

36-year life member



Paul Belanger

Paul Belanger serves as Gestamp's vice president BIW R&D North America, leading a team of body engineers in developing products and new technologies to support the North American market.

Belanger started his career in the steel industry for 6 years before moving to Chrysler and then General Motors for a combined 21 years. While at Chrysler, Belanger led the Materials Engineering Sheet Metal, Corrosion and Welding groups before moving on to the Truck Platform, where he managed the Body Engineering team for Ram Truck. While at General Motors, Belanger led the MP Supplier Development group, providing Manufacturing Engineering support to GM's suppliers of critical cold and hot stampings, and their welded assemblies.

Belanger has been using his more than 35 years of automotive body and materials engineering experience to drive the development and optimum application of advanced sheet metal products into automotive vehicle production.

When did you first hear about AISE/ISS and how? Was there someone who introduced you to the association?

I was first introduced to AISE/ISS around 1986 during my undergraduate studies at Michigan State University (MSU), where I pursued a degree in materials science and engineering with a concentration in physical metallurgy. Faculty members at MSU encouraged students to engage with the association, which would later evolve into AIST. As a student with no prior industry experience, this early exposure to a professional organization dedicated to the steel industry was invaluable. It introduced me to the companies, technologies, and challenges within the sector and helped bridge the gap between academic learning and real-world industrial application. That introduction sparked my interest in the field and marked the beginning of my long-standing involvement with the steel industry community.

What was your first level of involvement in AIST? How did your involvement progress over the years?

After graduating and starting my career as an entry-level metallurgist, I continued to engage with AIST through its conferences and seminars. These events were instrumental in deepening my technical expertise and expanding my professional network. I embraced opportunities to present my technical work, which not only honed my communication and presentation skills but also allowed me to share innovative ideas and gain recognition within the automotive steel industry.

Over the years, my involvement evolved as I took on active roles in technical committees and participated in industry discussions that helped shape the direction of the field. These experiences have been pivotal in my career development, enabling me to stay at the forefront of industry advancements while giving back to the professional community that has supported me from the beginning.

How has AIST membership benefited you in your career? (or, how do you see AIST benefiting people in the steel industry today?)

My AIST membership has been a foundational element of my professional development, offering unparalleled access to technical expertise, industry intelligence and a vibrant network of professionals committed to excellence in steelmaking. From the outset of my career, AIST served as a vital conduit between academic preparation and industrial application — introducing me to state-of-the-art technologies, operational innovations and best practices that accelerated my transition into the field.



As my career progressed, AIST's conferences, technical symposia, and committee engagements became instrumental in expanding both my technical proficiency and professional visibility. These platforms enabled me to present original work, engage in rigorous discourse and collaborate with thought leaders across the global steel community. The insights gained through these interactions have been invaluable in shaping my approach to complex challenges and strategic decision-making.

More broadly, AIST plays a transformative role in shaping the future of the steel industry. Its steadfast commitment to innovation, sustainability, and workforce development ensures that members are not only equipped to meet today's demands but are also prepared to lead tomorrow's advancements. By fostering a culture of continuous learning and cross-disciplinary collaboration, AIST empowers professionals to drive meaningful progress across the steel value chain.

For those engaged in the steel sector, AIST membership is far more than a professional affiliation — it is a strategic investment in lifelong learning, industry leadership and the collective advancement of steel technology.

Talk about your career path. How did you enter the steel industry? How has the industry progressed from when you started to present day?

Looking back, I could never have imagined the path my career would take when I was a college student in the 1980s. What began as a technical role in steel manufacturing evolved into a multifaceted journey across the steel and automotive sectors — each phase offering new challenges, insights and opportunities for growth.

That journey began with six formative years in the steel industry, where I gained hands-on experience in both steel production and product development. I started at Cargill's North Star Steel Tubular Division in Houston, Texas, working on the heat treatment of large seamless pipe used in deep oil well casings. This experience



laid a strong technical foundation, which I built upon through subsequent roles at Rouge Steel (now part of Cleveland-Cliffs) and National Steel (now part of United States Steel Corporation), where I deepened my understanding of manufacturing processes and the strategic development of steel products tailored to customer needs.

In the mid-1990s, I transitioned to the automotive industry and joined Chrysler, where I would spend the next 16 years. The first decade was dedicated to materials engineering, with a focus on steel applications and material innovation. I then moved into product engineering, ultimately serving as senior manager of body engineering for the Ram Truck. Following my time at Chrysler, I joined General Motors as the steel lead engineer for global body manufacturing engineering. In 2015, I was recruited to lead Gestamp's North American R&D Center, where I currently serve as vice president of BIW R&D North America within the Technology & Innovation Office.

Over the course of my career, I've witnessed — and been part of — profound transformations in the steel industry. Globalization was one of the earliest forces to reshape the landscape, intensifying international competition and driving significant consolidation. In the U.S., the number of steel producers declined from approximately 50 in 1988 to around 20 by 2025. Technological advancements soon followed, revolutionizing production processes and dramatically improving efficiency. The labor required to produce a ton of steel dropped from roughly 10 man-hours in 1988 to just 2 by 2025.

More recently, sustainability has emerged as a defining priority. The industry is focused on reducing its carbon footprint, integrating renewable energy and developing cleaner production methods. In parallel, the automotive sector has seen remarkable metallurgical innovations. Advanced high-strength steels, combined with technologies like hot stamping, have enabled the creation of lighter, stronger and more complex vehicle components. These advancements not only help steel remain competitive against alternative materials like aluminum and composites but also contribute significantly to the development of safer and more sustainable vehicles.

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to work with several remarkable mentors and leaders who have significantly influenced my development. Bob Ross and Roger Lindgren at North Star Steel Houston were among the first. Bob's no-nonsense approach and metallurgical expertise provided a solid technical foundation, while Roger's charisma and practicality made him a great mentor and colleague.

At Rouge Steel, Doug Rice deepened my understanding of steelmaking, and at National Steel, Bart DePompolo — an insightful second-generation steelmaker — taught me the importance of aligning technical development with customer needs and business strategy.

At Chrysler, John Fillion and Doug Verley shaped my approach to materials development and leadership. John emphasized the broader picture for Materials — balancing innovation with cost and performance — while Doug's calm, principled leadership instilled in me three guiding philosophies: do what's right for the customer, do what's right for the shareholders, and do what's right for the employees.

At Gestamp, Ignacio Martin has been a visionary leader whose charisma and strategic insight continue to inspire me. His leadership has reinforced the importance of adaptability, collaboration and forward-thinking in a rapidly evolving industry.

While I've highlighted several key individuals, I've also had the privilege of working with many other talented colleagues, suppliers and collaborators over the years. Their contributions — whether through technical insight, operational excellence or shared problem-solving — have played an important role in shaping my journey.

Additionally, my nearly 30-year association with the Advanced Steel Processing and Products Research Center (ASPPRC) at the Colorado School of Mines has been instrumental in expanding my technical knowledge. The guidance and collaboration of David Matlock, John Speer, Kip Findley, and the entire community of professors and students at ASPPRC have continually enriched my understanding of steel metallurgy and its evolving applications. Their research, openness, and commitment to advancing the field have been a continuous source of learning and inspiration.

What are you most proud of in your career?

Over the course of nearly four decades, I've had the privilege of working on a wide range of transformative projects that have shaped both my professional journey and the organizations I've served. While it's difficult to single out just a few highlights, several moments stand out as particularly meaningful.

One of the most rewarding experiences of my career was leading the engineering development of a new vehicle from concept to launch on the 2009/2010 Ram Truck. Guiding the development process, from initial clay themes in the design studio through rigorous engineering validation of functional and cost objectives, was a monumental undertaking. Successfully launching the vehicle across three assembly plants in the U.S. and Mexico, and ultimately seeing it recognized as JD Power's Truck of the Year for the 2010 Ram Heavy Duty, was a deeply gratifying milestone. This achievement was not only a personal highlight but a testament to the extraordinary dedication and collaboration of a world-class team.

Another defining moment was leading a pivotal make/buy analysis for hot stamping at General Motors. Traditionally, cold stamping had been a core manufacturing process within GM. However, as product engineering began shifting toward increased use of hot-stamped components — driven by the need for lighter, stronger materials to meet safety and efficiency goals — it became clear that a strategic evaluation was necessary. I led the effort to assess whether GM should invest in internal hot stamping capabilities or leverage the expertise of an already-established supply base. This comprehensive analysis entailed cross-functional collaboration, advanced cost modeling, and strategic forecasting of long-term capabilities. The outcome was a comprehensive global strategic sourcing strategy that optimized the balance between internal investments and external supplier partnerships, fully aligned with GM's long-term objectives in manufacturing innovation and operational excellence.

More recently, I've had the honor of building Gestamp's North American R&D Center from the ground up. This endeavor involved establishing advanced testing and evaluation capabilities, as well

as assembling a talented, multidisciplinary team. Today, the center stands as a hub of innovation and a symbol of what can be achieved through vision, teamwork, and a relentless pursuit of excellence.

These accomplishments are not just personal milestones — they reflect the collective efforts of the exceptional teams I've had the privilege to lead and collaborate with during my career. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities I've been given and proud of the impact we've made together.

Are there any current projects within the industry you are working on? If so, please explain.

In my current role as vice president of BIW R&D North America within Gestamp's Technology & Innovation Office, I have the privilege of leading several strategic initiatives at our North American R&D Center. Our primary focus is on advancing lightweight steel technologies to meet the evolving demands of next-generation automotive platforms. These efforts aim to enhance vehicle performance, safety and sustainability — while maintaining the cost-efficiency and scalability required by modern manufacturing.

One of our most promising developments is the Ges-Gigastampings® product line — large-format structural components that consolidate multiple body parts into a single, integrated unit. This innovation delivers significant benefits: reduced vehicle weight, improved crash safety, and streamlined production and assembly. Each component is engineered with tailored material properties, ensuring optimal performance by placing the right material in the right location for the right function.



At the core of this advancement is our expertise in hot stamping technology, which allows us to precisely control the thermo-mechanical process to achieve ultrahigh-strength steel (UHSS) with targeted mechanical properties. This enables the production of components that maintain structural integrity and energy absorption while significantly reducing mass — contributing directly to improved fuel efficiency/battery range and a lower carbon footprint.

Sustainability is a guiding principle in all our R&D efforts. At Gestamp, we are committed to supporting low-emission steel production processes and minimizing the environmental impact of the components we supply to our OEM partners. Our work not only pushes the boundaries of what steel can achieve in automotive design but also aligns with the industry's broader commitment to environmental stewardship and carbon neutrality.

These initiatives reflect our belief that innovation and sustainability are not mutually exclusive — but rather, mutually reinforcing. By combining advanced materials engineering with responsible manufacturing practices, we are helping shape a more efficient, safer and more sustainable future for mobility.

If you were to recommend AIST to a new graduate just coming into the industry, what would you tell him/her?

If I were to recommend AIST to a new graduate entering the steel industry — whether as a supplier, user or consumer — I'd say it's one of the best ways to accelerate your growth and broaden your perspective early in your career. AIST offers access to the latest technical advancements, industry trends and a global network of professionals who are passionate about steel and its future.

But beyond the technical and professional benefits, AIST also provides meaningful opportunities to give back. Through outreach programs aimed at educating and inspiring high school students, members can help shape the next generation of talent in our industry. I've found these experiences to be incredibly rewarding — they've not only expanded my knowledge and network



but also reinforced the importance of contributing to something larger than yourself.

I'd encourage any new graduate to get involved early. Attend the conferences, join a Technology Committee, volunteer for outreach. The more you engage, the more value you'll gain. AIST isn't just a professional organization — it's a community that supports your development and gives you a platform to make a difference.

Do you have any additional reflections on your career?

Looking back, I'm humbled by the journey I've taken and grateful for the people and organizations — like AIST — that have supported it. The steel industry continues to evolve in exciting ways, and I'm honored to have played a part in its progress. I look forward to what the next generation will bring, and I'm committed to supporting their growth just as others supported mine.

I would also be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the unwavering support of my wife and family. Their encouragement, patience and belief in me have been the foundation that allowed me to pursue my career with passion and purpose. I'm deeply thankful for their role in every step of this journey. ♦