

AIST DISTINGUISHED Member and Fellow



James (Jimmy) O. Barrett has worked in the steel industry for 55 years. His career began in the Bethlehem Steel Lackawanna blast furnace labor gang during his last year of high school in 1969. The year after that, he enlisted in the U.S. Air Force. Upon completion of service in the active military, he came back to the Lackawanna blast furnace, working full time and going to college full time, earning his B.S. degree from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1977. After receiving his degree, Barrett earned a place in Bethlehem Steel's advanced technical training program for supervisors. In 1978, he was transferred to Sparrows Point as a blast furnace engineer, where he was involved with the start-up of L Blast Furnace. In 1984, he moved to steelmaking for the start-up of the continuous caster. At the caster, he worked several positions up to general foreman, and reached the title of senior technical advisor for refractory for Mittal USA. After 41 years as a producer in the steel industry, Barrett was recruited by Allied Mineral Products. Barrett is the education chair for both the AIST Refractory Systems Technology Committee and the Ladle & Secondary Refining Technology Committee, positions he has held for the past 10 years. He was instrumental in founding the AIST Secondary Steelmaking and Refractories Technology Training Conference. He is also an active member of the AIST Ironmaking Technology Committee. Barrett remained in the Air Force reserve and retired with the rank of E-9 chief master sergeant in 1996 after 26 years of military service.



Jimmy Barrett (right) was presented with the AIST Distinguished Member and Fellow Award by 2022–2023 AIST president Keith Howell (left) at AISTech 2023.

In recognition of his leadership and dedication to furthering the mission of AIST. An expert in steelmaking refractories with four decades of experience, Barrett was instrumental in founding the AIST Secondary Steelmaking and Refractories Technology Training Conference, and his resourcefulness ensured the continued success of this program even during the COVID-19 pandemic. Time and again Barrett has lent his support to the association and his fellow members as an educator and mentor, encouraging and motivating the next generation of steelmaking and refractory engineers.

Iron & Steel Technology (I&ST):
How did you get started in the industry? Talk about your career path.

Jimmy Barrett (JB): I started my career working nights in the blast furnace at the Bethlehem Steel Lackawanna plant in 1969 while completing my senior year of high school. I joined the United States Air Force in the fall of 1970 and served my country for 4 years as an air traffic controller. When my active duty was complete, I went back to Bethlehem Steel. At that time, I knew I needed a 4-year degree to advance in my career, so I enrolled in the State University of New York at Buffalo. I proudly earned my B.S. degree while continuing to work full time at Bethlehem. After receiving



Barrett checks for slag in Sparrows Point “L” blast furnace, 1979.

my degree, Bethlehem Steel moved me to a salaried position, and I was promoted and put in a technical trainee program. In 1978, I was transferred to the Sparrows Point plant to start up the L blast furnace as a process engineer/furnace foreman.

After accomplishing my goals at the blast furnace, I was promoted to Sparrows Point’s new caster project as a caster engineer, and at start-up I was promoted to caster foreman. After 4 years I was promoted to general foreman of the pit, where my responsibilities included the tundish area, ladle lining area, and ladle treatment station, basically everything from the tapping of the BOF to the caster turret. When Mittal Steel purchased Sparrows Point, their corporate team liked what we were doing regarding refractories at Sparrows Point, and I was promoted to senior technical advisor for steel refractories for ArcelorMittal North America, along with the plant refractory manager for Sparrows Point. In 2011, Allied Mineral Products/Allied Mineral Technical Services hired me as a senior technical advisor — iron and steel. I decided to make a change and work with the Allied team. Allied is an employee-owned company

and has been an excellent career path for me. I’ve been in the steel industry for 55 years and am still going strong!

I&ST: Who has been most influential in your life for your career?

JB: Wow, what a great question! So many people have influenced me in my years in the steel industry. I’ll start with Fred Rorick at the Lackawanna plant. Fred encouraged me to get the education I would need to move up in the world, and then in 1977 he promoted me from a 3rd helper at the blast furnace to a salaried supervisor, which jump-started my career. In the steelmaking department at Sparrows Point, Bob Jones, Tom Russo, Rick Fash and Mike Panzeri were always challenging me to improve during their respective times as superintendent. They pressed me to become a better leader and to take advantage of AIST opportunities. When coming to Allied Mineral Products in 2011, both Paul Jamieson, now CEO, and Floris Van Laar, director of AM Technical Solutions, helped me make the transition from steel production

to refractory supply, which is not always easy for a producer to do. The people at Allied Mineral Products also taught me the importance of company culture.

***I&ST:* How did you get involved with AIST?**

JB: The Sparrows Point Bethlehem Steel management team of Bob Jones and Tom Russo recognized the importance of what was then ISS and AIME in the late 1980s. Bob and Tom wanted Sparrows Point to be a world-class steelmaking facility, so we got involved, which provided technical and network advances in the industry.

***I&ST:* What made you interested in educating others through the AIST Secondary Steelmaking and Refractories Technology Training Conference?**

JB: When I worked as a steel producer, I saw a strong need for educating our workforce in the refractory field. I wanted to make an impact on the next generation of steel producers. It is so important that a refractory person knows why a particular refractory needs to go to the right place, and the bigger question of WHY!

Jimmy confers with Richard Fash (center) and Tom Russo (right) while observing tundish spraying at Sparrows Point, 1990s, during conversion from tundish boards to tundish spraying.



I&ST: How has your membership benefited you in your career?

JB: I would not be talking with you right now without my membership in AIST. AIST has advanced my career in many ways. For the past 20 years I have attended AISTech technical sessions to keep up with current advances. The sessions always teach me something new to take back to my company, which helps advance our latest technology. I like the quote from Jack F. Welsh, former CEO of General Electric: “I am convinced that if the rate of change inside an institution is less than the rate of change outside, the end is in sight.” I am always thinking about the future, where we should be in two years, five years or 10 years. My AIST membership has provided me with the right tools to help me be the best I can be, and to help my company be the best it can be.

I&ST: What have you accomplished that makes you most proud?

JB: Our team of presenters for the Secondary Steelmaking Refractories Technology Training course has educated more than 1,000 steelmakers in the past 11 years. These men and women are the future of the steel industry, and I am very proud of that accomplishment. I could not do it without the help and support of the Ladle & Secondary Refining and Refractory Systems Technology Committees, as well as the presenters. I am grateful to all of them for their work on the conference.

I have received several awards over my career. I am especially proud to have been

named AIST Distinguished Member and Fellow. I have also received the Bethlehem Steel Gold Award, the highest individual achievement presented by Bethlehem Steel Board of Directors; and the ArcelorMittal Steel USA achievement award for contributions to corporate Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) project in refractory cost management. Outside the steel industry, I am proud to have served my country in the U.S. Air Force and Air National Guard, retiring after 26 years of service with the highest enlisted rank of E-9, Chief Master Sergeant. Fewer than 2% of the enlisted ranks ever make this rank in the U.S. Air Guard.

Lastly, I am very proud and grateful to have been married for more than 45 years to my wife, Carolyn. She has always supported me in my career.

I&ST: What does being recognized as an AIST Distinguished Member and Fellow mean to you?

JB: I call myself a dumb country boy because I learn by my mistakes and other people’s mistakes, so things don’t come easy for me. After I was nominated, I looked at the list of previous awardees and I am humbled to be in the company of such greats as Sara Hornby, Hans Schade, Ron O’Malley, Eugene Pretorius, Allan Smillie, Alan Cramb, Dick Fruehan, Ruth Engel, and many others too numerous to mention. The 18-year-old holding a shovel at a Lackawanna blast furnace could never have dreamed of such recognition, and I am grateful to AIST for this honor. ♦