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

I was born in Alabama and grew up in Pittsburgh, Pa., where I worked odd jobs during high school as a morning newspaper delivery boy, fast food cook and clothing store clerk. During my freshman year of college, I was hired as a summer laborer at the Houston, Pa., meltpshop of Washington Steel Corp. I worked there all four years of college, and learned every low-level job in the meltpshop from sweeping the floor; to loading lime, carbon and nickel into the charging bins; preparing graphite molds for bottom pouring; and hand-grinding slabs in the finishing end before they shipped to the rolling mill. Making a laborer’s wage in the steel industry was much better than my peers could make at a summer job, and the money I saved each summer got me through the next year of college. Upon graduating, I thought I’d never again walk through a noisy, dusty steel mill. I had no clue that I would spend the rest of my career in the steel industry, and love it!
Was there a person or a group of people who served as a mentor to you in the early stages of your career?

I was fortunate to be offered a job in the early ’90s as a district sales manager with the Carbide/Graphite Group (C/G) in Pittsburgh. C/G’s vice president of sales, Don Masyada, was my boss and became a mentor to me. Through job progressions at C/G, he provided me an opportunity to absorb his experiences in the steel business and gain technical know-how from industry veterans Bill Killian, Ron Hart and Jon Ciotti. These gentlemen were highly regarded in the electric arc furnace (EAF) industry and helped me build confidence and advance professionally. More importantly, I learned a lot about trust, integrity and people. My international experience at C/G helped me grow in global industry knowledge and develop lifelong contacts across the world. After C/G closed, I joined Bozel to help introduce and establish our company as a new producer of cored wires to the North American steel industry. We opened our first production line in 2013, which allowed me an opportunity to pay forward some of the mentoring I received, and also to make a difference in development of others as we added staff to our new plant in Michigan. JMC Group, the owners of Bozel, then gave me the opportunity to lead our company going forward. Through many opportunities and challenges over the years, I have been blessed to continue a lifelong friendship and the mentorship of Don Masyada.

When did you first hear about ISS/AISE and how?

I was invited by John Drenning, a retired United States Steel Corporation steelmaker and a consultant to my company. I started attending annual AIST conferences where my contacts with other steel industry people and suppliers grew. From those initial associations, I also became active with my local Member Chapter, which later became the Northeastern Ohio Member Chapter.

What was your first level of involvement in the organization? Do you remember your first event?

My first ISS/AIST event was the annual Christmas Party at the Palace Inn Monroeville, which was well-attended by steel producers and suppliers in the Pittsburgh area. Then I began attending local Member Chapter meetings and my industry contacts grew over the next several years. My first supportive involvement came later as I also attended meetings and events in the Canton, Ohio, area, helping to organize meetings and social events as part of the suppliers committee.
How has AIST membership benefited you in your career?
AIST membership and attending the annual conferences have provided important networking opportunities that continue to multiply year on year, opening many doors and allowing me to meet countless people here and globally that I would not have had the chance to meet otherwise. It was at one of these conferences that I was reunited with a past employer, who networked me toward the opportunity to join a new startup in the cored wire business that became Bozel North America.

How have you seen the industry change since you started? Are there any new developments that particularly excite you?
The monthly issues of Iron & Steel Technology (I&ST) enable those of us associated with the steel industry to maintain contact with our network and see who is doing what. It also helps readers generate new ideas, improve our businesses, and grow careers. I have always found the I&ST Industry Roundups valuable for information and updates in our industry. I have read about and admired innovators like Ken Iverson who brought Nucor from a steel joist manufacturer to what it has become today. Also, companies like Steel Dynamics Inc., started by people who developed at Nucor and went on to start other outstanding companies. Willy Korf also took chances no one else would, built steel plants and traveled the world talking up the future of the electric furnace and direct reduced iron (DRI). He built a DRI plant in Trinidad that some laughed at, but it became one of the models of the industry. I have admired the risks these steel entrepreneurs took to get the companies and our industry to where they are today.

We learn from articles and writings of their failures and successes. It is fascinating to see the increasing technological innovations in EAF and ladle metallurgy facility (LMF) steelmaking technology, improving efficiency, quality and safety in the steel mills.

At AIST, we’re always looking to inspire the next generation of steelmakers. What advice would you give to young professionals who are just coming into the steel industry?
The traditional North American steel producers have groomed and developed many innovators who began careers with the steel industry right out of college. These companies and the people they developed have improved steel-making processes to make cleaner, lighter and stronger grades of steel. Alumni of those companies have gone on to make innovations and start new companies. AIST can continue encouraging and supporting members to expand internship opportunities in the steel and supporting industries, helping to attract young, energetic men and women to become involved in early internships where they learn from the know-how of today’s mentors, and someday take leadership roles in the steel industry.

Hank Yeckley and wife Susan, Bozel Brazil visit, 2012.