


A man with short grey hair, wearing a blue suit, white shirt, and blue patterned tie, is speaking at a podium. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The podium has two microphones. The background is a blurred stage setting with blue and white vertical panels.

# An Interview With the 2024 AIST Steelmaker of the Year: **Charles Schmitt** **President, SSAB Americas**

by Emily Williams

**AIST**  
ASSOCIATION FOR IRON & STEEL  
TECHNOLOGY





Chuck Schmitt was the recipient of the 2024 AIST Steelmaker of the Year Award, conferred on 7 May 2024 during the President's Award Breakfast during AISTech 2024 in Columbus, Ohio, USA.

Schmitt was named Steelmaker of the Year in recognition of his exemplary leadership, pioneering vision on the decarbonization of steelmaking for environmental sustainability, strong support for research and innovations, commitment to employee safety, excellent strategy on production efficiency and product quality, and dedication to a culture of inclusion and diversity. Under Schmitt's leadership, SSAB Americas has become a major player in the steel industry and a company of choice for many who aspire to work in the steel industry.

○ **Firstly, congratulations on being selected as the 2024 Steelmaker of the Year! What does it mean to you to be honored with the Steelmaker of the Year award?**

It's quite flattering and humbling for sure, although I don't see this as an individual honor but as recognition for SSAB Americas' entire team. We've accomplished some great things together, especially in the sustainability sector, and remain focused on world-class quality and leading customer experience. I'm incredibly grateful to have the opportunity to lead this team and to have us recognized as an industry leader, particularly by our industry peers. It means a lot.

○ **How did you get your start in the steel industry?**

I come from four generations of steelmakers. My great-grandfather was a second furnace helper at the Homestead Steel Works in Pittsburgh, Pa., USA. Being from Pittsburgh, four generations of steelmaking isn't unusual. Coincidentally, after the award announcement, a family member sent me a photo of my grandfather and uncles taken in July 1957, a few years before I was born. Growing

up in Midland, Pa., a small steel town outside of Pittsburgh, it was typical to have a summer job in the steel mills. At the time, I didn't envision myself making a career of it. When I graduated college in Texas, I interviewed with U. S. Steel. I had the great fortune of being selected for their management training program and returned to Pittsburgh to begin my career.

Five years after that, I went to work for a very small Canadian steel company that was starting out in the U.S. called IPSCO. They grew rapidly in the plate business, and ultimately, they were acquired by SSAB, where I sit today. I've been very fortunate to have several meaningful mentors throughout the stages of my career, including within SSAB, IPSCO and U. S. Steel, along with who I consider to be some of the most influential executives in steel manufacturing.

○ **What has been your proudest achievement in your career thus far?**

We've had many great wins at SSAB, but I'll start with the latest one. It's been a source of pride within our entire workforce, being the first steel company to produce a true zero-emission, science-based steel





2023–2024 AIST president Barry Schneider (left) presented Chuck Schmitt (right) with the 2024 AIST Steelmaker of the Year Award.


early last year. Beginning with our operating, commercial and technical teams, along with R&D, we accomplished this incredible milestone in a short amount of time. I highlight this because it's captured the attention of younger generations, including my own children, who are unaware of what we are doing within the steel industry. Promoting steel as a climate solution has been truly gratifying, and it's been a rewarding process with many future implications. We're all very proud of that.

In the early 2000s, I was part of the project team in Mobile, Ala., where we built and started a new greenfield plate mill. I think anybody who's ever done a greenfield project knows the challenges of such an undertaking. However, the accomplishments of starting up a new mill, developing a workforce, implementing

new technology, and eventually seeing its success are a tremendous source of pride for me and everyone involved. Seeing the pride in our people and in working as a team for what they've accomplished is the ultimate reward.

● **Along the same lines, what has been your greatest challenge?**

Historically, steel has always been a cyclical business. Managing downturns and the issues our industry has faced over time can be stressful and not fun. Despite that, the peaks have certainly outweighed the valleys over most of my career. The steel industry has a reputation and history of being hot, dirty and potentially dangerous work. Working with our industry peers and industry associations, we continuously face the challenge of overhauling this image toward one as a highly technical, essential and adaptive manufacturer so we can be more effective in recruiting and bringing in our next generation of steelmakers.



Today, we have advanced technology and vastly improved safety programs. But workplace safety will always remain a challenge, as we constantly strive to send every employee home at the end of every day the same way they arrive at work. Most in our industry face this same challenge, and much of our success in these areas has resulted from collaboration between steel companies and industry associations.

○ **Earlier this year it was announced that SSAB was one of three companies in the industry awarded a shared US\$1.4 billion in federal funding for proposed decarbonization efforts and would be focused on SSAB's Perry County, Miss., and Montpelier, Iowa, USA, facilities. How do you see SSAB's role in the future of sustainable steelmaking?**

The announcement itself was a welcome surprise and an accomplishment for our team. We're very flattered by the recognition of the federal government and the Department of Energy (DOE) to recognize our technology around hydrogen direct reduced iron (DRI) and low-emission steelmaking. There are still a lot of details to be worked out, and we are in ongoing negotiations with the DOE. Most importantly, we have a lot of talented people involved in this potential project, along with a good number of partners, including state and local entities and equipment manufacturers. It's a large-scale, long-term project, and we feel good about our discussions with the DOE.

What does it mean for the future? The transformation SSAB is undertaking began with the announcement of our HYBRIT technology back in 2016. There weren't a lot of believers in our hydrogen technology back then, and we doubled down on it when we built the first pilot project in northern Sweden. We've been successful with the pilot production, which continues today. In fact, in June, our Montpelier, Iowa, plant melted its first full heat of SSAB's HYBRIT material from our pilot plant to make SSAB fossil-free steel. It was yet another proud moment for the many people who have worked hard to realize this technological advancement. We intend to demonstrate this technology at full scale with the help of our partners and complete our transformation goal to be a global leader in sustainable steelmaking.

○ **What would you tell a young person just starting out today who might be considering a career in the steel industry?**

Early in my career, what drove me, and a number of my colleagues, was the opportunity to collaborate with customers, technical researchers and operators to develop various steel products as material solutions. Steel is a vital and essential foundation for building our great country, whether it's through military applications, transportation, energy or construction. Starting with the history of steelmaking, it has been as much an art as a science. Today, we have the benefit of very sophisticated technologies and making steel for very sophisticated applications.

Today's college, high school and trade school graduates have a choice of places to build successful careers. If they enjoy building and manufacturing things and seeing the results of their creativity, be it in lightweighting and developing safer cars, immense wind tower structures, or massive construction equipment, then the steel industry is where they want to be. ♦

