

An Interview With Richard E. O'Hara 2005 AIST President

Richard O'Hara began his career with Carpenter Technology Corp. in 1977 at the Bridgeport, Conn., plant and has been with the company for 28 years. In 1984, he moved to the Reading, Pa., facility and held various positions in arc melting, continuous casting, vacuum induction melting, remelting and hot working.

Beginning in 1993, O'Hara spent four years in Yenshui, Taiwan with Walsin-Cartech, the joint venture between Walsin Lihwa Corp. and Carpenter Technology Corp. He began the exciting and rewarding assignment as business manager and eventually worked in operations as chief operations officer and served as senior executive vice president of Walsin-Cartech.

Upon his return to the Carpenter Reading facility, O'Hara worked on corporate development and took over global sourcing for products and services. He is currently director of procurement and logistics, with responsibility for procurement, freight management and warehousing operations.

He graduated from Lafayette College in 1977 with a B.S. degree in metallurgical engineering and earned an M.B.A. from the University of Bridgeport in 1984. He and his wife, Tina, live in Wyomissing, Pa., and have three grown children, Tim, Jeff and Robin.

Iron & Steel Technology: Beginning with the Iron & Steel Society, you have been a member of the association for over 25 years. How did you first become involved?

O'Hara: When I was a "cub metallurgist," just out of school, I was working in Carpenter's meltshop in Bridgeport, Conn., with Mike Sullivan, who was very involved with the ISS Electric Furnace Conference Committee at that time. I was looking for ways to enhance my knowledge of the steel industry and specifically melting. As a student, you receive general training. I was looking for opportunities to enhance that knowledge and for opportunities to meet with industry professionals to increase my knowledge base and aid my career development.

The first meeting I attended was an Eastern Section meeting in Valley Forge, Pa. A few years later, I got involved with the Electric Furnace Conference Committee and helped with organizing the conference papers with Duff Hunt, among others. I was involved in the EAF Committee for quite a while, eventually becoming chair of the division.

Iron & Steel Technology: What would you describe as the main professional benefits of being an AIST member?



O'Hara: For me, the key benefit has been the ability to network — getting out and meeting people with similar jobs at various phases of my career. Through the organization, I was able to meet people in all walks of their careers. This is a benefit that is not limited to the first few years of membership. The interest, the opportunity and the advantages do not diminish. Members can take advantage of the networking opportunity throughout their entire career.

Second, it is a great source of technical information. Whether it be through conferences, publications, short courses or local meetings, the association provides forums and opportunities to obtain and exchange information.

Membership in AIST allows individuals to learn from others who are encountering similar problems. It enables you to get to know people so that, when problems or situations arise, you have someone to talk to.

From a career development standpoint, participating on a committee provides the opportunity to observe management styles that differ from the one you are exposed to in your own organization. The opportunity to work with other professionals in problem-solving and/or negotiation situations provides real-world experiences that are hard to duplicate.

Iron & Steel Technology: Do you think there are ways that your involvement with the association has benefited your company?

O'Hara: Yes, membership has been a benefit to both Carpenter Technology Corp. as well as myself. Membership, and more importantly participation, has given me broader experience and access to other steel

industry professionals. I believe that, to the extent I have grown as a professional through my experiences in the association, it makes me more valuable to my employer.

I spoke before about being exposed to different management styles in various committee work and how valuable that exposure is. This is especially true for me, being with one company my entire career. Each company has a different culture or how they go about things with their own unique management style. It's very good to be able to walk out of that environment and see others in similar situations and get an idea that there's more than one way to skin a cat. That's very valuable. It has definitely affected my management style.

Networking not only helps the individual, but offers benefits to the employer as well. Numerous times I have called people I have met through the association to get help or opinions on specific problems being encountered. Several times, we have employed vendors originally seen at conference exhibits, often years later.

When I was beginning my career as a metallurgist, I attended specific training sessions on melting and on AOD technology. The specific knowledge I obtained allowed me to be more proficient at my job. AIST continues to offer this type of training today, which is another huge advantage of membership. That's a great opportunity to get specific, work-based knowledge that most corporations can no longer furnish themselves.

Iron & Steel Technology: Now that AISE and ISS have merged, how can AIST as an organization assist on both the producer and supplier side of the industry?

O'Hara: There's a lot of opportunity, and we have set this organization up so that we can be a benefit. We do want involvement from both the producer and the supplier side because the industry has changed. More of the functions that were always part of a large, integrated steel manufacturing facility have been pared down and outsourced.

I expect this trend to continue. It's very valuable that we retain people who in the past would have been producers but are now on the supplier side. A lot of development work in process and technology is now done on the supplier side. It is very important to have those on the supplier side of the industry involved. We've structured the AIST board of directors to include suppliers in order to demonstrate that commitment. In 2007, Charlie Messina, vice president of Praxair Metals Technologies, will become president of the association — the first supplier president of AIST. Suppliers and producers working together in our organization will have an opportunity to present papers at conferences and see what is displayed on the exhibition floor, as well. Suppliers now have the opportunity to speak with and mingle directly with those who are making decisions on what equipment and supplies

the producers are buying. AIST offers a tremendous opportunity to bring the two together.

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

O'Hara: I view my primary role as making sure that the executive committee and board are focused on the most important things for the association in both the short and long term. What we'd like to accomplish over the next few years is to grow membership and services.

We've been through some turbulent times over the past four or five years. Once we decided it was in the best interest of the steelmaking community to merge ISS and AISE, we put together a three-step plan. The first phase was transition. We had to combine the two organizations, which was very difficult for everyone, but executed very well on a very tight schedule. The second phase was stabilization. There were many changes in the new organization, and it was a challenge to ensure that the most important things were accomplished. New working procedures for the board and the full-time employees had to be developed on the fly. We are now poised to enter the third phase, which is growth.

As we move forward, I'd like to make sure that we cater to our entire constituency. In the old organizations, we had different groups that were smaller, but significant. We are still interested in catering to the needs of special groups, such as the special arcs and the foundry group. As an organization, we have to make sure that we don't lose track of those special interest groups. In the transition, AIST had to focus on the biggest pieces and make sure we didn't stumble and fall before we had an opportunity to run. When you're coming out of the gate, you have to concentrate on the first and second steps and not think about what's down the road. AIST is now up and running, and we're very solid. We've benefited from a good economy, so now we need to grow and take care of all the component parts of the association that we've put together.

During my term as president, the current transition board of directors will end their term. This board was assembled to lead the merger and transition to the new organization. We are now bringing on a new group that will represent the local Member Chapters and Technology Divisions in our permanent board structure. There will be a significant turnover now in our board that began in May 2005 (see board of directors listing on page 21.) Ensuring that the transition goes smoothly will be one of my key roles.

Iron & Steel Technology: With the goal of growth, how do you plan to encourage membership in AIST?

O'Hara: First, we need to get our message back out there and let everyone know the benefits of belonging to AIST.

Second, we have to enhance what we have and create new opportunities for new members. Again, I think we've done a great job with our training programs, which are making an impressive contribution to the organization. Realizing that everyone can't attend the conferences, we have to look at other programming and alternative activities. That is part of AIST's strategy. Those are some things we can concentrate on going forward.

In the transition, we've had to turn around and have a major conference in the fall of 2004 and one in the spring of 2005 — a huge undertaking for the professional staff and volunteer members who have to put these programs together. There is not another AISTech event until May 1–4, 2006, in Cleveland, Ohio. This additional time will allow us to focus on activities that can accomplish growth.

All of our short courses lately have been sold out, obviously showing a lot of interest and pent-up demand. We now need to engage our membership. We are a membership-driven organization. We need to find out what people need and provide it. The most important thing we can do is provide value. If we have what people are looking for, the AIST membership will grow.

Iron & Steel Technology: Do you plan on visiting the local chapters or traveling to AIST events?

O'Hara: Yes. That's obviously difficult in today's work environment, but we will coordinate between other board members to get as much coverage as we possibly can.

It is important and now is the time to work with the chapters. The process and procedural infrastructural work is done, with 95 percent of that work behind us now. We are poised right now and have to take advantage of the economic situation in the steel industry. We are in a cyclical industry that is experiencing an upswing; we need to get out and service our constituents.

Iron & Steel Technology: What is the greatest challenge facing AIST?

O'Hara: AIST has a twofold challenge. First, we need to attract the industry as a whole. To accomplish this, we need to ensure that we have the type of training to assist with career development in order for producer and supplier companies to see our value.

Second, we need to attract new, young talent into our organization. AIST can play a role with our student chapters by getting people involved through the engineering departments and providing education on the steel and primary metals industry. We can now work with schools, concentrating on more of a general engineering focus, and speak to virtually all disciplines. Previously, ISS was metallurgy focused and AISE was more mechanical and electrical focused. Now, as one organization, we can reach the schools of engineering

as a whole, rather than the individual departments. That is a strength. We can speak to all disciplines. We have much more to offer now.

The other concern is the graying work force in the steel industry. Our members are comprised from that work force. So we face the same aging issue. A lot of companies over the next 10 years will need an influx of new blood, which is important to keep this industry vital. AIST is going to be in the middle of that, and we have to figure out the best way to make that part of our strategic plan. The technology of steelmaking is advancing, and with that advancement will come a more technologically advanced work force. There should be less manual labor but more engineers and technicians. This should provide opportunity for our association. We need to position ourselves to take advantage of the situation. Steelworkers will have to be more sophisticated, and the message we need to convey to the next generation is that steelmaking is a viable, well-paying career choice.

The American Iron and Steel Institute (AISI) recently partnered with the AIST Foundation to create the Ferrous Metallurgy Education Today Initiative (FeMET). The goal of the FeMET Initiative is to compel students to choose metallurgy or materials science as their field of interest and to recruit such graduates into the steel industry. The program includes a scholarship and summer internship for college juniors and seniors, a design grant program, a curriculum development program and a steel industry–university advisory round table. There are exciting programs coming out of this collaboration. (For more information, visit the AIST Web site at www.aist.org.)

In summary, over the last year, the steel industry has experienced a turnaround, and what's good for the industry is good for the association. We are all benefiting from the cycle that is coming back a lot quicker and a lot stronger than anticipated. We are now coming back from the biggest debt since the mid-1980s. The rebound has been encouraging because it has been so rapid and so strong. Plans are materializing now for capital spending. Companies were holding off to make sure the recovery was robust and sustained, and now there is a careful watch to guard against overcapacity that would deteriorate pricing. The steel industry is now poised for a lot of activity on the capital side, with more to come in 2005 — not to increase capacity, but to replace equipment and improve technology and productivity. ♦



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