

2019 AIST LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE: AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

By Amanda L. Blyth

Representatives from AIST's leadership flocked to The Peabody Memphis in Memphis, Tenn., USA, for AIST's annual Leadership Conference on 18–19 November 2019. Technology Committee and Member Chapter officers, Board of Directors representatives, and AIST Foundation trustees met for this two-day conference to hear perspectives on leadership, set the strategic course for AIST's vision and mission, catch up with old friends, and make new contacts.

The conference was held in conjunction with the AIST Ohio Valley Member Chapter's annual meeting. The meeting included a golf outing on 17 November and technical presentations on 18 November.

The historic Peabody Memphis provided a unique atmosphere for the Leadership Conference. The hotel has been named Best Historic Hotel two years in a row by *USA Today*. The famous Peabody ducks found their home at the hotel in the 1930s, and it was



The AIST Board of Directors met during the Leadership Conference in Memphis, Tenn., USA.

here that Elvis Presley negotiated and signed his first recording contract in 1955.

Despite the historical venue, the Leadership Conference attendees were tasked with looking toward the future — of AIST, of its membership and of the steel industry itself. To that end, much of the discussion and brainstorming sessions focused on attracting students, young professionals and women to the industry.

In his global steel industry outlook, AIST executive director Ron Ashburn gave the attendees an overview of the past, current and forecasted figures in steel demand, production and capability utilization. Issues such as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement and the 2020 election cycle were cited as possible disrupters in the market.

Among the highlights were the planned capital investments and those in progress across the North American steel industry, extending out to 2022, by companies such as Nucor Corp., JSW, Steel Dynamics Inc., Big River Steel and United States Steel Corporation.

Following this presentation, Ashburn provided an update on the state of the Association. At the time, AIST was poised to break its all-time professional membership record of 13,257, which was set in 1980 (over the course of the week, the record was indeed broken!).

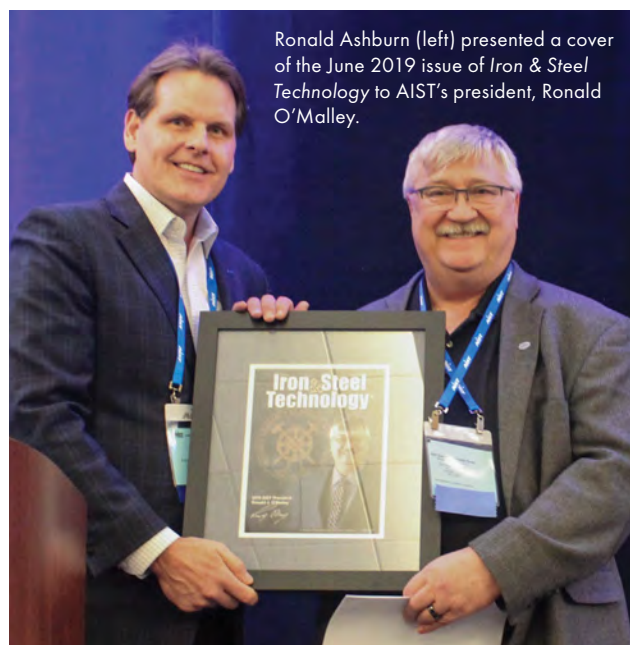
In his overview, Ashburn cited AIST's challenges — global steel overcapacity and dumping, a lack of a skilled workforce, and market development; and opportunities — a rejuvenated manufacturing sector, workforce development and exponential technology.

In a new segment this year, AIST staff and members gave updates on several key programs.

Pat Philbin, then-manager — technology programs, provided an overview of AIST's Road Shows. This grassroots program got its start at an AIST Leadership Conference, and it has grown by leaps and bounds over the years to be an effective tool in introducing AIST to the North American steel industry. At the time of the conference, AIST had completed 31 Road Shows. Philbin urged producer attendees to host an AIST Road Show at their plant



Ronald O'Malley and Ronald Ashburn presented the 2019 T.C. Graham Prize to Bruce and Logan Mullaney (left to right): O'Malley, Bruce Mullaney, Logan Mullaney and Ashburn.



Ronald Ashburn (left) presented a cover of the June 2019 issue of *Iron & Steel Technology* to AIST's president, Ronald O'Malley.



John Wilson (left) presented a retirement gift to Pat Philbin (right), who retired from AIST in December 2019.

Chris Kuehl of Armada Corporate Intelligence presented regional and global economic trends.



and encouraged suppliers in the audience to sponsor an upcoming Road Show.

Next, Danielle Schleiden, manager — membership, spoke about AIST's Steel to Students Program. This comprehensive program includes industry recruiting receptions, contests, travel grants, K-12 outreach, training events, plant tours and more. It provides students personal contacts and exposure to the steel industry, financial assistance, and access to events on or near their university campuses. Schleiden also

highlighted the Real Steel Video Contest, which challenges students to research the steel industry and produce a three-minute video.

Stacy Varmecky, general manager — sales & marketing, then talked about AIST's Young Professional programming. AIST's Bring Your Own Young Professional program also got its start at an AIST Leadership Conference, and Varmecky provided an update on the milestones that have been achieved. Since 2013, there has been a 192% increase in Young Professional membership, 30% in the past year alone. In addition, she presented the percentage of Young Professional participation in each of AIST's Member Chapters and Technology Committees, which continued to be referenced throughout the remainder of the conference.

Finally, Christopher Burnett of Thermo Fisher Scientific gave an update on AIST's Digital Transformation (DT) Strategic Plan. Burnett is a member of the five-person Core Team that organized AIST's first Digital Transformation Forum for the Steel Industry in 2019. He provided an overview of AIST's mission and vision with regard to digital transformation, and reviewed the priorities of the DT Strategic Plan, which include providing a home within AIST for DT, disseminating DT knowledge, creating DT incentives for industry and academia, and positioning the steel industry as a leader in DT.

Following the program updates, the audience heard from Chris Kuehl of Armada Corporate Intelligence, who gave a presentation on regional and global economic trends.



Kuehl pointed out that the U.S. is indeed a manufacturing economy, even if it may not appear so. One interesting statistic he referenced was the percentage of manufacturing jobs in the U.S. and how that number is often misreported. It's common to hear that the manufacturing sector makes up roughly 10% of jobs; however, those statistics often only count those employees who work in the shop or on the assembly line. They don't count those who work in research, accounting, marketing, etc. When those occupations are factored in, according to Kuehl, the real number is closer to 40%.



In the Leadership Perspectives session, Dick Teets answered questions from Ron Ashburn and attendees.

The group then switched gears for brainstorming and strategic planning. This session, known as “Air-It-Out,” required the attendees to divide into groups to discuss several themes: Rules of Engagement for Virtual Meetings, Effecting Positive Change for Women in Steel, Promoting Advances in High-Strength Steels, and Recruiting the Next Generation: Mobilizing Our Industry. Two additional topics emerged as a result of audience suggestions: Safety and Carbon-Neutral Steel Production.

The session closed with each group reporting its results and the attendees assigning priority to each theme. Some of the top priorities included: electing a female AIST president; creating marketing campaigns focused on the high-tech side of the steel industry to attract younger people to the industry; focusing more AIST events on the issue of decarbonization; and making time in every Technology Committee meeting to discuss safety.

Following this discussion, the 2019 T.C. Graham Prize was presented to Bruce and Logan Mullaney, who traveled from Australia to receive the award. Their proposal was titled “Semi-Modular Steel Reinforced Bridge System.” Logan Mullaney gave a quick overview of the modular bridging system and fielded questions from the audience. You can read more about this prize-winning technology and



Vivek Wadhwa presented “Digital Transformation: Embracing the Disruption” on 19 November 2019.

read the team’s proposal in this issue of *Iron & Steel Technology*.

This year’s Leadership Perspectives session featured retired founder of Steel Dynamics Inc. (SDI), Dick Teets. The past AIST president fielded questions from Ron Ashburn and the audience on his career, the



The conversation continued, with discussion of Teets' career path, the differences in the corporate cultures he experienced over the years, and the leadership tactics he picked up along the way.

The audience enjoyed hearing Teets' stories and many had the opportunity to ask questions and talk with him at the reception that followed.



Quaker Houghton had personnel on-site for the vendor displays during the receptions (left to right): John Accurso, Amy Beard and Nick Hladek.

The following morning, the audience heard from Vivek Wadhwa, who is a Distinguished Fellow and Adjunct Professor at Carnegie Mellon's School of Engineering at Silicon Valley and Distinguished Fellow at the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard Law School.

Wadhwa's thought-provoking presentation, "Digital Transformation: Embracing the Disruption," painted a picture of where technology is taking us over the next five to 10 years. From the future of medicine to smart cities, he emphasized that digital technologies will disrupt current lifestyles and ways of doing things.

But, he said, "leaders disrupt themselves before someone else disrupts them."

creation of SDI in the 1990s and what motivated him throughout his career.

Following the advice of his father, Teets found that what motivated him was "chasing technology."

"My father said, 'Always follow technology. You'll never want for a job.'"

Teets recalled the first time he saw a tabletop model of SMS' thin-slab caster at AISE's annual convention and how he wanted to be involved with that technology, no matter where it took him.

Not too long after, it ended up taking him to Nucor Steel in Crawfordsville, Ind., USA.

For steel, Wadhwa said, the competition isn't within the industry — it's against competing materials such as plastic and graphene. He cited several examples of where additive manufacturing is headed, particularly in the automotive, construction and transportation sectors.

He emphasized that this disruption will create opportunities in the manufacturing sector to build factories and create infrastructure, which will ultimately be good for the economy.

Breakout sessions followed in the late morning and early afternoon for representatives from AIST's Technology Committees and Member Chapters.

The Technology Committee session was led by Brian Bliss, general manager — programs & publications.



Bliss discussed the Young Professional chair and Digitalization Applications liaison positions and what the expectations and functions are for those roles. He reviewed the International Study Tour program and encouraged each committee to consider holding a study tour, as well as international venues for committee meetings.

The representatives then took turns discussing their committees' recent activities, publications, challenges and successes.

The Member Chapter workshop was led by Stacy Varnecky and Jill Liberto, Member Chapter advisor. Liberto opened the workshop with an overview of Chapter growth metrics and status updates on topics that were points of discussion at last year's workshop. Varnecky then led a discussion on Member Chapter scholarship marketing and the implementation of a Young Professional chair position to Member Chapter executive committees. The workshop provided Chapter officers a forum to openly share the successes and challenges of their programming efforts for the year, and gain insight from one another.

AIST would like to thank all of the sponsors of the 2019 Leadership Conference.



The Ohio Valley Member Chapter's golf outing was held on 17 November (left to right): Steve Murphy, Larry Marks, John Wilson and Stacy Varnecky.

The group reconvened in the afternoon for a Leadership Conference tradition: AIST Jeopardy! At the close of the conference, Ron Ashburn gave a summary of the key takeaways from the Air-It-Out discussions and steps forward. ♦

