



# VIEWS & VISIONS

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## Senator Rockefeller: “The Father of Wheeling-Nisshin”

Arthur Bertol, General Marketing Manager for ZAM®  
Wheeling-Nisshin

Arthur “Art” Bertol has been with Wheeling-Nisshin for 27 years. In 2013, he accepted the position of General Manager of marketing for the company’s newest product, ZAM®, a coated sheet steel, which has been called “the corrosion protection of the 21st century.”

Previously, Mr. Bertol served Wheeling-Nisshin as a sales manager and Manager of Quality Assurance and Customer Service. His other roles with the company have included Chief Operating Engineer, Operations Engineer and Supervisor of Operations.

He earned a master of business administration degree at Wheeling Jesuit University and a master of industrial engineering degree from West Virginia University. He graduated from Bethany College with a bachelor of science degree in chemistry.

One cannot possibly think of the history of Wheeling-Nisshin, Inc. and not immediately make a connection to Senator Jay Rockefeller.

Wheeling-Nisshin, located in the town of Follansbee, in West Virginia’s upper Ohio Valley, has been a surviving and thriving steel coating company for the past 26 years.

The area is known for a long, rich history of steel production that dates to the 1830s. The city of Follansbee was often called “Little Italy,” due to its abundance of residents with Italian heritage. With the dream, persistence and dedication of many – especially Senator Rockefeller – the community has become even more international with the union of two cultures and countries.

This success story began in 1978, when Rockefeller, then West Virginia’s Governor, initiated the first contact between two steel

companies, Nisshin Steel Co., Ltd. of Japan and Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel Corporation. By 1984, this matchmaking resulted in a shareholder’s agreement and construction of a new joint venture company. A \$75 million coating line began in December of 1986.

During the dedication ceremony for the first coating line, Senator Rockefeller stated, “This is the first time a joint venture between two countries has resulted in a steel company. This plant is a future symbol of cooperation between the two countries and the two industries.”

Since the start of commercial operations in 1988, the venture has expanded with the construction and start of a second coating line in 1993 – the CGL. Production and sales volumes have risen steadily, with cumulative production reaching 10 million tons in January 2006. Wheeling-Nisshin has a hot-dip coating capacity of



*Attending the opening ceremony of Wheeling-Nisshin’s first coating line in 1988 included (from left) Mr. & Mrs. Yuzuru Abe, then Chairman and CEO of Wheeling-Nisshin, Senator Rockefeller, Mrs. Jack (Hall) Wright; and Governor and Mrs. Arch Moore.*

700,000 tons per year of coated steel products that include Galvalume® Aluminized (type 1 and type 2), Galvanized and Galvanneal.

In May 2013, Wheeling-Nisshin commenced production of ZAM® coated steel – a highly corrosion-resistant hot-dip coated steel sheet product that joins the company’s list of other coated products. Wheeling-Nisshin is the first zinc, aluminum, magnesium (Zn-Al-Mg) alloy producer in the United States and North America. No other steel producer in the country makes all of these coated products.

The ZAM® project cost \$28 million to complete and has been Wheeling-Nisshin’s largest investment since the second coating line was constructed at a cost of \$120 million.

Wheeling-Nisshin President and CEO, Noboru “Ricky” Onishi, explains that ZAM® is a “natural extension for our current operations in West Virginia and allows our company and employees to grow into a new area of production.” He continued saying, “We have made a significant investment because we see the potential of ZAM® – a potential, we think, that can be considered the corrosion protection of the 21st century.”

While this brief summary of Wheeling-Nisshin’s history provides a glimpse of the big story that has been tracking for the past few decades, our story would not have been written without the assistance of Senator Jay Rockefeller, referred to by many as the “Father of Wheeling-Nisshin.”

The Wheeling-Nisshin collaboration was the very first steel market joint venture in the United States and the first union of Japanese companies in West Virginia. Senator Rockefeller has since been instrumental in the formation of 22 West Virginia-based Japanese companies, which now employ well over 3,000 employees – and counting. ▽



*The Wheeling-Nisshin facility, located in Follansbee, West Virginia.*



*Wheeling-Nisshin produces 700,000 tons of steel coated products annually.*