



STEVE HENDERSON



Commercial Metals

STEVE HENDERSON



## AN INTERVIEW WITH 2021–2022 AIST PRESIDENT

# STEVEN J. HENDERSON

BY AMANDA L. BLYTH

Steve Henderson is vice president of the West Region of Commercial Metals Company (CMC). In his current role, he is responsible for CMC's mill, fabrication and T-post operations west of the Rocky Mountains. Henderson joined CMC as a technical assistant at CMC Steel Texas in 1994. He has since held various operations-focused leadership positions at CMC, including vice president and general manager of CMC Steel Arkansas/Southern Post and vice president and general manager of CMC Steel Arizona, overseeing the construction and start-up of the first micro-mill. After the successful start-up, he accepted the role of vice president of the East Region, followed by the role of vice president and chief supply chain officer, focusing on strengthening and developing the company's supply chain organization. He was then appointed to his current West Region role in January 2020. Henderson holds a B.S. degree from Texas A&M University and an M.S. degree from the University of Central Texas. He has been active as a community volunteer as well as active in civic and industry associations throughout his career. *Iron & Steel Technology* had the opportunity to speak with Henderson before he stepped into the role of AIST president.

### How did you become interested in the steel industry?

I believe I'm very lucky to be part of this industry. I spent my first seven and a half years out of college in aerospace. The company I was with wanted me to move, but my children were young at the time and we didn't want to move out of state. I sent my resume to a headhunter and, fortunately, after a few weeks, CMC offered me a position at their plant in Seguin. When I first toured the plant, I was so amazed by the process and impressed by the people — and I'm still amazed and impressed. I always consider myself very fortunate that CMC was growing at that time and became my door to the industry.

### Did you have a mentor when you started out in those early days?

I did, and I've been so fortunate to have had so many mentors over my 26 years in the industry. I've had

exposure to some great people at all levels in the organization over my career. I think our culture at CMC, and in the industry, is a learning culture and if individuals show interest, many people will spend quality time with them and encourage them to continue to learn and advance their knowledge of the business.

There are those special individuals who take you under their wing and I've been fortunate to have several of those over my career.

### Over your 26-year career, how have you seen the industry change?

Having been around a long time, I think change is really the only constant for our industry — and I do think that's healthy. Our industry is changing for the better. If you think back, the focus on safety has advanced significantly, technology has advanced significantly, and steel applications and chemistry continue to advance. There have been many innovations

in environmental control technology as well as the energy sector. I think it's definitely changing for the better.

### At what point did AIST come into your career?

Early in my career, I was encouraged to get involved with AIST. When I first started working in Seguin in 1994, I was told to go to the plant library and check out *The Making, Shaping and Treating of Steel: 101*. I was always encouraged to broaden my network with other producers, suppliers and customers.

### How have you benefited from being involved in AIST?

It's great to see the passion that our members have for the steel industry and the work that we do. After attending AISTech, you always come back with great ideas, and things that you can do to challenge yourself — how you can improve your company using the things that you learn.

I've also had the opportunity to serve on the scholarship committees and see firsthand the benefits of the AIST Foundation. That's something I cherish as well.

I think I'm better off for being involved with AIST. My involvement has helped me grow as a leader. Being a member of an organization whose mission is to advance technology, develop people, and enhance applications of steel supports both my passion and livelihood.

We have many people at CMC who are involved with AIST. The relationships that you develop, the classroom programs, the technical papers, they are all part of advancing the mission of AIST and enhancing knowledge. It all ultimately moves the whole industry forward.

### What has your experience been serving on AIST's Executive Committee?

Serving on the Executive Committee has been very humbling. When I first joined as Officer-at-Large, I had no idea of the scope and breadth of the efforts of the organization. I'll cherish my time and the new relationships that I've developed. I'm proud of my tenure on the Executive Committee. Serving on the committee allowed me to learn and develop a better understanding of the initiatives and the organization.



“AT CMC, WE’RE VERY PROUD OF OUR DIVERSITY. IT MAKES US BETTER. I BELIEVE THAT CONTINUING TO ATTRACT GREAT PEOPLE, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, IS CRITICAL TO THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF OUR INDUSTRY.”

### Is there any one thing you can say is your greatest accomplishment in your career?

The greatest accomplishment of anyone in a leadership role is really to develop people and help them to be successful.

I've been very fortunate to be involved in some major projects and initiatives over my career. If I had to name one, it would be my part on the team that constructed the first-ever micro-mill, which CMC built in Mesa, Ariz. We had a great team of people who were really committed to making this new technology successful. Building a greenfield site is very challenging but also very rewarding — I always tell people that their best memories will be from when they've had to give their best.

### AIST is devoting much attention and effort to attracting the next generation and more women to the industry. Have you seen this effort within your own company as well?

At CMC, we're very proud of our diversity. It makes us better. I believe that continuing to attract great people, both men and women, is critical to the long-term viability of our industry.

I think we all want to attract and retain great people. I personally believe that we as an industry have a perception problem that needs to change.

### What do you plan to focus on during your term as the AIST president?

My focus is going to be how we can successfully continue to ramp up our efforts to promote the industry. Within the walls of our industry, we have a great story, but I don't think that story goes too far beyond those walls. That's our weakness as an industry: sharing our story. I believe this industry is noble, innovative, high-tech, full of great people and satisfying.

When I tell people I'm in the steel business, people are often surprised, and that can be frustrating.

I think we need to do a better job of marketing the industry — marketing that we're a healthy industry and that we are a safe, environmentally responsible and innovative industry. We just need to tell that story.

I am passionate about the steel industry and excited and very humbled to serve as AIST president. I'm going to do my best to advance the mission of the organization. I want the people outside our industry

walls to know how great this industry is and that our products are involved in their everyday lives.

We need to change the outsider's perception of this industry to continue to attract young talent so that we can be sustainable and relevant for years to come.

### Looking back at the past year and a half, what are your thoughts on the pandemic?

I don't think the modern world anticipated the events that occurred over the past year and a half. I know I didn't. I do want to applaud the industry. We were fortunate to be declared an "essential" workforce. We also had to stay on top of ever-changing guidelines set by various states, counties and municipalities. I applauded the IT departments across the nation, and the globe for that matter. They did a great job enabling people to work from home quickly and effectively so that our companies and industry did not skip a beat. I also applauded the small armies of people that gave extraordinary effort to repeatedly sanitize pulpits, break rooms, restrooms and office areas, and take temperatures for those entering the plant 24 hours a day.

I applaud the AIST team for quickly transitioning to a virtual format to offer learning and mentoring opportunities to our membership, and for continuously looking for opportunities to ease the burden of significant declines in revenue due to AISTech being canceled last year, as well as many other programs. In addition, I am so proud that AIST quickly converted to doing business virtually. The Foundation, Technology Committees, Member Chapters and Board of Directors continued to conduct business. Grants and scholarships were awarded to so many deserving individuals. The AIST team and member volunteers worked extremely hard to plan the many events and hold AISTech in person this year.

I am so proud of the response of our company and the industry to support their local communities through food banks, blood drives, donations of personal protective equipment, etc. Giving generously of our time and resources really exemplifies the character of the people in our industry. We learned so much, and hopefully the worst of the pandemic is behind us and we can move forward as a stronger industry and nation and, I believe, as better leaders. ♦