

## IN MEMORIAM

**Omer W. Blodgett, Welding Guru, Dies at 99**

Omer W. Blodgett, who died on January 11 at the age of 99, lived and breathed welding.

Throughout his long career, his expertise and passion influenced countless welders and engineers around the world.

“If we didn’t have welding today, I think the world would come to a grinding halt,” he once said.

Omer was born in Duluth, Minn., in 1917, and grew up on the shores of Lake Superior, where the Blodgett family had a fleet of lake vessels in the era of steam tugs and barges with sails. Like many who enter the profession, he came into welding via the family business, where he worked as a welder throughout high school and reputedly struck his first arc at the age of 10.

In fact, his family actually lived on the boats during the colder months, when they weren’t in service, so welding was more than just a profession; it was a household chore. Repairs such as patching the boiler were an ongoing occurrence. Omer’s father even purchased a welding machine the year Omer was born to save on labor costs.

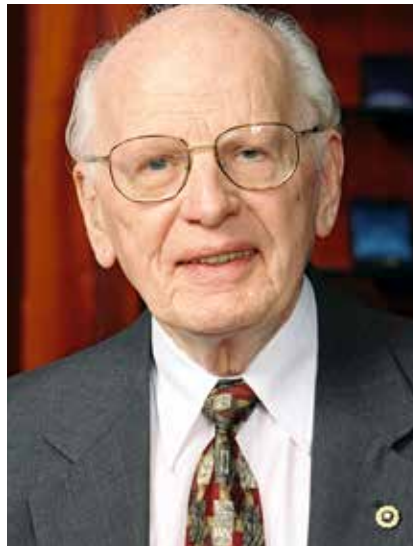
Not surprisingly, the Great Depression was especially hard on the family. “When you work for your father, you turn your paycheck back to the family to keep food on the table,” recalled Omer in a 1997 interview with AISC president Charlie Carter.

“The family business closed during the Great Depression, but a half-century later I sent Omer a map of Great Lakes shipwrecks, and he identified several vessels that had belonged to his family,” explained Larry Kloiber, a consultant with LeJeune Steel.

Omer attended the University of Minnesota, where he earned degrees in metallurgical and mechanical engineering. After graduating from college, he went to work for Globe Shipbuilding Company, where he refined his skills and learned firsthand how to resolve welding issues like distortion and cracking. There, during World War II, he supervised 400 welders who fabricated 29 all-welded oceangoing ships for the Federal Maritime Commission. In 1945, he met James F. Lincoln, a man who would not only become a lifelong friend

but who also encouraged him to come to work for Lincoln Electric.

Omer started with the company that year in a sales position, which he later described as highly educational.



While he knew welding from his own experience, this role gave him insight on how others used it. In 1954, he became a design consultant for the company and also worked as a mechanical engineer. By the time he stopped working for Lincoln full-time in 2009, he’d spent more than six decades with the company.

“I couldn’t work for any other company, I really couldn’t,” Omer recalled in his interview with Carter. “I admired Mr. Lincoln. I lost a friend when he died.”

While his expertise and longevity are certainly what helped make Omer a household name in the world of welding and in the construction in general, it was his kind spirit and generosity—as well as his drive to encourage, mentor and bring out the best in others—that many who were close to him acknowledged as his most admirable traits.

“Omer was a sort of long-distance mentor to me,” recalled Bill Thornton, a corporate consultant with Cives Steel Company. “We served together for a number of years in the late 70s and early 80s on the AWS D1.1 committee when I was a rookie and he was an old hand. He always encouraged me in my efforts.”

“Omer is a steel industry hero, and his influence on steel design and construction is incalculable,” commented Carter. “I personally appreciate and regularly remember things he said as he helped me: ‘Always remember that when a change is needed, the codes are the last to hear about it... Design with your head, not your heart.... When you’re trying to solve a problem, walk to the other drinking fountain further down the hall and take the time to think about it more.’ He also told me that the person you are is more important than what you’ve done. Certainly, Omer lived that high ideal in his own life.”

In 1977, at the direction of Lincoln Electric, Omer started to look for an understudy and successor. During a visit to LeTourneau College, he discovered Duane Miller, now Lincoln Electric’s manager of engineering services, who would become his protégé. Duane was asked to speak at Omer’s funeral and summarized his mentor’s attributes in three categories: an exceptional engineer, a tremendous teacher and a committed Christian.

“The awards Mr. Blodgett received during his career speak to his engineering capability,” said Miller. “As a teacher, he had a passion not only for the content of what he taught but also for those who he was teaching; he really wanted others to learn. In his everyday living, he was a committed Christian. People described him with words like friendly, kind, considerate, honest, caring and humble—all outgrowths of his Christian faith.”

Omer understood the importance of the codes and how they represented constant improvement. In his father’s time, he noted, codes and materials didn’t change, but he began to embrace the fact that change would become a constant in welding and construction, and it was crucial to anticipate it and drive it for the better.

“He was the epitome of a *professional* engineer,” said Kloiber. “He was tireless in his quest for knowledge and extraordinary in his efforts to share this knowledge through years of service on AWS and AISC committees, along with seminars, publications and his landmark

book, *Design of Welded Structures*. He made all of us better engineers.”

“I have many fond memories of Omer, but I will mention one that illustrates his wide-ranging interest in others,” said Ted Galambos, professor emeritus with the University of Minnesota’s Department of Civil Environmental and Geo-Engineering. “One of his collaborators at Lincoln Electric was a man named Richard Sabo, who was of Hungarian ancestry, as am I. Omer learned a number of Hungarian phrases from Mr. Sabo, and each time I met Omer, he would use his Hungarian skills on me.”

“I consider *Design of Welded Structures* to be an ageless classic text for structural engineers,” noted Jim Fisher, former chair of AISC’s Specification Committee and vice president emeritus at Computerized Structural Design. “I learned and solved many structural problems because of information in the text.”

Everywhere he went, Omer’s name seemed to precede him. And rightfully so.

“At Lincoln, I spent 50% of my time on the road,” recalled John Stropki, former CEO of Lincoln (now retired). “Wherever I went to visit customers or for other business meetings, anywhere in the world, Omer’s name almost always came up. They wouldn’t ask about past presidents or executives, they would ask about him. They’d show me autographed copies of his book and tell me how he influenced their work.”

“It’s not so much that Omer knew Lincoln’s products but that he knew *welding*. He wasn’t a salesperson in the traditional sense, but more of an educator. He sold welding as the preferred way to build structures and educated people on how to best use it.”

“We are indebted to Omer, who was a mentor to many,” said Christopher L. Mapes, Lincoln Electric’s current chairman, president and CEO. “He left a lasting legacy for our industry and will be fondly remembered with great honor.”

The combination of knowledge and sheer friendliness was what made Omer not only good at what he did, but also good at communicating to others how to be good at it.

“I admired Omer for his ability to use basic principles on complex problems, his knowledge of fabrication and his integrity, said Tom Schlafly, AISC’s director of research. “He provided individual assistance to me on a number of occasions and contributed to committees I worked on. When Omer spoke, we all listened closely.”

“I remember Omer best for his humble demeanor and his ability to explain things in a simple, down-to-earth manner,” recalled Jim Stori, former AISC Board chair and CEO of STS Steel. “That ability and the extent of his practical experience are how I’ll remember him.

“You could always rely on Omer to carefully review and improve how welds would be used and assessed,” remarked John Fisher, professor emeritus at Lehigh University and founder of the school’s Advanced Technology for Large Structural Systems (ATLSS) Center. “He always gave a full measure and encouraged younger engineers.”

“Omer was small in stature but his impact on the engineers practicing today and the industry in general can’t be measured,” commented Mark Holland, chief engineer with Paxton and Vierling Steel Company’s Steel Fabrication Division. “He was easy to know, funny, smart and kind, and had a deep understanding of science of welding. He

was the George Burns of welding.”

Omer was a longtime member and contributor to a several professional organizations, including the AWS D1 Structural Welding Committee, the AISC Committee on Specifications and the Welding Research Council (WRC) Task Group on Beam-to-Column Connections. AWS recognized his contributions in 1962, 1973, 1980 and 1983. LeTourneau University presented him with an honorary doctor of science degree. He was recognized as one of the top 125 engineers of the past 125 years by *Engineering News-Record* in 1999. And he even earned a triple crown of AISC awards: the T.R. Higgins Lectureship Award in 1983, the first Engineering Luminary Award in 1997—now called the AISC Special Achievement Award (for advancing the art and science of steel construction)—and the Lifetime Achievement Award in 1999.

Omer was preceded in death by his wife, Dorothy. He is the father of Robert (Linda), grandfather of Laura, Andrew and Mark, brother of the late John (Ida) and Ana Joslyn (Jay) and uncle of many.

For a taste of Omer’s welding genius as well as his life story and general thoughts, see “Blodgett’s Treasures” in the February 2013 issue (at [www.modernsteel.com](http://www.modernsteel.com)) and listen to his interview with Charlie Carter at [www.aisc.org/podcasts](http://www.aisc.org/podcasts) (it’s Episode 9).

#### Lessons of the Lifelong Sort

One of Omer’s enduring and endearing qualities was his willingness to pass along his knowledge to others. Here are a few lifelong lessons he presented at the 2004 NASCC: The Steel Conference in Long Beach, Calif.:

- Nothing beats hands-on experience.
- You’ll never know it all, so become a life-long student.
- Sometimes, great gems of knowledge are ignored for decades; this does not diminish their sparkle!
- You’ve got to have the courage of your convictions.
- Learn from other industries.
- Codes are not always clear as to intent and purpose.
- Welding is not a fastener! It is a method of design.
- Don’t hold back on accepting new ideas. You may be left behind.
- Don’t design with your heart.
- Codes always lag industry.
- A good picture is worth a thousand words.
- We’re standing on the shoulders of giants.

AISC BOARD

**AISC Elects Seven New Board Members**

AISC is pleased to announce the election of seven new members to its Board of Directors: Chris Gionti of Steel Dynamics Structural & Rail, Columbia City, Ind.; Timothy Hanenburg of Cives Steel Company, Alpharetta, Ga.; Hugh McCaffrey of Southern New Jersey Steel Co., Inc., Vineland, N.J.; Matt Smith of L&M Industrial Fabrication, Tangent, Ore.; Steve Knitter of Geiger & Peters, Inc., Indianapolis; Richard Phillips of Veritas Steel LLC, Lisle, Ill.; and Gary Stein of Triple-S Steel Supply & Subsidiaries, Houston.

“AISC certainly faced a challenge replacing seven board members, but we were very fortunate to have found such an accomplished and talented slate of industry leaders to join the board for 2017,” said David Zalesne, president of Owen Steel Company, Inc., Columbia, S.C., vice chair of the AISC Board of Directors and chair of the 2015-2016 AISC Committee on Director Nominations. “The scope of their experience in technical, commercial and marketing areas will serve the structural steel industry well, and will enable the Board to remain proactive in addressing the issues fabricators face.”

**Gionti** is the general manager for the Steel Dynamics Structural and Rail Division in Columbia City, Ind. He joined the company nearly 20 years ago as a plant mechanical engineer

at its Butler Flat Roll Facility and was responsible for various capital projects throughout the plant. In 2003, he was promoted to rolling mill manager of the newly acquired Engineered Bar Products Division in Pittsboro, Ind., and was involved in the design, modification and startup of this brownfield site. In 2015,

he was promoted to operations manager at the Techs Division in Pittsburgh.

**Hanenburg** has been active in the steel industry for over 30 years, spend-

ing his entire career with Cives Steel Company—starting out in their project manager training program and holding various positions at several locations. About two years ago he became president of Cives, responsible for all operating divisions of the company. He’s currently a member of the AISC *Code of Standard Practice* Committee and the American Welding Society, and has served on the board of directors for the Central Fabricators Association.



**McCaffrey** has been the sole owner of Southern New Jersey Steel Company in Vineland, N.J., since 2005, and before that served as principal for the company for over a decade. He began his career with Southern Steel of Vineland, N.J., gaining experience in all facets of the structural and miscellaneous steel business. He currently serves as president of the Mid-Atlantic Steel Fabricators Association’s Board of Directors and has participated as a panel presenter at NASCC: The Steel Conference.

**Smith** has served as president and CEO of L&M Industrial Fabrication since 2002. Before that, he held various operational and corporate management roles within Knife River Corp., which is a subsidiary of MDU Resources, Inc., a U.S. diversified energy company. Active in the regional steel community, he served as president of the Pacific Northwest Steel Fabricators Association for two years.



**Knitter** has spent the last 20 years of his career in the steel industry working in engineering, manufacturing, project management, estimating and finance, and he became president of Geiger & Peters in 2010. He

began his career in manufacturing as a robotics engineer for Motorola, setting up and supporting automated cell phone circuit board assembly lines, before transitioning into structural steel. He is currently a member of the Central Fabricators Association Board of Directors, *Modern Steel Construction’s* Editorial Advisory Panel and the Indiana Subcontractors Association Governance Committee. Previously, he served as president of the Indiana Fabricators Association and participated on the AISC Future Leaders Planning Committee. He was also a speaker at the 2016 NASCC: The Steel Conference and 2015 AISC Future Leaders Conference. He is a member of the Indiana Subcontractors Association, Metro Indianapolis Coalition for Construction Safety, Indiana Fabricators Association, the American Welding Society and AISC.



**Phillips** joined Veritas Steel three years ago as executive vice president of business development, responsible for managing sales, estimating, project management and procurement functions. Since then, he’s also been an operating partner of Atlas Holdings, LLC. Before joining Veritas Steel three years ago, he served as president, executive vice president and CFO of Hirschfeld Industries for eight years. He has been a member of the executive council of NSBA since 2014 and previously served on the AISC Board of Directors from 2010 to 2013, having also served as treasurer.



**Stein** has been president and CEO of Houston-based structural steel distribution company, Triple-S Steel Holdings, Inc., for more than a quarter-century. He also serves as chairman of ProservAnchor Crane Group, a local manufacturer of overhead crane systems.

## UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

**AISC, ACSA Issue Student Design Competition Call for Entries**

Attention college and university faculty: It's time to register your students for the 17th annual ACSA/AISC Steel Design Student Competition. Individual students or teams participating in this year's competition are required to have a faculty sponsor, who must fill out the registration form by March 29; registration information may be modified until submission of the final project (due by May 24). A total of \$14,000 in

cash prizes will be awarded to the winning students and their faculty sponsors, and there is no fee to enter the competition.

The program encourages architecture students from across North America to explore the use of steel in structural design. Students have the opportunity to participate in one of two categories: a museum category that challenges students to design a museum featuring

exhibit areas for large scale exhibits—as well as permanent collections and changing or rotating exhibitions—and an open design category.

For more about the competition, including the full program, registration information and competition guidelines, visit [www.acsa-arch.org](http://www.acsa-arch.org). You can view last year's winners in the December 2016 article "Standing Tall" (available at [www.modernsteel.com](http://www.modernsteel.com)).

## AISC SPEC

**New Revision of AISC Spec now Available**

The 2016 version of AISC's *Specification for Structural Steel Buildings* (ANSI/AISC 360-16) is now available for downloading at [www.aisc.org/2016spec](http://www.aisc.org/2016spec). The download is free.

The 2016 *Specification* supersedes the 2010 version (ANSI/AISC 360-10). It has been approved by the AISC Committee on Specifications, is ANSI-accredited and forms the basis for the 15th Edition

*Steel Construction Manual*, which is scheduled to be published in the third quarter of 2017.

"The 2016 AISC *Specification* continues to satisfy the mission of the AISC Committee on Specifications, which is to maintain a practice-oriented specification that provides for life safety, economy, predictable behavior and response and ease of use, while incorporating im-

portant updates in response to academic research and industry practice," commented Shankar Nair, past chairman of the AISC Committee on Specifications.

Please visit [www.aisc.org/2016spec](http://www.aisc.org/2016spec) to view and/or download the 2016 AISC *Specification* and commentary as a PDF. The 2010 version and other related documents are also available for free at [www.aisc.org/standards](http://www.aisc.org/standards).

## POLICY NEWS

**U.S. Steel Industry Supports "Buy American, Hire American" Initiative**

U.S. Rep. Mike Bost (R-IL), along with nearly 20 House Republicans, published a letter to the Trump Administration, pledging their assistance in the development of its "Buy American, Hire American" initiative. Buy American laws provide a preference to domestically produced goods and services in federal procurement, such as investments in public infrastructure.

"When American taxpayer dollars are being spent, an effort should be made to spend those in support of American workers," said Bost. "As we grow our economy and rehabilitate our nation's infrastructure, more must be done to ensure that Buy American preference laws are applied to these projects." (See the associated news item at [www.aisc.org](http://www.aisc.org) for links to a copy of this letter and a template letter to elected officials.)

Bost's effort was supported by the American Institute of Steel Construction, the National Steel Bridge Alliance, U.S. Steel, the Alliance for American Manufacturing and more than a dozen iron and steel companies and associations representing steel manufacturers and fabricators.

Other signatories to the letter included David Joyce (R-OH), Bradley Byrne (R-AL), Robert Aderholt (R-AL), Martha Roby (R-AL), Rodney Davis (R-IL), Jeff Fortenberry (R-LA), Sam Graves (R-MO), John Katko (R-NY), Mo Brooks (R-AL), Bob Gibbs (R-OH), Duncan Hunter (R-CA), Walter Jones (R-NC), David McKinley (R-WV), Gregg Harper (R-MS), Rick Crawford (R-AR) and Joe Wilson (R-SC).

Davis, along with John Delaney (D-MD), is also a cosponsor of the Partnership to Build America Act, which seeks to create a fund to provide financing to state and local governments for new infrastructure projects.

AISC and NSBA represent nearly 1,000 domestic steel fabricators, service centers and mills, as well as hundreds of erectors. Combined, the U.S. fabricated structural steel industry employs more than 160,000 American workers.

"It's important that tax money is used to support American workers and American businesses," stated Charles J. Carter, AISC's president. "We urge everyone involved in the construction industry to contact their representatives and express their support of the 'Buy American, Hire American' initiative."