

## Attracting the next generation to the structural steel industry.

# business issues

## INDUSTRY LIFT

BY BILL ISSLER

**RECENTLY, I POLLED SEVERAL STEEL FABRICATORS** about which jobs in the shop were the hardest to fill.

Among several mentioned, the one that came up most often was welders. A little research showed that trained and certified welders can earn a substantial income. So why aren't more people training to become welders?

As I share this issue with friends and others, including Uber drivers while I'm being chauffeured around, one of the key reasons becomes clear: Not many people know about the need for welders or how to become a welder, and even fewer know anything about a welder's income potential.

Speaking of Uber, that platform serves as a good example of pairing the need for a ride with someone who can deliver that ride. If only we had a platform that connected people looking for jobs in specific trades with the organizations that are looking to fill those jobs. More on that in a minute.

Why do I care about the future of steel construction? The obvious answer is that I'm involved with the steel industry. But it goes back further than that. I came out of college with a business management degree and no idea what kind of business I wanted to manage. My two uncles, Gunther and Fritz Baresel, offered me a chance to join their steel detailing business, with the goal of having me take over at some point in the distant future.

For about 20 years, my uncles mentored me in the trade and encouraged my growth. When an unsolicited opportunity appeared, I parted ways and started down another path. Within a few years, that path abruptly ended, so I began a new 17-year journey, developing a steel management software company. And after spending two decades being mentored and almost the same amount of time building a business, I thought, "Why not spend the next two decades working to help the next generation of the steel construction industry flourish?"

So I decided to become involved with lifting our industry and working with others to improve the visibility of each link in the steel supply chain, and attract dedicated, happy workers who can take pride in the value they contribute. My dear friend

and colleague Alberto Boin had a similar ambition to help people discover their dreams and bring them to reality. Over the past five years, Alberto and I have worked together in software development and brainstormed together about this idea. During our time together, we've discovered a common interest in using technology to assist repetitive processes. The result was Industry Lift, which we founded in 2017 with the purpose of addressing two questions:

Do happy workers make better products? Can we help people find fulfilling jobs?

First, we needed to validate that there was a universal need that required a solution, so before founding the organization, we organized a roundtable event, a single-day brainstorming session, in Varese, Italy, in late 2016. Leaders from various links in the steel fabrication supply chain were invited to participate and start a dialog about the current condition and future

needs of our industry. Attendees included Steven Hofmeister of Thornton Tomasetti, David Merrifield of SteelFab (an AISC member and certified fabricator), Nicolas Mosca of Mosca s.r.l. in Italy), Simone Campanella of Duferdofin-Nucor in Italy, former AISC president Roger Ferch, Mahesh Nagarajaiah of Sanria in India, Luigi Ottino of Delta Sistemi in Italy and Christian Colombo of Ficep S.p.a. in Italy. At that event, we agreed that the need for such an endeavor was indeed valid, so

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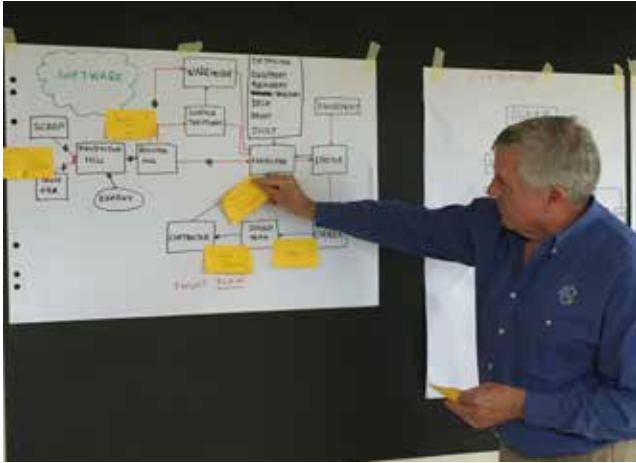
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**Bill Issler** is the founder of Industry Lift and software publisher FabSuite, LLC. You can find out more about Industry Lift at <http://industrylift.org>.



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we committed to researching ideas, experimenting with methods and meeting again the following year.

We held our second event this past October in Williamsburg, Va., and started working on a project for the upcoming NASCC: The Steel Conference in Baltimore. Our plan involves gathering several young adults from the Baltimore area that are open to

career guidance, then matching them with mentors from the various links in the steel fabrication supply chain. Each group will tour the NASCC exhibit hall to explore careers in steel construction while the mentor guide provides valuable inside information. Not only will we hopefully make some good matches, but we also look forward to learning new ways to make our industry more attractive to people considering a career in manufacturing or construction.

We'll also host a booth in the exhibit hall, where we will display videos on steel-related jobs in the construction industry. These videos will be made available to high schools, technical colleges, universities and any other organizations looking to guide young people into a happy, fulfilling career in our industry. In addition, we're planning to introduce a prototype of an interactive networking platform.

Come see us at the show and join us in giving our industry a lift for the future. ■

*This article is a preview of Session T8 "Industry Lift: A Vision of the Future of the Steel Industry Workforce" at NASCC: The Steel Conference, taking place April 11-13 in Baltimore. Learn more about the conference at [www.aisc.org/nascc](http://www.aisc.org/nascc).*