

# VIEW*&*VISIONS

Bowles *Rice*

---

BOWLESRICE.COM

FALL/WINTER 2023



# Forging Success in the Ohio River Valley



**Ken Tagashira**  
Wheeling-Nippon Steel

Ken Tagashira is the President and CEO of Wheeling-Nippon Steel, a hot-dipped steel coating manufacturer located in Follansbee, West Virginia. Tagashira has over 30 years of experience in the steel manufacturing industry, working in various management positions in Japan ranging from Quality Assurance, Customer Service, Marketing, and Product Development. Tagashira began his tenure at Wheeling-Nippon in 2019 as Executive Vice President and Chief Technology Officer before being promoted to Chief Operating Officer and eventually to his current role in 2021. His passion is to encourage a concept of continuous improvement among the company's dedicated employees that translates into providing a superior product among its diverse customer base.

Wheeling-Nippon Steel was founded in 1984 and broke ground on our first coating line in 1986 to manufacture high quality, hot-dipped galvanized products. We began coating steel in 1988 on our Aluminizing and Galvanizing Line (AGL). In 1991, we broke ground for our Continuous Galvanizing Line (CGL). Our initial investment was \$70 million for the AGL, and we spent \$120 million adding the CGL. As a result, our capacity grew from 400,000 to 700,000 tons annually within five years, making Wheeling-Nippon one of the most modern and state-of-the-art coating facilities in North America. Over the last 35 years, we have reinvested more than \$100 million into our operations to maintain our competitive edge. Choosing West Virginia and the Ohio River Valley as a home to manufacture our products was easy. It was a state and region that provided us an available and qualified workforce, along with easy access to both customers and suppliers for our products.



operate and maintain the equipment that we run 24/7. Since all of our operations, commercial, engineering, and IT activities are located at one site, we employ individuals that possess required skills in these areas as well.

We are the only facility of its type in North America where five different products are coated under one roof. Hot-dipped galvanized, Aluminized, Galvannealed, Galvalume®, and our newest product, ZAM®. ZAM® is a trade name for Zinc Aluminum Magnesium, which is known for its superior corrosion resistance, smooth surface, and use of fewer natural resources. ZAM® was developed to deliver superior corrosion performance

---

**“We are proud to be a West Virginia company and plan to be an ongoing and supportive corporate citizen in the future.”**

---

We employ 180 people in Follansbee, West Virginia in high-paying manufacturing jobs. Most of the employees are skilled operators, electricians, and maintenance folks, represented by the United Steel Workers of America. As a company that has successfully operated for over 35 years, we are now faced with replacing many of our employees who, in some instances, have been with us since the beginning. We seek employees who have backgrounds in electrical/mechanical to

in areas where harsh conditions prevail, such as automotive, solar racking, coastal roofing, animal confinement, and highway guardrails. We have worked closely with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) to have ZAM® written into the “W” Beam Guardrail M-180 specification. Our ZAM® product is approved for use in several states, including West Virginia and Ohio. Interest in ZAM® to supply long life requirements demanded by

makers of solar racking systems has intensified after last year's passage of the Inflation Reduction Act. We supply the largest flat roof solar racking maker in America and are looking to grow as solar demand continues to gain interest across North America. All of us are happy to be doing our part to generate sustainable, green energy for future generations.

We continue to develop products that our customers demand. We are constantly evaluating our approach on how we "go to market" with our products. Attracting a new audience for our products is one area we are concentrating our efforts on, especially as it relates to providing product options to architects who are designing building solutions that give back versus taking resources away from our planet.

Both local and state officials recognize having a company such as Wheeling-Nippon operate successfully in West Virginia is a benefit to the community. We have invested not only in our business to make coated steel safely and competitively, but we also play an active role in the community we reside in by supporting educational and civic events in Follansbee and Brooke County. We are proud to be a West Virginia company and plan to be an ongoing and supportive corporate citizen in the future.

I think it important to recognize that the success of Wheeling-Nippon over the last 35 years is due to the commitment of our employees, our leadership, and our parent company, Nippon Steel. It was with great vision that our leaders chose Follansbee, West Virginia, to construct a state-of-the-art galvanizing line during a time when the steel industry was viewed as downsizing and doomed to financial failure. The decision to locate and invest in Follansbee has proven to be a beneficial decision for the surrounding communities, the



*Wheeling-Nippon's facility in Follansbee, West Virginia.*



*Inventory of Wheeling-Nippon product coils.*

state of West Virginia, and all of our employees (past, present, and future) and their families. We operate a safe facility, which is a core value for all of us at Wheeling-Nippon Steel, as we believe this to be the foundation of a sustainable business enterprise.

We are a multi-year recipient of Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) SHARP Recognition, issued to companies that rank as a model worksite for safety

and health amongst our peers. SHARP is an acronym for Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program. This is one of the highest honors that OSHA awards to a worksite, and we are one of only 1,600 worksites in the United States to earn the SHARP recognition. We are proud, multi-year recipients of this distinctive achievement, which recognizes a company that operates exemplary safety and health programs for our employees in the Ohio River Valley. 