

PRESS RELEASE

Michelle Fields honored with, 2026 STEP Ahead Award from the Manufacturing Institute.

Pittsburgh, PA, USA – March 10, 2026 – The Manufacturing Institute (MI)—the workforce development and education partner of the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers—announced that Michelle Fields, Gary, Indiana Plant Manager at HWI, a member of Caldersys, has been recognized as a 2026 STEP Ahead Awards honoree. She is among 145 recipients to be honored.

“As a believer in hard work and setting a solid example, Michelle has worked her way up in plant management through a passion for learning new skills, while earning respect and appreciation from her HWI team and customers. She’s demonstrated leadership as a plant manager by being committed to quality, continuous improvement, and supporting others,” said Ross Wilkin, Senior Vice President of the Americas region for Caldersys Group.

Michelle Fields is a dynamic leader in the refractories industry with over 20 years of experience in steelmaking operations. Holding a degree in metallurgical engineering from Michigan Technological University, she advanced through various roles at United States Steel Corporation, ultimately serving as Primary Plant Manager at Gary Works overseeing 200+ managers and 2,000+ employees, before joining HarbisonWalker International (HWI) in 2016 as Plant Manager of the Gary Ladle Works facility, where she drives operational excellence, team success, and improvements in ladle life and efficiencies for key customer U.S. Steel Corp.

Michelle will be honored at the annual STEP Ahead Awards Gala in Washington, D.C., on April 23, 2026.

The STEP Ahead Awards are a key component of the MI’s STEP Ahead initiative, a leading program in the United States dedicated to supporting the manufacturing workforce through leadership development and recognition.

The STEP Ahead Awards shine a spotlight on the people powering manufacturing success, those whose leadership, expertise, and commitment to others are building stronger workplaces and communities. As manufacturers work to attract, retain, and advance talent in a rapidly evolving industry, programs like STEP Ahead play a critical role in elevating role models and demonstrating what leadership in manufacturing looks like today.

“Manufacturing’s future depends on leaders who develop talent, strengthen teams, and drive results by building strong workplace cultures,” said Lexi Champion, National Director of STEP Ahead. *“The STEP Ahead Awards recognize and celebrate those making that impact every day in their workplaces and communities, and whose leadership helps the next generation see a place for themselves in manufacturing.”*

These prestigious annual awards recognize employees across the United States who have excelled in their careers and showcase leadership across all levels of the manufacturing industry, from the factory floor to the C-suite.

About HWI, a member of Calderys

HWI is one of the leading suppliers of refractory products and services in the United States, with a history that spans 160 years. It is part of Calderys and is the brand for the Americas region of the Group. HWI operates an extensive network of manufacturing sites and distribution centers across the Americas, along with the largest refractory industry research facility in North America. Serving virtually every major industry that requires refractory solutions to enhance production and protect assets, HWI is consistently recognized for its talented experts, industry-firsts, and intensely driven excellence. For more information, visit <http://thinkhwi.com> and <https://calderys.com>.

About The Manufacturing Institute

The Manufacturing Institute works to build and strengthen the U.S. manufacturing workforce for today and tomorrow to create a workforce prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. This is done through implementing groundbreaking initiatives, convening industry leaders, conducting innovative research and promoting public policy that supports the sector as it meets the opportunity of modern manufacturing. Through this work, the MI furthers individual opportunity, community prosperity and a more competitive manufacturing industry.

For more information, please visit: <https://themanufacturinginstitute.org>

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