

# Southwest Chapter News



March 2003

2002–2003

## Chapter Officers

### President

Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS  
713.527.8219  
tom@centerforaids.org

### President-Elect/Program Chair

Kate Ó Súilleabháin  
713.792.3165  
Caitcinnor@aol.com

### Assistant Program Chair

Elisabeth Wann, PhD  
281.863.3373  
EWann@lexgen.com

### Treasurer

Chris Wogan, ELS  
713.792.3160  
cwogan@notes.mdacc.tmc.edu

### Secretary

Laurel Prokop, ELS(D), MT(ASCP)  
281.251.2436  
Laurel.Prokop@Techstyle.com

### Past President

Lorraine Cherry, PhD  
713.868.1549  
lcherry@metropolis.net

### Directors-at-Large

Jannifer Newcomb Fernandez, PhD  
832.601.6484  
Jennifer.Fernandez@usoncology.com

Susan Siefert, ELS  
281.228.7551  
Susan.Siefert@cyberonics.com

Laurel Prokop, ELS(D), MT(ASCP)  
281.251.2436  
Laurel.Prokop@Techstyle.com

Maureen Goode, PhD, ELS  
713.792.4579  
mgoode@mdanderson.org

Pamela Paradis Tice  
713.798.3652  
pptice@bcm.tmc.edu

### Newsletter Editor

Natasha Calder  
281.228.7519  
Natasha.Calder@cyberonics.com

## “Plain Language: Ensuring Strong Communication”



### Carol Ann Wilson Story Plain Language Association

Thursday, March 13, 2003, 5:30–7:30 pm  
The University of Texas School of Public Health

Clear communication is important in any business but is essential in medical fields because the stakes are so high: optimal treatment of patients, allocation of grant funding, and advances in cutting-edge research all may depend on the ability of medical professionals to convey information clearly and precisely. According to Plain Language Association International (PLAIN), plain language “saves time, money, and lives. Whether you are . . . writing a procedure, running a business, publishing a newsletter, managing a department, or training workers, you need plain language” (<http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/>).

The Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association is pleased to welcome Carol Ann Wilson Story, coordinator of PLAIN, for a lecture at The University of Texas School of Public Health in the Texas Medical Center in Houston. Founded in 1993 as a voluntary association of plain language advocates, PLAIN seeks to promote the interests of plain language professionals, promote standards and practices of the plain language profession, promote research and development in plain language, and provide marketing and networking services for members of the organization. Ms. Wilson Story will speak on such plain writing principles as writing for the reader and avoiding jargon, using the active voice, organizing your thinking to organize your document, and omitting unnecessary and weak words. After the lecture, she will respond to audience members’ questions.

*Continued on page 5*

## Robin Marantz Henig Presents 2003 John P. McGovern Award Lecture

On the evening of Wednesday, gathered for the Annual John P. the Houston Plaza Hilton near Award winner Robin Marantz “Turning Science into Stories: Nonfiction.” Ms. Marantz Henig countless articles and is currently book about the early days of in

Ms. Marantz Henig described editor to write a book imitating that conveyed scientific struggled to discover how she of the book, rather than just the assignment, the closest she had of narrative in her work was to scientific phenomena. However, pitfalls of using even this scientific concepts—such as the staircase—because such representations are usually misleading and often scientifically inaccurate. Moreover, she had tended to avoid anthropomorphizing scientific concepts, such as the idea that viruses possess an intelligence that enables them to “outsmart” cells.

Ms. Marantz Henig’s task of accurately conveying scientific information and historic fact while telling an interesting story in *The Monk in the Garden: The Lost and Found Genius of Gregor Mendel* was complicated by the fact that relatively little was known about Mendel’s life. The narrative form of the book demanded the use of scenes to move the action forward, and this required some level of conjecture and artistic license. She overcame her initial writer’s block by traveling to the Czech Republic and to England to see firsthand the places



John P. McGovern Award Chair Mariann Crapanzano (right) presents this year’s award to author Robin Marantz Henig.



John P. McGovern Award recipient Robin Marantz Henig (center) stands with Southwest Chapter President Thomas Gegeny and McGovern Award Chair Mariann Crapanzano.

in which Mendel worked. She still struggled, however, to develop character and dialogue on the basis of information not exclusively from Mendel’s own writings but often from “third- or fourth-hand sources.” She discovered that the assignment called for a mixture of narrative and explanatory writing and that narrative precepts such as “show, don’t tell” don’t always work—sometimes, an accurate scientific telling is the best approach. Mixing narrative scene and scientific summary, she acquired the flexibility of style that is necessary for presenting medical information in story form.

Attendees enjoyed a full dinner and listened to the lecture during the dessert course. After the lecture, the speaker took many questions from the audience on a variety of topics, including responses from readers with and without advanced education in science, the process of outlining books and developing book proposals, and balancing fact with fiction. After the question and answer session, McGovern Award Chair Mariann Crapanzano presented Ms. Marantz Henig with a beautiful AMWA Southwest award plaque and a \$1000 honorarium.

January 29, about 35 people McGovern Award Banquet at the Texas Medical Center. Henig gave a lecture entitled, the Limits of Narrative has authored seven books and working on *Pandora’s Baby*, a vitro fertilization research.

how, when invited by her the style of a then-bestseller information in story form, she could “make the story the *point* window dressing.” Before that come to applying conventions use metaphors to describe she had been aware of the convention to describe complex description of DNA as a spiral

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# Membership Appreciation Reception

Wednesday, April 9

5:30–8:30 pm

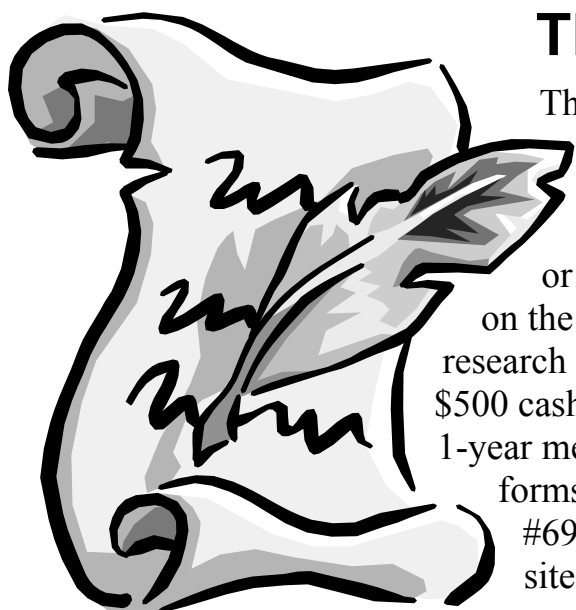
Berry Hill Hot Tamales

1717 Post Oak Boulevard, Houston

A light buffet will be provided free of charge and will include quesadillas, tamales, enchiladas, guacamole, queso, chips, salsa, beans, and rice. A cash bar with \$2 margaritas and \$2 Coronas (AMWA special) will also be available.

A menu and directions are available at [www.berryhilltamales.com](http://www.berryhilltamales.com), or call 713.871.TACO (8226).

This event is free for all AMWA members and for nonmembers who are interested in AMWA. There will be no speaker or program, just a few comments from the chapter president at some point during the reception. Registration is not necessary. For more information, contact Tom Gegeny ([tom@centerforaids.org](mailto:tom@centerforaids.org)).



## Third Annual Essay Competition

The Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is proud to offer a scholarship in biomedical communication for 2003. Applicants must be current students in Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, or New Mexico colleges or universities. Entries will be judged on the basis of a 500- to 750-word essay on any aspect of scientific research or biomedical communication. The winner will receive a \$500 cash award, a certificate of recognition, and a complimentary 1-year membership in AMWA. For more information and application forms, write to Grace Darling, ELS(D), 411 North Washington #6900, Dallas TX 75246, [darlingg@airmail.net](mailto:darlingg@airmail.net), or visit our Web site at [www.amwasouthwest.org](http://www.amwasouthwest.org).

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# Announcements

## Dallas–Fort Worth Meeting Held February 15, 2003

On February 15, 2003, medical writers and editors in the Dallas–Fort Worth area gathered at the meeting space of La Madeleine restaurant in Addison. North Texas Regional Director Arushi Sinha called the meeting a “great success” and reported that at least 30 people attended. These attendees came from a variety of backgrounds, including nursing, teaching, speech pathology, sports writing, and magazine editing. Participants got acquainted with one another and held general discussion about AMWA and job opportunities.

Another meeting will take place in the Dallas–Fort Worth area some time in March (date to be announced); the topic will be “Freelancing: What It Is and How to Go About It.” Arushi Sinha will distribute more information about medical writing as it becomes available. For more information, please contact Arushi at [arushisinha@hotmail.com](mailto:arushisinha@hotmail.com). In addition, Kersten Newell is compiling the contact information to create a directory for the local medical writing community.

## December Lecture Now Available On Line

For those who missed the December holiday gala and lecture, Dr. Stanley J. Reiser’s fascinating talk, “*Frankenstein* and Ethical Challenges in the Medical Future,” is now available for viewing on line. This lecture was Web cast live and can be viewed using the following link: <rtsp://webcaster.library.tmc.edu/frankenstein.rm>. RealONE Player must be downloaded before the lecture can be viewed. (To install RealONE Player, visit [www.real.com](http://www.real.com).)

Held at the Houston Academy of Medicine–Texas Medical Center Library in Houston, the lecture was presented in association with the traveling exhibit “*Frankenstein: Penetrating the Secrets of Nature*,” which was developed by the National Library of Medicine in collaboration with the American Library Association. The Southwest Chapter of AMWA will have the opportunity to use the library’s Web casting technology to broadcast other important lectures and events in future years. For more information, please contact Kate Ó Súilleabháin ([Caitcinnor@aol.com](mailto:Caitcinnor@aol.com) or 713.792.3165).

*In May, the chapter will elect its 2003–2004 board. If you’re interested in contributing your time and talents while advancing your professional-association experience this year, please contact*

*Tom Gegeny (tom@centerforaids.org or 713.527.8219) or  
Kate Ó Súilleabháin (Caitcinnor@aol.com or 713.792.3165).*

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## Marantz Henig Receives 2003 John P. McGovern Award

(continued from page 2)

The John P. McGovern Award was established in 1982 by the Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association to recognize excellence in the field of communications. This award was named for John P. McGovern, MD, founder and director of the McGovern Allergy Clinic in Houston. A noted educator, author, and medical historian, Dr. McGovern has been an AMWA Fellow since 1967 and is a past member of the Southwest Chapter of AMWA.



Robin Marantz Henig explains the pitfalls of employing narrative conventions to convey scientific information.

## Wilson Story to Speak on Plain Language (continued from page 1)

A professional legal secretary since 1981, Ms. Wilson Story is the author of several articles that have appeared in national journals; these articles include “Six Rules for Clear Verbal Communication,” “Plain Language Principles to Ponder,” “Write for Your Reader,” and “How to Obtain a Copyright.” Ms. Wilson Story has also written two books—*Guide to Research on the Internet* and *Plain Language Pleadings*—and received honorable mention from *Writer’s Digest* in 1999 in the personal essay category. In addition, she has served as an instructor of courses on plain language, concise legal writing, legal research, Internet research, and interviewing techniques. She has served on the

Committee and is currently a

Holdings Inc. (formerly Internet Law The lecture, which begins at 6:30 the Southwest Chapter of the Association in cooperation with The Health at Houston. Dinner will be must be mailed by March 10, 2003.

AMWA members and \$14 for trimmings will be catered by Pico’s grilled-vegetable fajitas with black gallo, chips, and queso. Iced tea and

register, please complete and mail the form on page 6 of this newsletter along with your check payable to AMWA Southwest. For more information, please contact Kate Ó Súilleabháin ([Caitcinnor@aol.com](mailto:Caitcinnor@aol.com) or 713.792.3165).

**“Plain language saves time, money, and lives”**

— *Plain Language Association International (PLAIN) Web site*

State Bar of Texas Plain Language corporate secretary for ITIS Library, Inc.) in Houston.

pm, is a free event sponsored by American Medical Writers University of Texas School of Public Health available at 5:30 pm; reservations The cost for dinner is \$12 for nonmembers. Fajitas with all the and will include beef, chicken, and beans, tortillas, guacamole, pico de soft drinks will be provided. To

**Directions:** The University of Texas School of Public Health is located off Holcombe Boulevard at 1200 Herman Pressler in the Texas Medical Center in Houston. From Fannin Street, turn east on Holcombe. Proceed to Bertner and turn left (north). Park in Garage 2 (hourly rates apply). Cross Holcombe and walk southward through the park. The dinner and lecture will be held off the main lobby on the ground floor of the school in rooms 102B and 102A, respectively. Detailed driving instructions to the School of Public Health are available at <http://www.sph.uth.tmc.edu/primary/mappage.htm>.

## AMWA Southwest Chapter News

Natasha Calder  
19200 Space Center Blvd., #415  
Houston TX 77058

Phone: 281.228.7519  
E-mail: [Natasha.Calder@cyberonics.com](mailto:Natasha.Calder@cyberonics.com)



### Registration Form

#### “Plain Language: Ensuring Strong Communication”

The University of Texas School of Public Health  
Thursday, March 13, 2003, 5:30–7:30 pm

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

No. of member(s) \_\_\_\_ @\$12

No. of nonmember(s) \_\_\_\_ @\$14

Total enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please mail your registration form and check payable to AMWA Southwest to Lisa Wann,  
3502 Burlingame, #13, Houston, TX 77006, by March 10, 2003.