TRIBUTES FROM THOSE WHO WORKED WITH AND STUDIED UNDER KENT PEASLEE

Wayne Huebner, chair of the materials science and engineering department at Missouri S&T --

Within this small community we call home walked a mighty giant in the world of steel. A man of uncompromising integrity, a man who had high standards for himself and those around him. A man who selflessly and tirelessly used to talents to elevate those around him. As a professor Kent had two simple goals – first, to make certain that when students sat at the table interviewing for their first job that they had all the tools and confidence they would need to succeed.

Secondly, to instill in them a love of learning that would carry them through all their life. While we will all miss him as a mentor and friend, all of us should be comforted by the certainty that Kent’s legacy of uncompromising excellence in the classroom, his many students, and his accomplishments in the world of all-things steel immortalize him as representing what is the absolute best in metallurgical engineering. Period. There is only one way to honor an individual such as Kent. And that is to simply carry on. And we shall.

Von Richards, Robert V. Wolf Professor of Metal Casting at Missouri S&T -- Kent was a good friend and someone we could go to for advice on the best way to handle any situation at work. He was a great team-builder. He could identify the positive aspects anyone could bring to a situation and cultivate that capacity.

He served as mentor to many faculty members and was a natural leader. He had the respect of many colleagues, some of whom do not give respect to others easily. The students regarded him very highly as well, often awarding him outstanding teacher in the department over multiple years.

Dick Brow, Curators’ Professor of Ceramic Engineering at Missouri S&T -- Kent was a role-model and inspiration for faculty members, as well as students. I don’t think there is anyone in MSE (or S&T), who had the collection of skills and accomplishments that Kent had.

Kent was probably the best and most influential teacher in the department. He was dedicated to student success and he defined that by holding them to the highest level of expectations. His background in the steel industry gave him an authority that what he taught was actually important outside of the classroom, something that most of us struggle to achieve. He worked hard to make sure that tests and home works were returned as quickly as possible, so the students saw that he respected their efforts to complete the material by giving his best effort to quickly grade and return it. It took me a long time to appreciate how important that simple policy was with my own students.

He was demanding, but also a bit of a goof -- a source of corny jokes and “Top Ten Lists” to lighten the mood and get the students engaged in the lecture. Kent was *always* available to help new or struggling faculty in the classroom; he’d sit in a series of lectures -- always a series because what can you learn that’s useful in one visit? -- and then offer valuable critiques and positive suggestions. He did this for many faculty (and grad students TA’s) in our department, in McNutt Hall, and around campus.
Kent was probably the most important “steel research guy” in U.S. academia, and probably one of the top three in the world. I think Kent was the only guy in the U.S. who could have formed the Steel Manufacturing Research Center, because he had the best combination of materials research expertise, industrial experience and charismatic leadership abilities to pull it off. Companies have invested in the SMRC (now PSMRC: Peaslee Steel Manufacturing Research Center) because they knew Kent knew steel, from the atomistic arrangements in an alloy to the cutting-edge industrial processes used in their own plants.

This spring Kent finished his term as president of the Association for Iron and Steel Technology -- the premiere professional organization for all things related to iron and steel. One does not become the leader of an organization like AIST without a lot of hard work and without the same qualities of technical brilliance, persistent work ethic and charismatic leadership that made Kent the premiere faculty member that he was.

Finally, Kent was a hoot to have around the department. We got to bask in the reflected glow of his accomplishments, but we also benefited greatly from his passion for everything he did. Kent was never afraid to tell you what he thought about something -- a hallmark of many faculty members to be sure. But what set Kent apart from the run-of-the-mill faculty was his willingness to reconsider a position. Kent *listened* to other opinions and used them to refine his arguments, and then was confident enough in his own judgments to change his mind. That willingness to listen and adjust and then advocate is not unique to Kent, but was rare enough to be notable.

Kent’s passing was a terrible blow to his family, his wife Mary and their three kids, and the grandkids. Their loss was most sharply felt. For us, though, the loss is also great -- as colleagues, we’ll miss his examples of excellence, his advice, his goofy sense of humor. Our students will miss the chance to have “the best steel guy in the world” teach them what he knew best. We’ll muddle along -- but S&T is a little dimmer, a little sadder place, without Kent Peaslee on campus.

**Colin Welshymer, former student** – Dr. Peaslee is actually the one that changed the course of my life. He introduced me to the materials department and gave me the overview of metallurgy that originally got me interested in my major as a metallurgical engineer. All of this was after he assisted my family with moving into our house claiming he was ”all brawn and no brains.” He taught three of my classes with an unequaled passion for the subject. Dr. Peaslee was also the one that urged me to apply for an AIST scholarship that helped my financial situation as well as guaranteed me an internship thus putting me onto a viable career track. I am convinced that without Dr. Peaslee’s complimentary letter of recommendation I would not have gotten this scholarship and, furthermore, I would not have received the valuable internship experience that helped me obtain my full time job.

Dr. Peaslee was always available to the students for help either with classes or just advice for your current situation in life. Any industry-related questions I had were fielded to him first because he knew, and had seen, almost everything about the existing world of steel. Not to mention that man could play racquetball like nobody’s business; to my knowledge he was undefeated to all students brave enough to try. I never even came close to beating him on my own! Dr. Peaslee was an incredible person and has had a huge impact on a multitude of lives. He is dearly missed and I am daily thankful for everything
Gary Pennell, former student, now chief metallurgist with Nucor-Yamato Steel -- I first met Dr. Kent Peaslee in 1995 during my junior year at the University of Missouri-Rolla (UMR). Kent was teaching a class on transport phenomena, and that is where I first experienced his unique teaching style. This style would prove to be one of the most effective that I had ever and would ever experience. Kent brought his real world experiences to the classroom and combined them with a true passion for teaching and desire to see his students learn and succeed. It was during this time that I made a connection with Kent and found myself going to him with questions or problems, even those unrelated to the class. This is where Kent went from being just a teacher to mentor. Kent’s door was always open and he seemed always willing and happy to help, even if it just meant listening to your frustrations.

My senior year Kent asked me to work with a graduate student to help him finish his research so he could graduate and go to work. This proved to be a valuable experience for me and led to my 17-year friendship with Dr. Dhiren Panda. I’m not sure if Kent knew Dhiren and I would work well together or not, but Kent seemed to be a good judge of people, and this quality led to me personally hiring many students for internships or full-time positions over the past 16 years based in large part on Kent’s recommendation.

The summer before I graduated, Kent asked me if I would be interested in doing a summer internship for a company in Arkansas. The company was Nucor-Yamato Steel (NYS) and it was a steel mill on the Mississippi river in Blytheville, Ark. Kent had a former co-worker who was employed there, and Kent had been talking to him about hiring a summer metallurgical intern. NYS had some experience with interns and, let’s just say, it wasn’t positive. Well, Kent persuaded them to at least interview me and that led to me working there over the summer. Kent did remind me before I left for the summer that my performance there would probably determine whether or not they would hire another intern in the future. As it turned out, I completed the internship, and, at the end of the summer, NYS offered me a full-time position to begin when I graduated in December of that year.

One of Kent’s strengths and weaknesses was his ever-questioning mind, and it was during the last semester of my senior year that I learned about this. Kent was my advisor for my senior design project and every time I would go to him thinking the work was done and I could now write the report, he would ask, “What if you did this?” or “What if this happened?” This went on for several weeks and I finally had to remind him that I was graduating soon and we had to decide where to draw the line. Realizing that I was running out of time, Kent relented and I was able to start writing, but this proved difficult as he still had a tendency to want more. Finally, I finished my report and gave my presentation to the faculty, and Kent was extremely supportive during this process as well.

After I graduated and went to work at NYS, my relationship with Kent grew into a strong friendship. We spoke often, and usually the conversations would last for an hour or more. We discussed technical issues, research possibilities and ways NYS could work with the university to help strengthen and grow
their metallurgy program. Kent was extremely passionate about the metallurgy program at S&T and the students. Kent was always concerned with finding new ways of attracting students to metallurgy. This led to NYS sponsoring activities such as the annual MSE department picnic, the ASM Materials Camp at Missouri S&T, student and faculty trips to the NYS steel mill for mill tours, and many other activities.

Then, in 2007, Kent was named the first F. Kenneth Iverson Chair in Steelmaking Technologies, an endowed chair position that was named for the former CEO of Nucor Corporation and a man who is credited with revolutionizing the steel industry. Kent was a true believer in Iverson’s business philosophies, and Kent said that he was extremely honored to be selected for a position that was associated with the legacy of such a great man. In 2012, Kent proved again what a tremendous advocate he was for the steel industry when he was named the president of the Association for Iron & Steel Technology (AIST). During his time as president of the AIST, Kent was a great leader of the organization and worked very hard to strengthen the relationship between academia and the steel industry.

In my lifetime, I have had many friends, mentors and teachers, but I can say Kent was more like family to me. He was always available to talk and give advice or just listen. Since his untimely passing, there is not a day that that goes by that I don’t think of him. The loss is great and I truly believe I will never meet another person like Kent. Kent was a true friend!!!

Carolyn Trobaugh, graphic designer, Association for Iron & Steel Technology (AIST) -- I first started working for AIST right before AISTech’07. I was responsible for overseeing the student plant tour at SDI. I was so nervous because I had never been in a steel mill before, and had no idea what to expect. Dr. Peaslee stayed by my side and answered every question I had. He welcomed me and made me feel so comfortable and at ease. The little bit of kindness he showed me that single day is something I’ve never forgotten.

Chris McKelvey, board services advisor, AIST -- I came to know Kent Peaslee through his volunteer work with our student member program. He was the only faculty member to routinely call me before conferences to personally check and see if his students were all registered. He always managed to break away from a very busy schedule and come to watch our students present their research in our contests. Students always came first. Be inspired by his example, let it continue to shine.

Lori Boucher, assistant to the executive director, AIST -- I had the pleasure of working closely with Kent during his year as AIST president. Kent was always the epitome of professional, as well as one of the kindest, most down to earth people I have ever known. He had a way of making everyone feel special and an important part of the common good.

Niccole Reichel, CMP, conference planner, AIST -- Kent and I worked together on multiple AIST Making, Shaping and Treating of Steel: 101 seminars including the first international collaboration of this course in Sydney, Australia. He was a key figure in all aspects of the association and was always willing to give of his time. Our students appreciated the way he simplified the chemistry and industry language. He made my responsibilities easier and I looked forward to our projects together.