An Interview with

Anthony R. Bridge

2009 AIST President

ANTHONY R. BRIDGE began his career in the steel industry with Inland Steel in East Chicago, Ind., in 1976 and moved through a series of supervisory and management positions in ironmaking operations. In 1995, he moved to Rouge Steel in Dearborn, Mich., as superintendent of ironmaking, a position he held until joining United States Steel Corporation in 1998 as area manager of the No. 13 blast furnace — U. S. Steel's largest blast furnace — at Gary (Ind.) Works. He advanced to division manager of iron producing in 1999, and to plant manager of primary operations in 2001. In 2003, Bridge was transferred to Pittsburgh headquarters when he was named managing director — blast furnace engineering and technology. In this position, he was responsible for the technological development, operation and maintenance of U. S. Steel's blast furnaces around the world. Bridge was elected vice president — engineering and technology in 2005, with responsibility for research and development activities at the company's Research and Technology Center in Munhall, Pa., Automotive Center in Troy, Mich., and research facility in Košice, Slovakia. He also oversaw engineering for domestic and international operations, as well as blast furnace engineering and technology companywide. In March 2008, Bridge was appointed to vice president — operations for U. S. Steel. He is responsible for directing operations at Great Lakes Works in Ecorse and River Rouge, Mich.; Mon Valley Works, which includes the Clairton Plant, the Edgar Thomson Plant and the Irvin Plant near Pittsburgh, as well as the Fairless Plant outside Philadelphia; and U. S. Steel Canada, which includes Hamilton Works in Hamilton, Ont., and Lake Erie Works in Nanticoke, Ont.

Tony Bridge, the 2009 AIST president, recently took time from his schedule to share his background and insights with *Iron & Steel Technology* readers.

Iron & Steel Technology: How did you first become interested in the iron and steel industry?

Bridge: I grew up in a Gary, Ind., a steel town, at a time when probably 80% percent of the population, including my father and several relatives, worked in the steel industry. Folklore of the steel mill culture and manufacturing processes were common topics in the neighborhood. So, my interest, I suppose, developed as a natural outgrowth of that environment. After graduating from high school, I enrolled in an industrial management curriculum at Purdue University. The expectation at that time was to apply for a management position at one of the steel mills in northwest Indiana after graduation. After graduating from Purdue in 1976, I interviewed with Inland Steel Co., and was hired as a technical assistant in the ironmaking department, which began my nearly 33-year involvement in the steel industry.

Iron & Steel Technology: How long have you been associated with AIST and its predecessors?

Bridge: I have participated in ISS and AISE activities since the mid-80s, regularly attending technical sessions and professional assemblies where work-related problems and experiences were exchanged. I was also involved by participating as an author at the 1998 AISE convention held in Pittsburgh.

Iron & Steel Technology: What were your first impressions of the organization?

Bridge: In a sense, I was recruited by the society's vast technical membership and following. For me, it was a network of the best minds in steelmaking. One could learn about all aspects of steelmaking from academics, suppliers and process experts — it offered great opportunity and value.

Iron & Steel Technology: What are some of the personal benefits you've gained as a member of AIST?

Bridge: Besides the accelerated learning curve that results from the networking opportunities, the greatest personal benefit has been the friendships developed over the years. Aside from being great friends, they helped me to become better at my job, which then became a way that my AIST membership was a benefit to my company.

Iron & Steel Technology: Can you share some background on your career and some of the changes you've seen in the industry through the years?

Bridge: There have been significant technological advances in steel manufacturing since the mid-70s when I entered the business — increased utilization of non-recovery cokemaking, the introduction of direct reduced ironmaking, the discontinuation of open hearth steelmaking in favor of the basic oxygen and the EAF processes, continuous slab and strip casting, and a number of shape and coating control technologies that have significantly improved the quality of steel products. In addition, the industry has refined processes to produce lighter weight, higher strength steels. Another meaningful and noteworthy change has been in the workforce (represented and non-represented). Positions historically held by 10- to 20-year veteran (mostly male) steelmakers are now being staffed by a younger, more inclusive workforce. The domestic industry's hiring drought of the 1980s has required the steel industry to invest more in the training and development of its workforce in response to the many changes in technology, as well as its younger demographic.

Iron & Steel Technology: How do you view your role as AIST president?

Bridge: The primary role will be to support the overall mission of the organization to facilitate the development of new strategies, and to serve as the main point of communication between our various leadership groups - the board of directors, technology committees, Member Chapters and our membership at-large.

Iron & Steel Technology: What do you feel should be the main focus of AIST as an organization?

Bridge: The main focus of the organization should be to maintain the strong position it has established since the 2004 merger of ISS and AISE. To that end, it should continue to develop and refine its existing products and services — adjusting, perhaps, to the more tactical concerns of its membership. AIST should also focus on addressing and developing topics that speak to energy conservation, technologies that offer cost-efficiencies driven from high-return investments, and effective safety and environmental management practices.

Iron & Steel Technology: What do you feel is the greatest challenge facing AIST as a member-driven organization in the 2009–2010 fiscal year?

Bridge: Attracting members and attendance to AIST-sponsored events will be difficult in the recessionary economic environment projected for the foreseeable future. The greatest challenge during this period will be the creation of value for prospective and existing members; a careful assessment of the technical and professional needs of the industry will be required to enable the association to focus resources and services toward attractive and useful products for its producer, supplier and academic base.

Iron & Steel Technology: What do you feel has been the key to your successful career?

Bridge: A key element of my success — and no doubt the success of countless others in this industry — has been the capacity to persevere and the commitment to spending the long hours required to understand, at the most basic level, the needs of the business. My best decisions were a result of this kind of insight and perspective.

Iron & Steel Technology: With the current economic conditions, what insight can you share regarding the steel industry's future?

Bridge: I believe the future of the steel industry remains promising. Steel is vital to the economy, competiveness and national security of most countries. Over the past six or seven years, the industry has taken several steps to secure its future. The industry has consolidated, worked to eliminate inefficiencies, and with the support of labor has negotiated competitive agreements. The business model, generally adapted by the industry to control supply close to real demand, also protect margins and shareholder interest where costs are controlled. ✦

Tony Bridge (left) and Kurt Wilson, division manager — steelmaking, at the U. S. Steel Edgar Thomson Works, Braddock, Pa.