

Friends and Fellows

An interview with 2020 AIST Distinguished Member and Fellow Award recipients William Breedlove and Dale Heinz

By Amanda L. Blyth



The Distinguished Member and Fellow Award recognizes AIST members who have attained eminent distinction in advancing the technical development, production, processing and application of iron and steel and/or related activities of the industry, and have performed meritorious service to the association.

Two of this year's awardees are longtime friends who have quite a few things in common: both served as AIST Foundation president, both were awarded AIME Honorary Membership, both were involved in securing the AIST Foundation's first US\$100,000 corporate pledges — and they both like to golf. In fact, each year at AISTech, the pair join Jerry Nelesen and Fred Harnack in raising money for the Foundation at the AIST Foundation Golf Classic.

It is because of their history together that *Iron & Steel Technology* interviewed William (Bill) Breedlove and Dale Heinz together. And in the current climate, that interview took place over Zoom this past summer.



Opposite page: William (Bill) Breedlove (left) and Dale Heinz (right).

Top right: Heinz congratulated Ashley Vayer-Jenkins, a 2008–2010 recipient of the FeMET Scholarship, at MS&T 2010. Top left: Breedlove spoke with 2004–2005 AIST president Thomas Graham Jr. (left) and 2015–2016 AIST president George Koenig (right) at AISTech 2009. Bottom: Heinz at the 2018 AIST Foundation Golf Classic (left to right): Heinz; Jerry Nelesen, AIST Foundation trustee; Wendell Carter, 2016–2017 AIST president; Fred Harnack, 2013–2015 AIST Foundation president; and Bill Breedlove, 2010–2011 AIST president and 2005–2007 AIST Foundation president.

Iron & Steel Technology (I&ST): How did you each become involved with the AIST Foundation — Bill, would you like to go first?

Bill Breedlove (BB): I was fortunate in that the company where I worked back in the 1980s along with my immediate supervisor, James Joseph Kelly, supported AIST (the Iron & Steel Society (ISS) at the time). He demanded

that I volunteer at the local level — I wasn't given a choice. The Midwest Chapter of the ISS at the time was a very active organization and I moved through the many roles within the local chapter. The people were great, because they would always help you; they knew I didn't know what I was doing. I was in my late 20s or early 30s, and they were very helpful. It was great.

I&ST: *I think that's how it goes most of the time. When you first join, you don't really know what to do, and you usually have someone who can guide you, which is great.*

BB: Absolutely.

I&ST: Dale?

Dale Heinz (DH): My involvement with the AIST Foundation really came from being involved with the ISS Foundation prior to the two groups merging. I'd been with the Foundation for a couple of years when the merger took place, and was pleased to continue on with the newly formed board that merged the two organizations together. I actually got there by virtue of Bill Breedlove's nomination to the ISS Foundation. To a large extent, this was an upgrade to the previous activities I'd had along the way, with program committees, local chapters and membership committees. It's kind of funny to hear Bill tell that story because when I joined in Cleveland in the mid-1990s, I had taken on a new job. I moved from iron producing to steel producing and was working with Bob McCormick. Basically, I sat down with him and was "voluntold" that I would join this organization. Bob was a big believer in the networking power of the organization and a strong promoter of membership to everybody that he came in contact with. He essentially was my mentor when I joined at that level.

BB: One thing I want to add to this. Dale and I; Bob Kuhn, who also served as a Foundation trustee; Jerry Nelesen and a few others, we all came out of the Midwest section. A little bit of history here: back then, we had an annual meeting called the president's dinner dance. The night before the dinner dance, the president of the Association would come in to the Chicago section, along

with the treasurer and AIST staff from Pittsburgh. We'd have a meeting where we would present them with a book about the year's activities from our Midwest Chapter. It was something that we, as a chapter, were quite proud of because of the technical meetings we held, the money we raised and the scholarships we handed out.

And I can tell you I found my way onto the Foundation through Alan Cramb. Dr. Cramb, who was the president of ISS at the time, was so impressed with the people in the Midwest section that he said, "We've got to get those people involved on a national level." So Alan Cramb is the one you can blame for all this. I owe him a debt of gratitude.

DH: Bill Sammon actually got me involved with the Midwest chapter after I moved out there in Y2K. I was sitting at my desk late one day in December of 1999, I think it was about 4:15 p.m., so it was pitch black outside in Chicago. My phone rang and it was Bill Sammon. He said, "Dale, welcome to the area. I understand you're quite active in the Cleveland chapter and wondered if you'd want to get involved with the Midwest Chapter too," to which I said, "Sure." And that got me started with the most active of active chapters, here in the Midwest.

I&ST: *And at what point did you meet Bill?*

DH: It was the first Midwest Chapter meeting that I attended. I think we ended up sitting next to each other, which is always a dangerous proposition. There's something about the relationship that Bill and I have that has been awful good for me. And I think he probably would say the same.



I&ST: *Aside from developing lifelong friendships, what do you think the biggest benefit of being involved in AIST has been, professionally?*

BB: Beyond the lifetime friendships, and I've developed many, is the work that we've done to help the industry sustain itself and prepare for the future. And we've done that on several levels — the most obvious one is attracting the brightest students into the industry through the Foundation and through the scholarships, the curriculum development programs and the grant program. The best thing that anybody in this industry can do is make sure that the future of the industry is in good hands. And I think that Dale and myself, and all the folks who have been on the Foundation, worked very hard to make that our legacy contribution to the industry and I'm quite proud of that.

DH: I certainly have to agree with Bill's comments wholeheartedly. I appreciate the opportunity to have a piece of that legacy as well. And I'd have to say, professionally, I've met an incredible number of extremely talented professionals from all disciplines of ironmaking and steelmaking. And this pool of talented individuals has provided me with resources and networking opportunity that's too valuable to actually put into words. I have on many occasions dialed somebody on the other side of the globe and said, "Hey, I'm faced with a problem here on this blast furnace, and I don't understand it. Have you ever seen anything like this?" I've been on the receiving end of those calls as well. A couple actually bring a smile to my face.

I&ST: *Let's talk about something that you both were involved in, which is the creation of several of the Foundation's grants: the FeMET program, the Steel Research Grant and the Steel Curriculum Development Grant. Can you talk about why those were created?*

BB: Wow, this is a great question. I joined the Foundation as a trustee in a period when we were so strapped for money that we did not distribute scholarships. We were literally raising money one dollar at a time by selling raffle tickets. I have seen the Foundation come full circle. Back then, the most critical task at hand for the trustees was to raise money so we could develop and find ways put the money to good use for the benefit our industry. The programs you mention — FeMET, the Steel Research Grant and the Curriculum Development Grant — were all developed as we raised sufficient funds to support them. It did not happen overnight. I was also very fortunate to serve on the Foundation board at a time when we had very smart and very aggressive volunteers who were

committed to making a difference for our industry — people like Tom Goettge, Dale Heinz and others.

The idea was to make sure that the curriculum was current, because some curricula had not kept up with what was going on in industry. We had professors on the Foundation at the time, and they were sending us messages asking for help, so the Foundation reacted to that.

I never thought they would grow as big as they have grown. It's just wonderful, and Dale was involved in that.

DH: We recognized a need to find a way to attract young professionals to our industry. The industry had gone through nearly a generation of contraction where the number of jobs available was limited by changing technology. So, for at least two decades, top engineering talent from the universities found mostly closed doors to the steel industry. The "graying" of the industry was becoming fairly apparent and the anticipated attrition from retirements presented a compelling picture of what was to come.

The grants were designed as an initial step in re-engaging students and faculty at the university level and provide an incentive for them to consider a career in steel manufacturing, as well as using the curriculum grant as a means to ensure steel was included as an option for study.

BB: I remember that I was literally scared. I was about to become president of the Foundation and Tom Goettge was instrumental in the curriculum development program. He dug in deep and it was in its infancy when his term was ending. So I said to him, "Tom, if I'm going to be president, I really need your help — could you please stay on for another two-year term?" He agreed to that, and it was because of Tom's efforts that the program was so successful. He did such a great job and I was scared it was going to fall apart on my watch — so it was my fear of failure!

DH: Fear of failure is proven to be one of the strongest motivators.

I&ST: *What more do you think the Foundation can be doing?*

BB: Our message then, and our message now, is that we are a highly technical, exciting and challenging industry with great people, and that it is an industry that offers tremendous career opportunities for personal advancement. But my dream has always been to raise enough money to the point where AIST could give a four-year scholarship and in return the recipient spends two years in the industry — sort of how it is with military.

DH: I have a little bit different perspective and I like your dream, Bill, that sounds terrific. I would bump that up to four years, so that they can really gain some level of understanding.

I think the Foundation can use its resources to paint a more attractive picture of steel as a vibrant industry and an attractive career. For too long, the industry has been portrayed as “rust belt” or at worst, “dying.” In fact, it is neither of these; rather, it is a constantly evolving business that is using all of the most recently developed technologies to become even more efficient. I think many students today are excited by what they can contribute to society by helping to improve the environment. To the extent AIST Foundation can engage students on this topic, I think they will find an eager audience.

BB: I think you’re right about that.

DH: I saw it with our most recent hires, who are coming out of school. I could engage them on something and say, “You know, we can improve the environment if we get 1% more efficient with energy,” as an example. Their eyes would just light up.

I&ST: *With all the different programs AIST offers right now, what’s one thing we’re doing that you are really excited about? Dale, would you like to start?*

DH: It’s hard to pick one thing, but I have to say that I’ve been really impressed with the AIST response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I think it’s been really well done. I’m obviously disappointed that the conference in my hometown of Cleveland was canceled for 2020. I was really looking forward to it for a number of reasons. But when I see the technology topics being offered as webinars, I appreciate the fact that somebody was looking forward and saw this as an opportunity to shift gears a little bit and still make those resources and the networking opportunities available to our membership.

I&ST: *Bill, what about you? What are we doing that you’re really excited about?*

BB: I’m thoroughly impressed with the global outreach that has occurred over the last five to 10 years. You know, in our day we were highly concentrated on North American steelmaking. It’s no longer the case. The association is in Asia, we’re in India, Australia, South America, Europe — it’s really impressive how the team has stepped up and grown the organization. Technical exchange and networking on a global scale is very exciting indeed.

I&ST: *You’ve been nominated by your peers within the Association who recognize your achievements and your contributions. So, Bill, what does winning this award mean to you?*

BB: I’m humbled by it. I’m excited about it. I volunteered my time and experience to AIST in an effort to give back to the industry that has been so good to me and my family. I owe a debt of gratitude to those who advocated on my part for this recognition. I am grateful, surprised, humbled, appreciative, excited and overwhelmed, all at the same time. I’m especially thrilled that my good friend Dale is having this same honor bestowed on him at the same time. It makes me so happy because he is very deserving of it.

I&ST: *Dale, what does winning this award mean to you?*

DH: I am deeply honored to receive this award, and I am humbled that my name is being added to a long list of industry icons. This was not something I’ve ever considered that would happen for me, so it was a bit surprising. I’m truly grateful to the nominating committee, the individuals who endorsed me, and to the Association for Iron & Steel Technology for selecting me for this honor. It represents a long time of providing service and hopefully some value to the organization. I would also like to take the time to acknowledge the contributions of a large number of my teammates in Cleveland, Lorain, Indiana Harbor and Burns Harbor. Without their efforts, I would not have had the flexibility and ability to serve AIST so readily or as often; so, in a sense, this award has also been earned by them. And without the ever-supporting presence of my wife Debbie, I could not have participated in the same fashion for so long.

I&ST: *I think you’re both so deserving of the award. Your contributions are beyond measure, especially through the Foundation and how many students have been impacted, so kudos!*

DH: I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and Bill and others.

BB: Thank you. ◆

You can watch the full interview on AIST’s YouTube channel.