



VIEW*S* & VISIONS

A publication of Bowles Rice LLP

Fall 2014



Celebrating a 20-Year Partnership with West Virginia

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NGK Spark Plugs (U.S.A.), Inc.

Hitoshi Iimi is President of NGK Spark Plugs (U.S.A.), Inc. He also serves as an executive corporate officer of NGK Japan.

Mr. Iimi joined NGK Spark Plug Co. Ltd, the Japanese parent company of NGK USA in 1979, as a spark plug engineer, after earning a bachelor of science degree in physics from Nagoya University, in Nagoya, Japan. During his 35-year career at NGK, he has worked in Chicago, Detroit, West Virginia and Great Britain, as well as in his home country Japan.

NGK produces automotive oxygen sensors and spark plugs at its plant in Sissonville, West Virginia.

Our company was founded in 1936 as Japan's first spark plug manufacturer. Thirty-five years later, in 1971, NGK Spark Plug Co., Ltd.'s automotive sensor business began. When automakers started using catalytic converters to reduce emissions, we developed a new temperature sensor to detect and control abnormal engine temperatures. As emissions regulations grew stricter, we expanded our sensor business with the development of oxygen sensors in 1982.

North American emission regulations and the heightened consciousness of energy conservation resulted in major changes in the exhaust cleaning systems of automobiles. In 1993, we had set up our first U.S. exhaust gas oxygen sensor production line at our Irvine, California operations, but the growing demand for American-made parts necessitated our building a new sensor production facility in the United States, which would be closer to our U.S. customers. In large part due to the efforts of Senator Jay Rockefeller of West Virginia, we established our second U.S. production facility in 1994, this time along the Pocatalico River near Sissonville, West Virginia. This year marks the 20th anniversary of NGK Spark Plug Co., Ltd.'s groundbreaking in the Mountain State.

NGK and Senator Rockefeller

The NGK Spark Plug Group has enjoyed the honor of having a friendship with Senator Rockefeller and the State of West Virginia, extending now for more than 20 years. When the company management first met with Senator Rockefeller and the team from the West Virginia Development Office, we felt such an enthusiasm from the people. Far from a business-like approach, (although the West Virginia people at that time did not lose sight that it was a



serious business), these West Virginians were very friendly and welcoming with broad smiles. Senator Rockefeller always refers to NGK Spark Plugs (U.S.A.), Inc. as the first wholly owned Japanese investment in the state of West Virginia.

Since 1995, NGK Spark Plugs (U.S.A.), Inc. has continually produced automotive oxygen sensors at the West Virginia plant. With the continued support of the Senator and the State, our investment in West Virginia did not stop there. In 2001, following a second expansion of the sensor plant, we established our East Coast warehouse and distribution facility on the West Virginia site, and since 2008, with a third plant expansion, we have been manufacturing spark plugs in West Virginia.

West Virginia Management and Global Competition

We are proud to have several associates who have been working with the company since production start-up began in 1995. They are the symbol of our success and long-term partnership with the State of West Virginia. I now understand that this commitment by its people is something



Associates from NGK USA help with the cleanup program on River Bend Road.



Members of the Sissonville Volunteer Fire Department participate in fire school training on the NGK campus.

covering an area of approximately 125 square miles. Over the years, NGK USA has partnered with the Sissonville Volunteer Fire Department for a variety of its building and equipment projects. Most recently, the department was tasked with a total rebuild following the loss of one of its stations.

Adopt a Road

Each year, associates from NGK USA adopt River Bend Road, leading to the NGK West Virginia campus, and help keep it clean as part of the Adopt-A-Highway Program, co-sponsored by the West Virginia Division of Highways and the West Virginia Department of Environmental Protection.

Challenge Program

The Challenge Program is a local high school scholarship program aimed at inspiring student interest in future employment in the manufacturing sector, and hopefully an interest in NGK USA. 

most attractive to NGK. In our industry, self-initiative mindset is very important to improve our manufacturing capabilities and quality. Our people at the West Virginia campus have great minds for independence and self-learning. If you visit our facility, you can test our people on our production lines. The operators will explain how they produce world-class, quality products with confidence.

Global competition is very challenging. Our West Virginia-made products are always compared with products made elsewhere. For example, the market asks “which of the products; made in West Virginia or made in Asia, are optimal and/or superior in terms of quality, cost and delivery?” The competitive landscape transforms over time and forces us to keep changing ourselves, too. In such an environment, NGK’s West Virginia plant has worked very hard and continued to grow for 20 years.

The NGK Spark Plug Group is deeply grateful to those who have supported our growth for so long, especially our employees, our local communities, our local governments and Senator Rockefeller. We are now 20 years into being a part of our local West Virginia community.

A Member of Our Local Community

Through our associates, “NGK USA” engages in a number of local community activities outside the workplace. Here are three examples of the varied network of community relationships NGK USA has built through its West Virginia campus associates.

Local Fire Department

NGK USA provides use of its West Virginia campus to the Sissonville Volunteer Fire Department for fire school training twice each year. This fire department operates out of four stations