



# IEEE

# MADISON SECTION NEWSLETTER

**VOLUME 10, NUMBER 5**

*SERVING IEEE MEMBERS OF SOUTH CENTRAL WISCONSIN*

**MAY 2007**

## Simulating Wisconsin's Future Electric Resources

**Date/Time:** Thursday, May 17, 2007, 11:45 - 1:00 PM

**Speaker:** Paul Meier, PhD, University of Wisconsin Energy Institute

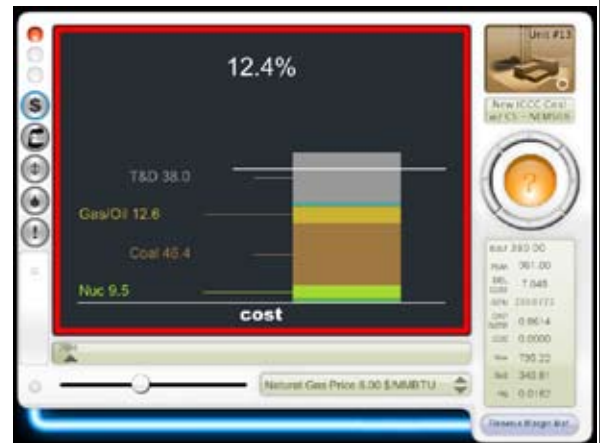
**Location:** Rocky Rococo's Pizza, 7952 Tree Lane (Madison Beltline Hwy. at Mineral Pt. Rd.), 608.829.1444

**Menu:** Pizza buffet, salad and soft drinks (cost \$10.00, free for student members)

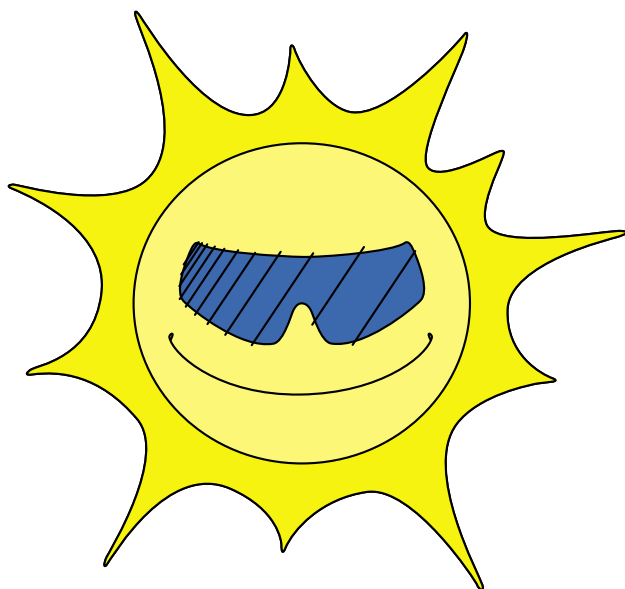
**RSVP:** by May 14th to Les Schroeder via e-mail (l.schroeder@ieee.org) or call 608.224.0664

*Non-member guests are always welcome!*

Paul Meier will use the MyPower simulation tool to discuss alternatives for satisfying Wisconsin's future electric demand, while considering impacts on greenhouse gas emissions, conventional pollutants, electric reliability and customer costs. MyPower is an electric utility production simulation which uniquely blends research, education, and public outreach. The web-based program simulates electric generation resource planning, evaluating existing and proposed technologies (e.g., base-load power plants, intermittent renewables, energy efficiency, pollution controls), while providing continuous feedback on the system cost and compliance with emission limits, portfolio standards, and planning reserve margins. A game-like interface creates entertaining educational opportunities, while the possibility of networking many users may uniquely enable detailed research of national energy policies.



Paul Meier is the director of the Energy Institute at the University of Wisconsin - Madison. The Institute works to comprehensively address energy issues by fostering interdisciplinary research; organizing education and outreach programs, and developing state, national and international collaborations. Paul's research focuses on integrated resource planning and climate change policy for electric utilities. Paul has worked with industry, government, and public interest groups on energy and environmental issues since 1995. He received a B.S. in Civil Engineering from Purdue University, an M.S. in Environmental Systems Engineering from Clemson University, and a Ph.D. through the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW - Madison.



## Summer Recess No Section Meetings June - August



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June 5–7, 2007 in Madison, WI
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For further information...

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## IEEE MADISON SECTION NEWSLETTER

Published 9 times per year (Jan. - May & Sep. - Dec.) by the Madison, Wisconsin Section of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE), as a service to its members in south-central Wisconsin.

Printing and mailing by: SprintPrint  
2790 S. Fish Hatchery Rd.  
Madison, WI 53711

Mailed at Madison, Wisconsin as 3rd Class, Non-Profit postage. Permit No. 953.

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## Two Members Write the Book On Virtual Teams

By Anna Bogdanowicz

As businesses get ever more global, there's less face time between employees and their clients as organizations rely on teleconferencing, e-mail, and the Internet to get work done. But there's a major problem: not everyone knows how to work in teams in this virtual workplace. That's why two IEEE members, Brenda Huettner and Katherine ("Kit") Brown, along with Char James-Tanny, wrote *Managing Virtual Teams: Getting the Most From Wikis, Blogs, and Other Collaborative Tools* [Wordware Publishing, 2007]. The book hit the shelves this January.

The three know each other from being members of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). In 2005, they began brainstorming about writing a book that would explain the essentials of working in a virtual team, as well as describe the different types of collaborative tools that make such teams work efficiently.

Huettner, a 46-year-old IEEE senior member, and Brown, 42, a member, had worked in virtual teams throughout their careers as contract technical writers. They both had come to writing in roundabout ways.

### Connecting

As the principal of her own technical communications consulting company, Comgenesis, in Boise, Idaho, Brown became interested in writing on the topic after several of her clients complained that they had trouble communicating with virtual teams. Huettner's own experience with blogs and wikis, which can be of great help to virtual teams, convinced her that a book on the topic was sorely needed. "I've been blogging for a lot of years and get asked all the time for help with starting one," Huettner says. Blogs can be a great help because, for example, they allow team members to post and e-mail updates on their project to a team blog. "This can be useful for teams that travel a lot or have widely varying time zones," Huettner explains.

With Huettner living in Arizona, Brown in Idaho, and James-Tanny in Massachusetts, working in a virtual team was, fittingly, the only way the three could write the book. They used their experience to detail how conference calls, instant messaging, e-mail—and understanding time zones—were essential to them.

Huettner and Brown wrote the first half of the text, explaining the basics of managing virtual teams—such as encouraging social interaction, being explicit with expectations, being considerate of fellow team members, and maintaining good communication. "There's no such thing as too much communication," Brown says. James-Tanny, also a technical writer, is an expert on blogs, podcasts, wikis—Web sites that allow users to add or edit the site's content—and other collaborative tools. She wrote about how to make the most of the tools by assessing which tool to use depending on the situation, and understanding each tool's pluses and minuses.

### Roundabout Way

Though Huettner and Brown both wound up in technical communication, in the beginning, that career choice wasn't so clear to either one.

Brown initially wanted to become a veterinarian and received a bachelor of science degree in biology in 1987 from Colorado State University, in Fort Collins. When she didn't get accepted into veterinary

school, a professor recommended she study technical communication as a way to make the most of her strong writing skills and understanding of science.

Brown took his advice and earned a master of science degree in technical communication in 1991, also from Colorado State University. She landed her first job later that year as a technical editor for an environmental consulting firm in Denver. Her work with virtual teams began there, although the process was much more rudimentary than it is now. She would mail her documents to engineers working at various sites around the country, getting their edits by phone and fax.

One year later, she joined a cardiac pacemaker company, also in Denver, where she spent more than four years writing product manuals and working on a product recall team writing reports to the Food and Drug Administration. She held several other technical writing jobs, working for a financial management software company in Fargo, N.D., and a localization company in Boise, which helps clients prepare their products for international markets and translate their documentation. At this last company, she helped train clients on how to write documentation specifically for international audiences, which can significantly decrease translation costs and can even make the English version easier to understand for non-native English speakers. In 2002 she was laid off and, as often happens, it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, Brown says. She got serious about starting her own business in 2003, after taking a much needed six-month sabbatical.

An associate fellow in the STC, she's also active in the IEEE, serving as editor of the IEEE Professional Communication Society's (PCS's) newsletter.

## Another Winding Road

Becoming a technical writer wasn't Huettner's first career choice either. She graduated in 1982 with a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and got a job as a bookkeeper for a company that manufactured vacuum tubes. Because she spoke German, the company asked her to help it translate their product manuals into that language. That project inspired her to get a certificate in technical communication from Northeastern University, in Boston. She left her bookkeeping job to become a contract technical writer for Solutions, a consulting company in Reading, Mass. That's where she learned the do's and don'ts of working on a virtual team.

"As a contractor, you are constantly reporting back to the client, so the need to communicate well is critical," Huettner says.

She also has worked as a full-time employee at a PC software company and a weather-forecasting software company. She's been freelancing for the past 20 years, and for the past five has also been the co-owner and Webmaster of Microwaves101.com, which she describes as an online textbook for microwave engineers. In the meantime, Huettner's been a volunteer for the STC and the IEEE Microwave Theory and Techniques Society, talking and writing about technical writing and project management. Currently, she's the publicity chair of the IEEE PCS. She has also written several books, including Robohelp for the Web [Wordware Publishing, 2003], which explains how to set up Help Desk systems for resolving technical issues.

Huettner, Brown, and James-Tanny created a wiki to go along with the book. Check it out at <<http://www.wikiwackyworld.com>>.

For more on the book, visit <<http://www.wordware.com/wiki/>>.

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## World Bytes

By Terrence Malkinson

Today's workplace is witnessing a shift to a more diverse work force, including older employers. The Bureau of Labor Statistics suggests that 70 percent of workers plan to work beyond their "normal" retirement age or never retire. Many jurisdictions are abolishing mandatory retirement, allowing a growing number of people to work beyond common retirement ages. A continuing ability to contribute to society, worker shortages, financial challenges, lack of retirement funds, and the need for benefits are some of the reasons older individuals are remaining on the job. From an employers point-of-view mature workers are generally seen as dependable, loyal and dedicated, having a strong work ethic, experienced and a good performance record. The February 2007 issue of Best's Review [107(10), 2007, www.bestreview.com] provides viewpoints from the insurers perspective (pp. 22-43). This mature work force is creating new opportunities for insurers. Many interesting articles are provided in this feature on health and employee benefits for this cohort group of workers many of whom consider age 60 to be middle-age and age 75 as old age!

*Terrance Malkinson is a communications specialist, business analyst and futurist. He the author of over 300 publications and is also an accomplished triathlete. The author is grateful to the Haskayne School of Business Library at the University of Calgary. He can be reached at [todaysengineer@ieee.org](mailto:todaysengineer@ieee.org).*



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*World Bytes*

*Two Members Write the Book On Virtual Teams*

*Meeting Notices*

**WHAT'S INSIDE**

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