



1997 PRESIDENT



J. DOUGLAS ASHTON • IRON & STEEL SOCIETY

Coated Products for Automotive.

In his present position, Mr. Ashton serves as Stelco's direct technical liaison with automotive stamping plants. He works with the Chrysler Canada plant at Bramalea, all the Magna International stamping plants and several independent stampers.

I&SM: What do you value about your membership in the ISS?

ASHTON: I can answer that in two ways. In a broad sense, it has to be people. People make the difference. That is what experience has taught me during my 25 years within the industry, and, now, my 25 years of involvement with the Society.

Second, I'm technical by nature. I enjoy getting involved with the physical metallurgy side.

I&SM: What has impressed you about the Society?

ASHTON: I have been very impressed by the commitment of the individuals. That is evident in the frequent emotional fervor of some of the discussion issues at Board meetings or executive committee meetings within the divisions. I think that is a sign of the health of the Society. It's very rare that you see apathy on the part of a committee or the membership.

I&SM: What would you say to someone who was thinking of joining the Society?

ASHTON: There are unlimited benefits you can derive from ISS programming, interfacing with colleagues – all of the activities of the Society. It gets back to commitment. If someone is planning to join, my definite recommendation would be to get involved to as large a degree as possible. That is the way to maximize the benefit in return.

I&SM: The Society's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan were created to maximize member benefits. Can you tell us about your involvement in the development of the Mission Statement?

ASHTON: I became involved with

the Mission Statement while serving on the Board of Directors. I was quite vocal about the initial cut, as was Les Niemi. We felt that it was too confined, that we do a lot beyond just serving the membership. As a result, we were appointed to come up with a draft. The Board then made the draft more concise in format. The Mission Statement now reads, "the Iron & Steel Society seeks to be the premier professional and technical society serving its members and advancing knowledge exchange within the global iron and steel industry."

That Mission Statement culminated in the formation of the Strategic Plan in 1995 under the direction of Keith Brimacombe [1995 ISS president] and John Scheel [then president-elect]. As the new Society President, I must ensure that we maintain the momentum of the Strategic Plan and that it becomes a living document. To that end, I plan to bring a motion to the next Board meeting to set up a standing committee to oversee the Plan.

We have come through a two-year period of significant change. But it isn't change for the sake of change, it's change for the sake of improvement. The acid test for anything we do within the Society ultimately goes back to the Mission Statement. Is what we are considering going to improve the level of service to our members and the associated costs reasonable?

I can't help but reflect on Al Davis of the Oakland Raiders, when he articulated the phrase, "commitment to excellence." We have incorporated that same idea into our Mission Statement.

I&SM: Can you tell members about the Mission Statement's role in Society life?

ASHTON: Although the concise Mission Statement is in the magazine, there are a series of values that go with it, such as Members, Science, Exchange of Knowledge, Publication of Knowledge, Environment, Community, Industry, Academia and Cooperation. There are brief paragraphs in the full Mission Statement that expand on those values.

This year is special for ISS president J. Douglas Ashton for more than just the obvious reason. This year marks his 24th year of employment at Stelco Inc. in Canada, his 25th year of marriage to his wife, Sue, and his 25th year as a member of the Iron & Steel Society.

Mr. Ashton has been very active in the ISS, particularly within the Mechanical Working and Steel Processing Division. He has served as an author, member and co-chairman of the Flat Rolled Products Committee, executive member-at-large, and division chairman in 1993. Mr. Ashton has also served on the ISS Board of Directors from 1992-1994.

A native of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the new ISS president studied engineering at the University of Toronto on a four-year scholarship. He graduated in 1972, with honors, with a bachelor of applied science degree in metallurgy and materials science. He immediately joined the Steel Company of Canada, now Stelco, as a graduate trainee and soon progressed to project metallurgist first in the Plate & Strip Mills and subsequently in the BOF Shop at Hilton Works. In 1976, Mr. Ashton was promoted to supervising metallurgist – Galvanize Lines and, in 1980, supervising metallurgist – Plate & Strip Mills. Since 1990, he has served as a senior product and service metallurgist – Cold Rolled &



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I plan to resurrect the President's Page [in *I&SM*] and, hopefully, elaborate more fully on a few of the values of the Society, as well as assess various aspects of Society life.

For instance, the value of Members in the Mission Statement says that the Society will constantly strive to cultivate new members and sustain existing ones by affording opportunity for enhanced professional development. Students represent the future of the industry. Whatever we can do to enhance their professional development, as well as their technology information base, is going to benefit the industry as a whole.

I&SM: Speaking of students, how do you view the relationship between the ISS and ISS Foundation?

ASHTON: Excellent. The Foundation is almost financially self-sufficient. Similar to the Society, it is looking at expanding benefits to students.

All of the integrated mills have downsized. In most cases, there's been a hiring freeze on new engineers. Hopefully, we're coming to a point where there will be an infusion of new engineers into companies to address future attrition. That decrease in hiring has had a spin-off effect on programming at universities. Obviously, the Iron & Steel Society is in a position to influence university programming and ensure that there's always a spot for metallurgical training. That is exactly what the foundation is trying to promote.

The other consequence of downsizing has been a drastic reduction in the amount of research and development individual companies conduct. As a result, research is being pushed toward the universities. Through the Foundation, we have the opportunity to ensure that iron and steel research will still have a place at academic institutions.

I&SM: More research also is being conducted at the supplier level.

ASHTON: That's true and also addressed in the Strategic Plan.

Programs are being discussed within the divisions with respect to recognizing suppliers, forming supplier committees and having them become more involved with planning and programming. We should make the point of expressing the increasing importance of the supplier community within our organization.

I&SM: Can you tell us how work on the Strategic Plan is progressing?

ASHTON: Very well. We are making significant progress on virtually all of the items. Quite a few of them already are completed and in place.

On the negative side, one thing that surprised me, and I'm currently addressing, is a lack of familiarity with the Strategic plan on the part of some of the standing committee chairpersons. It's of paramount importance that the chairpersons and committee members are familiar with and recognize the importance of the Strategic Plan.

I&SM: Are there any particular areas of the Strategic Plan that you intend to focus on in your year as president?

ASHTON: I could sit here for four hours and talk about various things, but there isn't enough time. I'm hoping to impact, to some degree, all the aspects in the Strategic Plan.

It was gratifying at the last Board meeting to be able to grant the initial two charters for the first two student chapters [part of the Plan] at the University of British Columbia and at the University of Missouri-Rolla.

We are also trying to cross-pollinate between various groups. For instance, the local sections would be a valuable asset to the student chapters. We are trying to cross-pollinate between divisions. As a result, joint sessions will be held at the upcoming Electric Furnace Conference in Chicago in November on alternative ironmaking, sponsored by both the Ironmaking Division and the electric Furnace Division.

Also this year, the ISS Board of Directors will meet for the first time

at the Mechanical Working and Steel Processing Conference, which will be held in Indianapolis. This will afford some board members, who normally wouldn't attend this Conference, the opportunity to experience it.

I&SM: What are some of the Society's other recent accomplishments?

ASHTON: Have you got a few hours? The fact that we continue to increase in membership is very important and very heartening. We're continuing to expand worldwide with the formation of new local sections in places like Mexico and Argentina. I think that's very healthy.

I&SM: Does the Iron & Steel Society have any weaknesses?

ASHTON: It would be unrealistic to assume we're doing everything perfectly. From time to time at Board meetings, members have raised issues about quality in regard to particular situations that have arisen. The catch phrase is continuous improvement. There's always room for continuous improvement.

It's realistic to recognize that your first attempt at something is not necessarily going to be the optimum. The key is that if we can learn from our mistakes, then we will succeed and do better. I think [Nucor Chairman] Ken Iverson made a comment along those lines, saying "anything worth doing is worth doing poorly." You have to start somewhere, make a first step and then improve.

I&SM: Speaking of Ken Iverson, how do you view the relationship between integrated mills and minimills?

ASHTON: The integrated mills on the flat roll side have the luxury of supplying the more sophisticated end uses. But as time evolves, the minimills will make progress in those areas. It's a matter of not resting on your laurels and seeking to optimize existing operations and to include new technology, new ways of doing things more efficiently. Within the realm of the Society, we're hoping to attract more participation by the



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minimills and to incorporate them in our programming.

For instance, there's a major initiative in the Mechanical Working and Steel Processing Division to attract minimill people to participate within the division. This has resulted in the scheduling of a minimill symposium at the upcoming conference in October.

I&SM: How can the Iron & Steel Society help all steel industry people compete, whether they are from the integrated sector or otherwise?

ASHTON: The conference programming, in general, is an excellent forum for various individuals and companies to disseminate information on the various studies they've conducted. The industry, as a whole, benefits from that.

We are a society of individual members, not corporate members. So it isn't our design or function to be lobbyists for the industry. Our efforts focus on individuals, and I think information exchange, including continuing education, is key.

I&SM: How do you view your role as ISS president?

ASHTON: I think my priority as president is to ensure that we maintain the momentum and direction of the Strategic Plan. With the Mission Statement and Strategic Plan in place, we've got the ship steering in the right direction. I see myself as the pilot guiding that ship on that course with a firm but gentle hand on the rudder. Ultimately, the viability of the Society and our competitive position among the various technical societies gets back to the quality and the value of our programming. As long as we can improve from year to year, then the membership will continue to grow and we will continue to thrive as a society. *I&SM*