Farewell, Janet!

For more than 40 years, Janet McConnell has helped to ensure this publication lands in your mailbox each and every month. She’s taught us a few things about teamwork, too. Now we must say good-bye.

At first glance, this issue of *Iron & Steel Technology* doesn’t seem altogether different from the previous one. But for those of us on staff here, there is one small detail that significantly alters this publication. For the first time in all the years AIST has published this journal, the name Janet McConnell does not appear in the staff credits.

Janet was our production editor, and she officially retired on 30 September.

Each month, she ushered into being what otherwise would be a haphazard collection of charts,
photographs, articles and advertisements. She also was AIST’s longest tenured employee and the manager of another crucial office function — she administered the Wednesday takeout order.

“We’re in trouble. Janet is the only one who knows the lunch specials. I’m bracing for chaos on Wednesdays,” said AIST executive director Ron Ashburn.

As with all else she did for AIST, Janet embraced that responsibility. But there was nothing she approached with more thought and skill than her role as the pre-press supervisor. She ensured that there was a place for everything in the journal and that everything was in its place.

And under her watch, it always was.

“Year in and year out, we have relied on Janet’s steadfast commitment to ensure *Iron & Steel Technology* always looked great, and that our many valued advertisers were happy with our flagship publication,” Ron said. “*Iron & Steel Technology* is an industry benchmark today, and we owe much of that respect and success to Janet for always making sure that nothing was released without our very best effort, each and every month, each and every year, and all without fail.”

Perhaps one of Janet’s most important and lasting contributions was to have helped the magazine and its supporters make the transition from physical paste-up to electronic publishing and then to cloud-based production. We struggle to imagine the countless number of slips of paper, floppy disks,
CDs, emails and .pdfs that have passed through her hands, and her hard drive.

But no matter the production method, a deadline is a deadline, and it has always been up to Janet to chase down advertisers whose ads were missing and corralling harried news editors who had yet to mark up final drafts. Turns out that a successful publication requires not only stellar content, but a great deal of nagging.

So in some sense, Janet was I&ST’s heavy, yet she was no more intimidating than her beloved Yorkie, Miss Molly, who often appeared in Janet’s holiday greeting cards. Incidentally, the other favorite dog in her life was of the Oscar Mayer variety, which she often ate for breakfast.

In addition to fast food, Janet appreciated fast cars, even if she rarely drove above the speed limit. Nevertheless, she in the mid-1990s bought a Dodge Stealth, a cruiser with a turbocharged V6 that could easily go from zero to 60 miles per hour in less than 6 seconds.

One time while driving down the highway, she was passed by a group of teenagers who, apparently incensed that a person in such a car would be below the speed limit, yelled, “Why did you buy a Stealth?”

The answer, of course: to haul firewood.

As AIST web administrator Gina Kosak recalls, Janet one time let her borrow the car to run an office-related errand. When she went to open the trunk, she found that Janet had filled it with cut wood. Turns out that she was driving out to a lake that evening.

“Janet is the only woman I know that drove a sports car and hauled wood in it. She never did show us how to disarm the car alarm. I’m not sure she knew.”

What Janet did know, however, was how to work with others. Amanda Blyth, who manages the publications department, recalled that one of Janet’s oft-repeated phrases is “build a bridge (and get over it),” her shorthand way of saying that any obstacle can be overcome with resolve and hard work.

“When some problem would come up, rather than joining us in wallowing in our sorrows, Janet would simply listen and say, ‘build a bridge.’ Her use of that phrase has always had an enormous effect on me,” she said.
“But I always thought it had another meaning, too, as in building a bridge with someone you’re disagreeing with. Find a solution together and get the job done.”

Going forward, it will be up to AIST senior graphic designer Chris Brown to get the job done. He’s taking over as production editor for Janet, who mentored him throughout his time at AIST.

“I will never forget my first day at work — 20 September 2004. It was everyone’s first day back in the office after AISTech 2004. The graphic designer who preceded me graciously came in to give me a half-day of training. When noontime came, she got up and promptly left.

“So I was left sitting there, unsure of what I should be doing, and that’s when I heard Janet on the other side of the cubicle wall. All she said was, ‘I gotcha, babe.’ And she did. Janet guided me every step of the way.”

Janet has been with AIST and its predecessor, the Association of Iron and Steel Engineers (AISE), for 43 years and her retirement marks a changing of the guard. Chris was the first to have been hired by the merged organization, and Janet was the last of the staffers who had spent more time with one of the predecessor organizations than they did with AIST itself.

In Janet’s case, she was with AISE for 26 years, and AIST for 17. But no matter how you parcel out the time, it’s an increasing rarity to see these lengthy service dates. So what kept Janet coming back?

For one, she said, it’s been great fun to watch the younger staffers mature, marry and start families of their own. But also, she said, the challenge of the job kept it interesting.

“Every day was something new. Plus, I enjoyed being a big nag,” she joked.