

36-year

AIST Life Member

Thomas Bovalina*



Thomas Bovalina is president and chief executive officer of Tenova Inc. in Pittsburgh, Pa., USA. Bovalina graduated from Washington & Jefferson College in 1979 with a B.S. degree in chemistry and a B.A. degree in economics. He earned an M.B.A. from Wheeling University in 1983. He began his career at Wheeling-Pittsburgh Steel Corp., Yorkville Plant in the metallurgy and quality control department and held several positions from metallurgical technician through general foreman in the cold mill and tin mill. In 1988, Bovalina joined LOI Inc., which became Tenova in 2006, holding positions in project management, engineering, sales and operations.

Tell me a bit about your background. How did you get started in the steel industry?

I grew up in Pittsburgh, Pa., USA, in the 1960s and 1970s, and back then steel was everywhere: Wheeling-Pittsburgh, Weirton Steel, LTV Aliquippa and Pittsburgh, Allegheny Ludlum, Armco, etc. Everyone you knew worked in the industry, and so it always held my interest. This is partly why I went to school already interested in chemistry and metallurgy.

During my senior year at Washington & Jefferson College, I interned at the Koppers chemical plant next to Wheeling-Pittsburgh's cokemaking plant in West Virginia. That was my first experience working in an industrial environment.

After I graduated in 1979, I was hired at Wheeling-Pittsburgh's Yorkville, Ohio, plant as a metallurgical technician, which marked the start of my career in the steel industry. I eventually moved on to other positions in the mill, such as foreman of

the inspection and testing group, claim metallurgist, general foreman of rolling and finishing, and finally general foreman of tin coating.

After nine years with Wheeling-Pitt, I joined LOI Industrial Furnaces as a process engineer. I eventually became project manager, then manager of process technology, manager of projects, operations director, then vice president of operations. In 2006, we were bought by Tenova, and in 2009 our division merged with Core Furnace Systems to form Tenova Core. In 2016, I took over as president and CEO and the company was renamed to Tenova Inc.

All together, I've been involved in the steel industry for 41 years.

Was there a person or a group of people who mentored you in the early stages of your career?

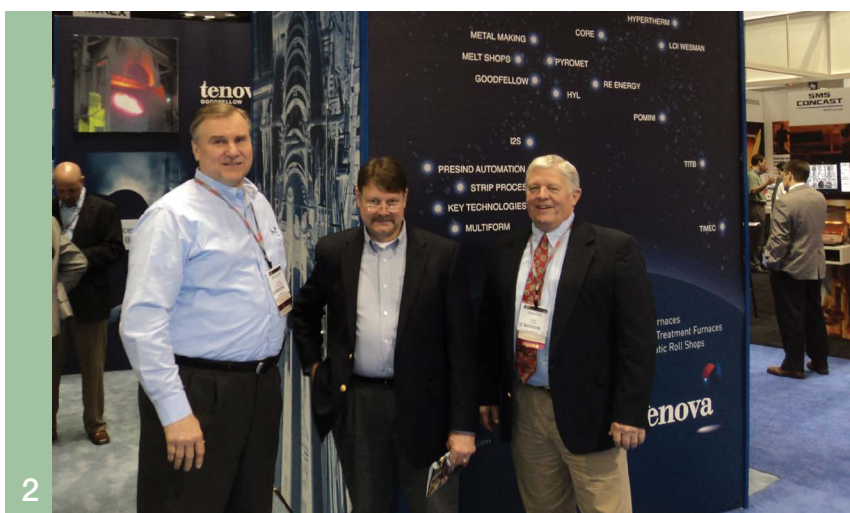
Early on during my time at Wheeling-Pitt, I had a couple of bosses who had an influence on my career. The first was Dan Kopec; he was my first boss in the mill. He taught me about the steelmaking process and working in the metallurgical lab. We also visited customers, so I started learning the business from the customer's perspective and what was required from our mill's products. Bruce Batdorf, who was the superintendent of my department at the time, also had a tremendous influence on me. Later when I moved into operations, Tom Phillips and Ed Neese taught me a great deal about how to manage mill operations.

After I transitioned to the supplier side of the industry in 1989, John Tanner helped me learn about project and operations management from the engineering side of the business.

When did you first get involved with ISS/AISE and what is your current level of involvement in AIST?

Right when I started in the industry in 1979, I began to attend the AISE conference in Pittsburgh every year. I also started regularly attending the ISS conferences for the technical papers. I joined ISS first, then later AISE.

I became involved with the AIST Technology Committees starting in the early 2000s. I began with the Project &



1. Bovalina (second row, far left) attended a kickoff meeting for a 2006 reheat furnace project at Altos Hornos de México (AHMSA).
2. Tenova's booth at AISTech 2011 in Indianapolis, Ind., USA (left to right): Tom Zamanski, Bovalina and Rand Kane.

Construction Management Technology Committee, but later joined the Cold Sheet Rolling, Hot Sheet Rolling, and most recently, the Plate Rolling Technology Committee. Right now, I am mainly involved in the Plate Rolling and Hot Sheet Rolling Technology Committees, attending meetings and supporting the Technology Training Conferences.

I also encourage our people at Tenova to be involved with AIST. Just recently we sponsored the 2021 Hot Sheet Rolling and Plate Rolling virtual conference and presented three papers: one on reheat furnaces, one on plate heat treating lines and one on roll grinders.



1. Line 2 normalizing furnace commissioning at Nucor Steel—Hertford County, 2014. 2. Bovalina attended a meeting of the AIST Hot Sheet Rolling Technology Committee in September 2015 at California Steel Industries Inc. in Fontana, Calif., USA.

How has AIST membership benefited your professional development?

The networking is key. Over the years I have had the opportunity to meet many people through AIST events, especially at the Technology Committee level, which benefited my industry knowledge and my business. In turn, I encourage the younger people coming up behind me to do the same.

What changes have you seen within the steel industry from the beginning of your career until now?

When I started in the industry back in the late 1970s, the U.S. was one of the largest steel producers in the world. The early 1980s saw that change in a big way, and today we've seen China take over that No. 1 role.

When I moved from the steel mills to the supplier side in the mid-1980s, one of the newest key technologies I was involved with was hydrogen annealing. That became a key development in the annealing of cold-rolled coils. If you look now, with the trend toward CO₂ emissions reduction and green steel, we're again seeing a big change in the way steel is produced. My company is directly involved in these changes with our work to develop direct reduced iron using hydrogen, carbon capture technologies to reduce CO₂ emissions, and many other projects for sustainable steelmaking.

What words of advice would you give to a young professional who is considering or about to enter the steel industry?

If you're a young professional in this industry, it pays big dividends to join AIST. Use this organization to further your development, to make the personal contacts, and to use what is available to you from the AIST training seminars and conferences for your education. ♦