



# capital translator

Newsletter of the National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association  
Vol. 20, No. 7 October 1998

---

Twenty years later:

## Revisiting the School for International Interpreters in Mons, Belgium

by *Dimitra Hengen*

June 17, 1998 – It has been 20 years to the day since I graduated from the *École d'Interprètes internationaux*, and although I made many trips to my hometown from abroad to visit my family, I had never revisited my alma mater. On this typically gray Belgian day, as I drew nearer to the campus, memories began to flood my mind and conflict with the discovery of new grounds.

The old one story building where I'd slaved for several years had been replaced with a brand new two-story brick structure, and other faculties were now nicely arranged around a paved piazza. I suddenly felt like a pioneer returning to a brand new city looking for his old camp.

To my surprise, the principal, Mr. Jean Klein, then head of the German division, recognized me at once. After reviewing the list of professors to see who was still teaching, I was pleased to learn that a couple of my schoolmates had become assistants themselves.

Created in 1963 as an attachment to the Economic Science faculty, the E.I.I. became a distinct entity within

the University of Mons-Hainaut in 1965. The creation of this international school in a small provincial town was a challenge that was successfully met when the school forged itself a solid worldwide reputation. After a four year post-graduate program, students can apply for a doctorate at the Sorbonne University in Paris.

The 850 students who register every year belong to 26 nationalities, most from Europe and a few from Japan and the USA. Two thirds of the teachers are native speakers. Examiners from EU and NATO headquarters are part of the annual examining boards and provide feedback to the staff to keep them focused on the needs of international organizations.

With the development of international trade, the E.I.I. has evolved to adapt to the needs of those specializing in the transfer of knowledge. International communications and exchange of information in all fields forced the school to reach a very high level in the art of translation by adopting new programs every year.

In addition to the mandatory courses, which include political science, economic science, history, linguistics, phonetics, law (trade, international, private, public and economic law), sociology, history of modern literature, and general stylistics, technical translation courses

...continued on page 5

---

## Inside

President's Corner	2
NCATA Elections	3
Accreditation Info	4
Internat'l Translation Day	4
Ten reasons	6
Technology Corner	7
Info Exchange	7
Calendar	8



## capital translator

The *Capital Translator* is a newsletter published by NCATA nine times a year from September through June with a combined issue for December and January. Letters to the Editor, short articles of interest, and information for the calendar and other sections are invited. Submissions become the property of the *Capital Translator* and are subject to editing unless otherwise agreed to in advance. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Editor, the Chapter, or its Board.

Editor: Ruth Zimmer Boggs  
703-378-9305  
REZB@aol.com

Assistant Editor: Dimitra Hengen  
703-426-4938  
DimitraH@msn.com

Production: Karin Wuertz-Schaefer  
301-607-8036  
wuertz-schaefer@erols.com

Deadline: No later than 5th day of month before the issue

---

Membership: Michael Wahlster  
804-984-1305  
Michael@GW-Language.com

### National Capital Area Chapter of the American Translators Association (NCATA)

President: Scott Brennan  
500-447-7407  
sbrennan@compuserve.com

Vice President: Kim F. Olson  
703-803-6781

Treasurer: Therese Hathaway  
703-925-9087

Program Chair: Alissa Martin  
301-718-0405


Accreditation: Bill Keasbey  
301-897-8318

The **Chapter Address** is P. O. Box 65200,  
Washington, DC 20035-5200,  
Tel: 703-255-9290  
Web site: www.ncata.org

The **National HQ Address** is American Translators  
Association, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 220,  
Alexandria, VA 22314-2840,  
Tel: 703-683-6100, Fax: 703-683-6122  
Web site: www.atanet.org

For address changes, please write to the chapter at  
the above address, Attn: Membership

For advertising in the *Capital Translator*,  
please contact Angelika Spears, Advertising  
Coordinator, Tel: 301-464-8309,  
e-mail: 102502.3224@compuserve.com

 Printed on recycled paper.

## President's Corner

by Scott Brennan

**W**ith the annual SFL/NCATA Luncheon under our belts, the next item on the menu is the election of new officers to the Board (details on page 3). As I look around the room at every NCATA gathering, I am struck by the depth of talent in our organization. Many long-time members have served as officers, some for multiple terms. But I would especially encourage newer members to seize the opportunity to run for Vice President or Secretary, or serve in one of the appointed positions opening up next year.

When I first began working as a freelance translator, learning the ropes and building my professional contacts were high up on my list. Serving on the board of a professional organization puts you in a position to network and get to know colleagues with a great deal of experience and time in the trenches. There is also the satisfaction of helping make exciting seminars and other events happen. Think about the direct, tangible benefit to us as working professionals of the Job Fair, *Professional Services Directory* and online database. Not to mention the shop talk; one thing I've noticed about translators is that they love to talk about what they do. And now that NCATA has corporate members, you also stand to gain name recognition with potential clients.

On the subject of volunteers, then, I would like to welcome **Dimitra Hengen** as the new Assistant Editor of the *Capital Translator*. She will be joining Editor **Ruth Zimmer Boggs** and Production Manager **Karin Wuertz-Schaefer** on the team responsible for bringing us this newsletter each month.

I am happy to announce that Membership Chair **Eric Barcel** has

received a scholarship to study in Germany. Unfortunately, this also means we will be losing him as Membership Chair. Thank you Eric, on behalf of NCATA, for doing the heavy lifting over the past few months during membership renewal and directory update season. We are looking forward to a "letter from Europe" from one of our far-flung correspondents.

**Michael Wahlster** will therefore be stepping back into his old shoes as Acting Membership Chair, and is overseeing production of the *Professional Services Directory*. Thanks to his and Advertising Manager **Angelika Spears's** efforts, advertising revenue and advance orders for hard copies have defrayed production costs, which will enable us to put complimentary copies into the hands of more buyers of language services this year than ever before.

The Membership Committee is a good place to start getting involved in NCATA. Membership duties lend themselves especially well to being broken down into one-time tasks that even the busiest translator or interpreter with a desire to pitch in can fit in.

Fall elections are an excellent opportunity to take a more active role in your professional life. Please give it some serious thought. ✍



## Going to Hilton Head?

Will you be attending the American Translators Association Annual Conference in Hilton Head this year? If so, consider giving an hour to help staff NCATA's table and talk to colleagues and prospective members about our chapter. Contact Scott Brennan at (703) 242-7171 or [sbrennan@compuserve.com](mailto:sbrennan@compuserve.com). ✍

# NCATA Elections

by Scott Brennan

Is NCATA a valuable part of your professional life? If so, why not take a leadership role? The offices of Vice President, Secretary, Program Chair and Membership Chair open at the end of this year. Serving on NCATA's board provides an excellent opportunity to make professional contacts, advance your career, and actively influence the development of the organization.

## Elected Positions:

The **Vice President** works closely with the President on all NCATA activities and planning, and presides at functions and meetings when the President is unable to attend.

The **Secretary** records minutes of meetings, prepares ballots, and handles NCATA correspondence except as delegated to other individuals.

The Vice President and Secretary are elected to two-year terms and are voting members of NCATA's Board of Directors.

*Elected officers must be members in good standing of both NCATA and ATA. ATA's bylaws require the Vice President to be a voting member of ATA.*

## Appointed Positions:

The **Program Chair** handles all facility and registration arrangements for NCATA workshops and other functions.

The **Membership Chair** manages the membership database and NCATA's website and searchable database, and oversees production of the Professional Services Directory, membership list, and other mailings. Some familiarity with database software and Internet is desirable.

The Program Chair and Membership Chair are appointed to renewable one-year terms and play an active role in board meetings, but are not voting members of NCATA's Board of Directors.

Interested but want to know more? Contact NCATA's current officers by October 5:

For Vice President, contact Scott Brennan at (703) 242-7171 or [sbrennan@compuserve.com](mailto:sbrennan@compuserve.com).

For Secretary, contact Kim Olson at (703) 803-6781 or [KFOTrans@aol.com](mailto:KFOTrans@aol.com).

For Program Chair, contact Alissa Martin at (301) 718-0405 or [martina2@gusun.georgetown.edu](mailto:martina2@gusun.georgetown.edu).

For Membership Chair, contact Michael Wahlster at (804) 984-1305 or [Michael@GW-Language.com](mailto:Michael@GW-Language.com).

Candidates for Vice President and Secretary must submit a 150-word statement by October 5, to be published in the next issue of the *Capital Translator*. The election results will be announced at the 1998 Annual Meeting, held before the Holiday Party on Sunday, December 13 (see announcement on this page). ✍

## Mark Your Calendars – December 13 NCATA Annual Meeting / Holiday Party

NCATA's Annual Meeting and Holiday Party will be held on Sunday afternoon, December 13. Metro-accessible venues are being scouted in the District, and the cost for the party will be comparable to previous years (about \$20 per person; there will be no charge to attend just the Annual Meeting). See next month's *Capital Translator* for details. ✍

## Testing, anyone?

Rick Rowland of Land Software has designed a database for interpreters and translators and is currently putting the finishing touches on his product. He designed the database with the help of two practicing interpreters.

The database features invoicing, a complete report generator (a/r by month and customer, billings by month and customer, statements and overdue statements, just to name a few), as well as a glossary and a business expense tracker.

The program will work on both PC and Mac.

I'm looking for two practicing translators/interpreters to help me review the database for one of the upcoming CTs. If interested, please call Ruth Boggs at (703) 378-9305 or contact her by e-mail at [REZB@aol.com](mailto:REZB@aol.com). ✍

## Accreditation Information

by Bill Keasbey, Accreditation Chair

Because of strong demand the Chapter is going to hold another accreditation orientation seminar. It will take place on Saturday, December 5, from 2 to 5 p.m. at the Cleveland Park branch of the DC Public Libraries, which is located at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Macomb Street, a block south of the Cleveland Park Metro Station. The first part of the session will provide general information about the accreditation program and how it operates. Plenty of time will be made available to answer questions. In the second part, we will divide into sections by language pairs and discuss the translation of specific passages from previous

examinations. Everyone is welcome to attend the seminar, but for maximum benefit, you should obtain a copy of an examination passage in the language pair in which you wish to be accredited and prepare it ahead of time. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Bill Keasbey, 5031 Alta Vista Road, Bethesda, MD 20814, indicating the desired language pair. This will also help us to know which language pairs to prepare for in the second part of the session.

The next accreditation sitting in the local area will be held at 1:30 pm on Saturday, January 23, 1999, at the Graduate Education Center of The George Washington University,

1775B Duke Street, Alexandria, VA, near the King Street Metro Station. You must contact ATA Headquarters to obtain the application forms for the examination and the information brochures about the accreditation program. The telephone number is (703) 683-6100 and the fax number is (703) 683-6122. To verify your readiness and benefit from the corrections and comments of the grader is highly recommended that you take a practice test before tackling the actual accreditation examination. The practice test too must also be obtained from ATA Headquarters. Do not wait until the last minute to register for the examination, because space is limited. ✍



September 30, 1998

## International Translation Day

by Eve Bodeux

Mark your calendars! September 30, 1998 is International Translation Day. This date, designated by the Fédération internationale des traducteurs (FIT - International Federation of Translators), is also the day dedicated to St. Jerome, the patron saint of translators.

FIT's theme for this special day is *good translation practices* and you can find out more on their web site at <http://fit.ml.org/english/jmt98-e.html>. FIT emphasizes that it takes team work to create a top-notch translation product. The team players include the individual translator, the client, and translators' associations. Visit FIT's site and review the Federation's interesting suggestions.

In addition to FIT's perspective, I'd like to contribute to your celebra-

tion of Translators and Translation, so here are some more ideas for observing International Translation Day!

- Spend some time helping a local, regional or national translation organization: contribute an article to your group's newsletter, organize a special event, plan a seminar, or just stuff envelopes.
- Refer a favorite colleague who translates a different language pair to one of your preferred clients.
- Broaden your client base; take advantage of new technology and use the Internet to identify at least 5 new prospective clients overseas.
- Start reading a novel in a language other than your native language.
- Do some public relations for your profession! Contact a local school and offer to give a presentation

about translation and international opportunities.

- Write a letter to the editor of your city's newspaper outlining the value of a good translation.
- Call your newspaper's features editor and suggest an article on how the global economy affects the translation industry and vice versa.
- Donate translation services to a charity, friend, or public service organization.
- E-mail your favorite translator-related web site link to 3 colleagues.
- Have a translation theme party: exchange war stories, learn about cultural differences, and play fun word games!
- Contact your friends and colleagues and wish them a happy Translation Day. Give yourselves a pat on the back, it's your day! ✍



## School

...continued from page 1

were added over the years to meet the physics, chemistry, mechanics and applied science demands of the market. A heavy load for a student who faces 45 hours of classes per week, not counting lab work and personal research time.

Moreover, life can be pretty stressful for an E.I.I. student facing the future; no diploma is delivered unless the whole four-year program is completed, and transfer of credit does not apply in this part of the world! In other words, you go the distance and succeed, or you have wasted four years of your life. I remember that sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach only too well. With a failure rate of 75%, the E.I.I. is not a school for the fainthearted, and makes the ATA accreditation exam almost seem like a piece of cake.

Having always supplied the EU with translators and interpreters, the E.I.I. is now cooperating with other international organizations such as NATO, the United Nations, Euro Control, and 20 European schools in conducting exchange programs and workshops. The school's economic impact on the local economy is growing as students and teachers help satisfy the terminology needs of local companies and increase their trade exchanges in broader markets.

What does the future hold for the E.I.I.? As the old crew of 1965 is

With an eye to the next millennium, the School for International Interpreters is hosting the FIT World Congress in August 6-10, 1999. Call for papers" brochures are available right now. The school will publish a registration brochure this month. For more information, send your inquiries to:

International Federation of Translators, 1999 Congress  
École d'Interprètes Internationaux  
7, avenue du Champs de Mars  
B-7000 Mons Belgium  
e-mail: [fit99@write.me.com](mailto:fit99@write.me.com)  
internet: <http://fit.ml.org/>  
Or contact the Assistant Editor  
Dimitra Hengen (e-mail: [DimitraH@msn.com](mailto:DimitraH@msn.com)).

considering retirement, fresh blood is needed to help the school adjust to the multiple challenges ahead. The new team will need to prepare for emerging new technologies, set up exchange programs with EU headquarters, create new linguistic workshops for its students, and a job bank for the freshly graduated professionals. Of concern are the decreasing budgets that will require students to do more independent work.

True to its European spirit, the school has consistently adhered to its democratic principle not to increase the very low annual tuition: Between four and five hundred dollars for European students,

and about \$2,000 for non-EU students. Considering that the school is equipped with state of the art equipment, that is a true bargain.

As I left Jean Klein later that day, I realized that I've spent the last twenty years exploring the word of translation from Asia to Africa, and from Europe to the USA, with an insatiable desire to learn. I've worked for international organizations and lived the corporate life, but I have also spent hours sitting on a fruit box in an African market writing down all the different terms the Baoule tribe uses to describe the color "green." As I walked past the E.I.I. library, I realized it all had started here, in this small faculty of this provincial Belgian town.

Merci l'E.I.I.! ✍

Dimitra Hengen, a native of Belgium, is a French <> English, Italian <> English translator and interpreter based in Fairfax, Virginia. She specializes in technical translations and has translated techno-thrillers such as the James Bond series, science fiction, and military adventure novels. She is a member of the Mons School for International Interpreters, Class of 1978, and has worked for NATO (Brussels), Disneyland Paris, and USAID (Africa). Dimitra can be reached at [DimitraH@msn.com](mailto:DimitraH@msn.com)

## Just One Single Letter

The following are some of the winners in a New York magazine contest, in which the rules were: take *any* well-known phrase in *any* foreign language, change *just one single letter*, and then provide a definition for the new expression.

Harlez-vous français?	Can you drive a French motorcycle?
Idios amigos.	We are two wild and crazy guys from south of the border.
Pro bozo publico.	Support your local clown.
Haste cuisine.	Fast French food.
Quip pro quo.	A fast retort.
De ficto.	We made that up. ✍

# Ten Reasons Why I Am Glad To Be A Freelance Translator

by *Steve Vlasta Vitek*



- It is the only thing that I can do quite well ( I usually get paid for it). I tried my hand at different other professions and I was a complete failure every time. Let's face it, it's not like I really have a choice.
- It takes me only seven minutes to drive to my office (which I will move back home next to a bedroom in my house when my kids grow up). It took me 30 minutes to get to work in Prague, 30 minutes in San Francisco, and 90 minutes in Tokyo (each way). Why go to work when work comes to you?
- On a good day I get to humiliate a lawyer by simply quoting my price for a translation to a lawyer who discovers, to his utter amazement, that somebody who is not a lawyer has the gall to ask for several thousand dollars for a few completely useless pages of paper that make no sense whatsoever. Nothing quite makes my day like when I can humiliate a lawyer (and the best thing is that he can't even sue me for it)
- I can listen to my CDs when I work. When I tried that on another job, it got me fired for some reason. I can actually listen to a radio talk show or watch Ricky Lake or Jenny Jones when I translate a simple telephone communication manual from Japanese, but please don't tell anybody!
- I never know what to expect when I drive through the wine country fog to my cozy little office. A couple of marriage, divorce, or death certificates on a boring day? Juicy personnel department files from a subsidiary of a US company in Prague or Tokyo on a better day?

A nifty patent for a machine that is insanely clever, even though nobody seems to be using it, on a really thrilling day? Every day comes in a different flavor.

- Because I am a translator by profession, the rest of my life will be a continuous course of post-graduate study in the languages that I am translating. When is the last time a non-translator got paid simply for trying to learn a language? As long as my clients never find out that I am basically just faking my languages, I should be OK. (Again, please keep this secret).
- I can deduct all the cool hightech toys that I keep buying for my office from my taxes, and according to my tax accountant, it's perfectly legal, as long as my wife never finds out how much these things cost. Come to think of it, I do need a new laptop, 1,200 dot per inch laser printer, and a smaller cell phone among other things. Is America a great country or what?
- I can always look up everything in my dictionaries and encyclopedias. For instance, if I have high blood-pressure, I will look it up in the American Medical Association's Encyclopedia of Medicine (also tax-deductible), which will also tell me what to do about it. I would probably not do anything anyway (especially if it tells me to drink less alcohol and eat less meat), but it's good to know these things. Knowledge is power!
- I cannot get fired for insubordination again, since I don't have a boss any more! And when I have no work, I can just slip my cell phone into my jeans pocket and go to a café or a bookstore, and –

voilà – I'm working. As long as I am answering the phone, I am always working, even though I may be reading a mystery novel instead of translating a patent. And if I am not making any money that way — we are not really doing it for the money, are we? We are doing it for the fun of it! Otherwise we would be no better than the lawyers and dentists that we have to work for!

- The main reason, of course, is that I don't need to have a real job any more to pay my bills! ✍

Steve Vlasta Vitek, M.A., a new member of NCATA as of this year, is a translator from Czech, German, and Japanese who emigrated to the United States in 1982 and lives in Northern California. He worked as an in-house translator for a Japanese company in Tokyo in 1985-86 and opened his translation service after his return to California in 1987. He is grateful for big lawsuits with boxes of documents in Czech, German and Japanese for translation, although contrary to rumors, he does not actually create or incite such lawsuits. He just translates the stuff. He lives with a wife, two kids, a dog, a bird, two guinea pigs, four computers (four PCs and one Mac), and two Hewlett Packard printers in Santa Rosa, California, the heart of the Sonoma wine country, 50 miles north of San Francisco. His e-mail address is [stevevitek@compuserve.com](mailto:stevevitek@compuserve.com).

## Technology Corner

### Why Is The Text On My Screen So Small?

by Michael Wahlster



The designer of Web pages has little control over how these pages appear on the screen. Different browsers lead to different results, screens are set to different resolutions, and browser-specific settings of font and font size may make the text appear larger or smaller than planned. While it is possible to specify fonts for Web pages (as we do with our NCATA pages), this specification only works if the font specified is installed on the viewing system.

In designing the NCATA pages, we assumed a screen resolution of 640x480 pixels, the smallest com-

mon denominator. We specified a sans serif typeface (Arial for Windows systems) and a size of 10 points for the body copy. Still, we received numerous complaints about the text being too small.

While 10 points is not large, it is generally accepted as a legible point size. If you find the text size on our pages (or any Web site) too small, you can easily make text appear larger in your browser window:

Netscape Navigator 3.x...

On the menu bar, select Options -> General Preferences -> Fonts, and set the desired point size. A good starting point is the value 12.

Netscape Navigator 4.x...

On the menu bar, select Edit -> Preferences -> Appearance -> Fonts, and set the desired point size. A good starting point is the value 12.

Microsoft Internet Explorer...

On the menu bar, select View -> Fonts -> Larger (or Largest).

This is also the place where you can select a font for displaying text. Unless a Web page specifies a particular font and that font is installed on your machine, the font selected in your browser preferences takes over. ✎

## Information Exchange

Here's what our readers came up with this month:

*From Cassandra Decker, Japanese to English Patent and Technical Translation ([deckerc@erols.com](mailto:deckerc@erols.com)):*

Adam Rice, a J-E translator, has set up a mailing list to send job offers out to translators via the internet. He also put a member directory on the web page. This is a free service! Anyone can join. Here is the URL:

<http://www.crossroads.net/xj/dir.html>

*From Eric Barcel, German to English Translation ([webarcel@cstone.net](mailto:webarcel@cstone.net)):*

Dogpile seems to be a pretty good search engine; apparently, it combines quite a few others into one large *super* engine. One thing I found tremendously helpful when I was new to the business was an internet listing (two separate addresses, two lists) of the ASCII commands (number pad on the right side of the keyboard must be used) for the Umlaut-characters (ä, ö, ü):

<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~gerry1/Program/ascii1.htm>

<http://www.users.dircon.co.uk/~gerry1/Program/ascii2.htm>

I was very grateful to Jonathan Hine for directing me to these lists. ✎

# Calendar

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Event</b>	<b>Location</b>
Saturday, Dec. 5, 1998	2 – 5 p.m	Accreditation Workshop	Cleveland Park branch of the DC Public Libraries at the corner of Connecticut Avenue and Macomb Street, one block south of the Cleveland Park Metro Station Contact Bill Keasbey at 301-530-5031
Sunday, Dec. 13, 1998	afternoon	Annual Meeting	Exact time and place tba
Sunday, Dec. 13, 1998	afternoon	Holiday Party	Exact time and place tba
November 4–8, 1998		39th Annual ATA Conference	Hilton Head, SC Contact ATA at 703-683-6100
Saturday, Jan. 23, 1999	1:30 pm	Accreditation Exam	Graduate Education Center of The George Washington University, 1775B Duke Street, Alexandria, VA, near the King Street Metro Station Contact ATA at 703-683-6100

NCATA  
P. O. Box 65200  
Washington, DC 20035-5200