas City area chapter members expressed an interest in attending local chapter activities. Please contact Kathi Whitman at [kwhitman@incredibleenglish.com](mailto:kwhitman@incredibleenglish.com) if you are able to help organize one or more gatherings.

In other chapter news, we have a new chapter secretary. Larenda Mielke, MA has volunteered to be our chapter secretary for the 2009-2010 term. Larenda has been an AMWA member since 2004, and is an instructor of English Language Programs at Washington University in St. Louis. In one of her first official roles, she represented our chapter at the Board of Directors Wednesday meeting at the AMWA annual conference in Dallas and also at the Chapter Delegates session.

Finally, I would like to know what our chapter could do for you. What activities would you like to see our chapter sponsor? Local luncheons or dinners with guest speakers? Potluck dinners or other social gatherings? How do you think our chapter members can become more connected? Please contact me with your ideas.

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## Mid-America Chapter Semi-Annual Report

### MEMBERSHIP

The Mid-America chapter currently has 114 members. Since March 2009, the Mid-America chapter has welcomed 11 new members, and 16 members did not renew their AMWA membership.

Rona Claire Grunspan, our membership chair, has sent a welcome e-mail to each new member upon receiving their contact information from Mark Rosol, with a link to our chapter web site. Rona has also fielded questions about AMWA from a few interested potential members.

### FINANCIAL STATUS

The financial status of the Mid America chapter is healthy with a CD balance of \$12,186.39 and a checking account balance of \$6631.12.

## St. Louis Area AMWA-STC Freelancers Luncheons

St. Louis area AMWA and Society for Technical Communication (STC) freelancers continue to meet six times a year for lunch and interesting discussion topics. This group is coordinated by Lisa Balbes, an STC member, and Joanne McAndrews. Mid-America chapter member Dana Delibovi gave a very interesting and valuable presentation titled "Portfolios that Pop" at our July 2009 luncheon. Dana discussed both paper and electronic portfolios, and the need to have each. Our September 2009 luncheon was an informative seminar about statistics for writers and editors, presented by Dr. Jay Piccirillo, Professor of Otolaryngology at Washington University School of Medicine.

On Friday, November 13, 2009, STC member Barb Vogel talked about "Writing Instructions". This was held at Maggianos Little Italy in Richmond Heights.

We will meet in January 2010 to discuss good and bad experiences with clients, and ways to remedy bad client situations. This discussion will be moderated by Joanne McAndrews. Please RSVP to Lisa Balbes ([lisa@balbes.com](mailto:lisa@balbes.com)) if you would like to attend.

Please contact Joanne McAndrews at [jmmcandrews@earthlink.net](mailto:jmmcandrews@earthlink.net) to be placed on the mailing list for this group.

A list of our upcoming luncheons can be found at: <http://www.stc-stlouis.org/cicsig.html>

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Mid-America chapter member Linda A. Landon, PhD for passing the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) certification examination in May, 2009.

# Member News: Duck's Tongue and Biomedical Research Writing

What do duck's tongue, pork intestines, lotus root, and biomedical research writing have in common? Read on to see.

Since 2004, I've taught biomedical research writing at the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. Occasionally an American attends my classes, but I specialize in teaching to nonnative speakers of English. Fortunately, nonnative speakers in great abundance study and do research at Washington University; as a result, my classes fill and overflow somewhat regularly.

One of my students, an MD/PhD from Hangzhou, China, arranged for me to guest lecture at Zhejiang University Medical School in Hangzhou this year. Zhejiang University has been chosen by the Chinese government as a "model university" and is ranked #3 in China. Since I hadn't been out of the US for five years I was itching to travel, and I agreed to go.

My husband and 16-year-old son, who coincidentally did not appreciate Chinese food before going on this trip, traveled with me. Before deplaning upon our arrival in Shanghai, three people dressed in hazmat suits from head to toe scanned everyone for fevers in order to quarantine anyone who might have swine flu. In the quiet of the moment, we could hear the "click, click, click" as passengers kept busy snapping photos of the white forms with scanners. After that long flight I felt as though we had arrived in the twilight zone, but with such a large population it is understandable why China is careful. Thankfully, we passed the inspection.

We had arranged to spend two days touring Shanghai on our own and took a bus from the airport about 40 minutes to downtown Shanghai. Our first impression of China was miles and miles and miles of

tall cement apartment buildings; out of the windows of these buildings hung drying wash on bamboo poles by the thousands.

After taking a high-speed D-train to Hangzhou, we enjoyed an evening at the five-star Shangri-La Hotel and a bike ride around West Lake, a Chinese vacation spot. Everywhere were people. Another impression of China: mosquitoes thrive inside the buildings! But the food in Hangzhou defies imagination. Thank goodness for menus with photos because we ordered blindly and enjoyed the consequences. Even Jonathan discovered that Chinese food in China is not much like that in the US.

The first morning at the medical school, two students showed up at our hotel and took our family to tour a nature preserve in Hangzhou. The students had never been to the preserve either, so they enjoyed our pole boat trip through the canals. At lunch that day and at meals thereafter, students ordered for us and expounded on the joys of the regional cuisine found in Hangzhou. Duck tongues, pork intestines, and lotus roots were strongly featured. Then it was off to the medical school to teach.

Students were waiting in the room at the medical school as the dean and I entered. I lectured for two hours, and the students were surprised at first to experience my American style of teaching featuring student response and discussion. They were accustomed to professorial lectures, but they adjusted in about an hour. I began with an overview of the IMRAD style and moved quickly to teach the methods section. Since papers must be written in English, these students had questions about the expected content of each section as well as the grammar structures which might be useful, including appropriate verb tenses, problem-process structures, and the repetition of key terms.

Each day I taught more of the IMRAD format, and a different pair of student researchers appeared at the hotel to accompany me to the classroom and on to touring and shopping. By the end of my time at the university, we had collected quite a dining group! They even bargained for me while shopping, a somewhat successful venture often resulting in raised voices, but also resulting in my acquisition of

Hanzhou silk scarves and fans.

I had arranged to follow up with the students after my return to the US by commenting on their manuscripts by email. This arrangement worked well for the most part, and I was able to occasionally exchange photos and writing throughout the next few months.

Overall, the trip was full of surprises. University culture in China is very different from university culture here, yet it is the same in some aspects.

About the trip in general, the population density, unique regional food and teas, and biomedical writing stand out in my memory. The students and the dean were more than hospitable and invited me back next year, so we'll see what happens. Although biomedical research writing is not usually characterized by cultural exchanges, the two can coincide surprisingly easily.



LARENDA TALKING WITH A LOCAL IN A BUS STATION IN HANGZHOU, IN ZHEJIANG, EASTERN CHINA.

# Report on the Board of Directors Meeting American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)

OCTOBER 21, 2009

SUBMITTED BY LARENDA MIELKE, SECRETARY OF THE MID-AMERICA CHAPTER AND REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE MEETING

Larenda Mielke participated in the annual Board of Directors meeting for AMWA on Wednesday, Oct. 21, 2009, where she represented the Mid-America Chapter as a voting delegate. Before the meeting, a large binder containing the pertinent information to be discussed was mailed to Larenda. She studied the information and learned about the business conducted by AMWA throughout the year. The topics of discussion at the meeting, logically following the binder information, included reports from the president, secretary, treasurer, and annual conference administrator (a big job within AMWA), and information about chapters, publications, IT, education, membership, and finances.

The most intriguing report emerged from the education committee; the changes the committee outlined will affect everyone beginning work on an AMWA certificate. The upcoming certificate changes will be explained sometime in November on the AMWA Web site. Among other changes, an ethics workshop will be required for the completion of all certificates which are begun after the new requirements are launched. Members of AMWA should be on the alert for these workshop changes, but they should remember that no workshop credits will be lost! No requirements will be changed for anyone already working on a certificate.

A second bit of information worth repeating is that AMWA membership, although down slightly because of the economic impact of the past year, is healthy and steady. Correspondingly, AMWA finances are conservatively invested and are in excellent condition.

Although the Board of Directors meeting was dry, a seeming requirement for this type of meeting, the key points outlined above are applicable to many AMWA members here in the Mid-America Chapter. Please feel free to contact Larenda at [mielke@wustl.edu](mailto:mielke@wustl.edu) if you have any questions about this report.

## Job Opportunities

From time to time, chapter members are contacted with information on job openings and would like to share the information.

Given the need to pass along job news in a timely fashion, we will be posting these on our website.