



# 1996 PRESIDENT



## JOHN H. SCHEEL • IRON & STEEL SOCIETY

plant as senior blast furnace engineer. The plant then started a plant technology group, of which John was named manager – plant technology in 1988. The group included the cokemaking, ironmaking, steelmaking, hot rolling, cold rolling and finished areas. He became area manager – steel production and processing in 1989. And, in 1991, he was named general manager at Ashland. John attained his last AK position as general manager, design engineering, in 1993.

Before going to college, John joined the U.S. Marine Corps in 1972. While enlisted, he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in metallurgical engineering from Purdue University in 1976 and 1977, respectively. (He served in the Reserves from 1975-1977.) In addition, John earned an M.B.A. in finance and international business from Xavier University in 1981.

John has written 16 technical articles and has one patent. He also has received several honors and awards. Among these is the ISS's J.E. Johnson Jr. Award (1984).

*I&SM* visited John in Trinidad in late January to discover his plans for the Society in the coming year.

**I&SM:** What do you plan to do in your year as ISS president?

**SCHEEL:** The best thing I could do is to keep doing what [1995 President] Keith Brimacombe started. It's an interesting study to read the interviews of incoming presidents – read what they say they are going to do, and then, at the end of the year, see what they've really done. What Keith said – and this is from memory – is that he wanted to improve international relations. We've done that. We've started more international chapters – the Mexican chapter, the Argentina chapter.

Keith said he wanted to get into financial and strategic planning, and we've done that. He said he wanted to make the Society membership stronger, improve the quality and timeliness of publications, and empower the divisions.

The mechanisms to accomplish these goals are being put into place. I think we've got to continue to push that agenda. I think it's the right thing to do.

**I&SM:** Many of those items are in the ISS Strategic Plan. As chairman of the Strategic Planning Committee, what can you tell us about the plan and its origin?

**SCHEEL:** The Strategic Plan was borne out of a financial planning effort. The process through which the divisions had access to Society money was, at best, misunderstood and, at worst, impossible to negotiate. That's not good. The society is a nonprofit business. The money that's taken in should be used to benefit the membership. It needs to be dispersed equitably across all the divisions.

The Board needed a more controlled way to plan spending to the best benefit of the membership. In doing this it had to determine what activities the Society should pursue – where it should put its resources. That activity mushroomed into the Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Planning Committee took representatives from each of the divisions and the Executive Committee and pounded through where it felt the Society needed to go and what needed to be done – not necessarily how it should be done, but what needed to be done. That product was reviewed by all the locals, the Divisions, and the various committees – or at least the heads of the committees. Everybody had some input into it.

We [the Strategic Planning Committee] next created a Plan that was accepted by the Board in November. Now we're trying to figure out how to get the goals of the Plan accomplished. It will be a living document, so that as times change, we can adjust the course of the ship.

**I&SM:** What is the heart of the plan?

**SCHEEL:** By the very nature of the Strategic Plan, it's member-focused. Anything that doesn't provide value to the membership has been discarded. Every part has value. It doesn't matter whether

Although John H. Scheel has had hands-on experience in most areas of steelmaking, he remains an ironmaker at heart. Today he holds what is perhaps one of the most exciting positions in the field. Since October 1995, John has been the production manager at Nucor Iron Carbide Inc. in Trinidad.

John also holds an exciting position in the Iron & Steel Society. He is president for the 1996 term. Since the start of his iron and steel industry career in 1977, John has been active in the ISS. He had been particularly active in the Ironmaking Division and in the division's conferences. In fact, he likes to say, "Everything happens at the Ironmaking Conference."

John served the Ironmaking Division as program session chairman from 1981 to 1987, program chairman in 1988, secretary in 1989, vice chairman in 1990, and chairman in 1991. He also was a member of the Howe Memorial Lecture Committee from 1988 to 1992. From 1991 to 1993, John was a member of the Board of Directors. He has been an ISS officer since 1994. As president-elect in 1995, he also chaired the ISS Strategic Planning Committee.

John began his career as an engineer in the research laboratory at AK Steel Corporation's predecessor company, Armco Steel Company, Middletown, OH. In 1982, he joined the Ashland, KY,



# 1996 PRESIDENT

## JOHN H. SCHEEL • IRON & STEEL SOCIETY

the part concerns student chapters, or the ISS Foundation, or education.

Each member has his or her own reason for belonging to the Society. Members should extract that part of the Society which is of value to them. If there is a need that's not being met, members should make it known to the divisions, the locals, the Executive Committee, the Board, or the staff. That's what the Society is all about – fulfilling needs.

**I&SM:** Are there any areas of the Plan you would like to focus on?

**SCHEEL:** The hard thing is when you have to take committees or groups and make them more uniform. One area I'd like to concentrate on is the locals. Another is the divisions. The divisions are doing a great job. One of the things the Board struggled with was the divisional structure. This does not mean the Board wants to do radical surgery, but, things are getting more and more closely tied together. You can't separate members of the Mechanical Working and Steel Processing Division from steelmaking. And it's hard to separate the Steelmaking people from the Electric Furnace Division people. The Society is becoming more classless. That's healthy.

One of the things conference attendance does is give people the opportunity to break down boundaries. It lets ironworkers learn about galvanizing and vice versa. The nature of the industry is such that today you could be a steelmaking manager, and tomorrow you could find yourself in the coke plant. Look at [past ISS President] John Holditch – an ironmaker. Now he's running a minimill [Gallatin Steel Company].

**I&SM:** What other advantages do you see in Society membership?

**SCHEEL:** The biggest advantage of Society membership is the people you can interact with. You can't really verbalize the opportunity that makes available. It can alter your life, seriously. You can develop relationships that go beyond just business acquaintances.

**I&SM:** Has Society membership altered your life?

**SCHEEL:** A lot. The career part goes without saying. As a personal example, when I was thinking about getting married, it was, as you might expect, at an Ironmaking Conference. I went to dinner and that's what we talked about. We didn't have any good esoteric conversation about ironmaking. We talked about the pros and cons of being married. In the Society, you've got a whole block of people that, in one way or another, have common experiences.

**I&SM:** Why did you join the Society? Do you remember?

**SCHEEL:** The year 1977 was the earliest I could join. It was the first Ironmaking Conference after I got my degree. I actually went to my first Ironmaking Conference before that. Ed Case [now an ISS member who works at Armco Inc.] and I were at Purdue together. We got in the car and drove to St. Louis. It was a good thing to do because you could learn from the people that you met. It's like going to school. Two-thirds of what you learn is outside of the classroom. And two-thirds of what you learn at a conference is outside the sessions. You can't beat it.

**I&SM:** Has your membership in ISS benefited your employers?

**SCHEEL:** Tremendously. ISS members become better employees. Whether the subject is new processes, new problems, or old problems – the Society is what you could call the "town square" of the iron and steel industry. Access to it gives you access to solving problems, correcting designs, implementing new designs – it directly translates to the bottom line of every part of the business. It doesn't matter whether you're in manufacturing, or sales, a supplier, or a customer. I think the people I've worked for have gotten the benefit [of ISS membership]. In every job, I've encouraged membership for that reason. I think it's critical. It pays for itself

time and time again.

**I&SM:** While we're on the subject of employers, let's talk about yours. How did you come to leave AK and join Nucor?

**SCHEEL:** It was a chance of a lifetime. And, of course, I've been an ironmaker at heart for 20 years, and this is really the first significant ironmaking technology that is new and different. I'd been watching this for sometime. Everybody has. It probably is the only thing I would have left AK to do, and, of course, did – to work at this plant. The fact that it is Nucor makes it even better because of the company's reputation.

**I&SM:** Did Nucor find you?

**SCHEEL:** It started at an Ironmaking Conference – you know, everything happens at the Ironmaking Conference. Last year it was in Nashville, and the year before that it was in Chicago. Gus Hiller then worked at Northshore, which was AK's main supplier. At the time, Nucor was after Gus to become the production manager here. I told him he'd be a fool not to take it because it was the chance of a lifetime, a process that would work, and he would grow from a professional, academic viewpoint. He finally came here in February of 1995. In June or July, Nucor decided to make Gus the general manager, which left a hole as production manager. That's when he called me. I could hardly tell him it was a dumb idea, because I had already told him it was a chance of a lifetime, a "no-brainer." So, I came here in early September and looked around. By the first of October I was here.

**I&SM:** You had 18 years with AK.

**SCHEEL:** Yeah. It's a great company. Cincinnati is a great place to live. And, suddenly you walk into the house one day and say: "Guess what? We have this opportunity." And you ask yourself, "How badly do you want to be an ironmaker? Badly enough to take the kids out of school, irritate mother-in-law – taking all the grandchildren away, etc.?" But if we can make this plant work – that's the



# 1996 PRESIDENT

## JOHN H. SCHEEL • IRON & STEEL SOCIETY

fun of it. That's what makes the change worthwhile.

**I&SM:** How are operations at the iron carbide plant?

**SCHEEL:** I don't have any reason to think it won't work at 100 percent. Basically, if you can't deliver the material to the reactor, you can get it out. The reactor appears to be doing what it's supposed to do. The thermodynamics and kinetics are doing what they're supposed to do. The carbide is being produced.

**I&SM:** Some people say the plant was poorly engineered.

**SCHEEL:** Nucor went to reputable people and put a lot of money into pretty good equipment. But, it's kind of like having an orchestra with real good trombone players and real good piano players. You have all these good players, but the conductor didn't put them together right. That's true, and Nucor recognizes that. We can dwell on it, or we can fix it. What did Ken [Iverson, ISS member and Nucor chairman] say? "If it's worth doing, it's worth doing poorly." If it's done poorly, you can fix it and make it work. We just have to get it all working together. That's what operating people do.

**I&SM:** Where do you see your career going? Will you remain an ironworker?

**SCHEEL:** I don't know. I don't draw boundaries on myself. I've done ironmaking, I've done steelmaking, I've started up casters, I've modernized electrogalvanizing lines, and built picklers and cold mills. I've worked in unionized settings and nonunionized settings, and worked with people as well as the presidents. I think it's more important to enjoy what you're doing, because you'll get a better and more long-lasting result.

Right now, what I'd like to do is prove this thing [the iron carbide process] – which I think is momentary. I think the technical viability is around the corner. It's just a matter of consistent operation. The problems we're having are not technical.

They are operational. Then, we will build some more units, turn this into a Nucor Division and go from there.

**I&SM:** What do you think the future holds for the iron and steel industry?

**SCHEEL:** I don't see iron and steel being supplanted by alternative materials. That doesn't mean we have to get lazy or less technically sophisticated in the future. Steel is a very desirable material. It is very recyclable, and that makes it fairly energy efficient.

As more steel companies are privatized around the world, steel will become more competitive. The competition will be good for the consumer and more exciting for the producer.

A lot of people think once the glass is full, that's it. The next step is to make a larger glass, so you can fill it. There are so many things to continue to improve upon in the industry. There are limitless opportunities, if you are willing to take a chance, personally or professionally.

**I&SM:** Do you feel the ISS should reach out to nonmetallurgical disciplines?

**SCHEEL:** Yes. Absolutely. In the iron and steel industry, the people who are metallurgical engineers make up a pretty small percentage. Mechanical, electrical and chemical business people also are in the industry. We have to include everybody – only in our diversity are we strong. If the Society was just a metallurgists' club, it wouldn't be nearly so valuable.

**I&SM:** What would you say to someone considering joining ISS? Are there any threats on the horizon for the Society?

**SCHEEL:** When you superimpose family and other interests, professional development can take a back seat. There are lots of professional societies. They're all competing for people's dues, but more importantly, they're competing for people's time. People just don't have that much time to give. I think people have to decide whether they are going to be passive or active participants.

If you want to take a passive role, you can. But, like I said, two-thirds of what there is to gain from Society membership is outside the formal functions. The two-thirds involves other active participants. That's the beauty of the Society. Since it is driven by the members, the active participants have more to offer than just a bunch of conventioners.

**I&SM:** What do you believe are the Society's greatest strengths?

**SCHEEL:** The members – and, through the members – education, and a relationship with academia and industry. The relationship between the different nationalities – Canadian, Mexican, European, Japanese, or American, etc. – is an advantage. An ISS member is just as comfortable calling Japan or South Africa as down the block. This is a great value that comes from membership. You can't say enough good things about the Society, if you take advantage of the opportunities. And, there are more opportunities coming. *I&SM*