

# Discover

The Real West Virginia Foundation



# West Virginia Lands First Automotive Assembly Plant

*State Becomes Magnet for Automotive Companies*



*Keith Burdette, President & CEO, Wood County Development Authority; Senator Jay Rockefeller and Governor Joe Manchin.*

On June 25, hundreds of business and community leaders and government officials including Senator Jay Rockefeller and Governor Joe Manchin gathered in the former Walker Systems building in Williamstown to celebrate an announcement some said would never happen—the State had landed its first first-scale automotive manufacturing and assembly plant.

Hino Motors Manufacturing USA, Inc., a Toyota-owned truck manufacturer will open an assembly plant in Williamstown later this year and plans to produce 2,500 trucks each year at the facility. The company will hire 80 employees initially and plans to add more employees over the next several years.

This announcement marks the nineteenth Japanese company to locate in the State, a majority of which are involved in the automotive industry, making the motor vehicle parts and equipment cluster one of the fastest growing sectors of West Virginia's economy.

"It's remarkable to think that in just 15 short years, our state has become home to an automobile parts manufacturer, a sheet-metal stamping plant, a producer of oxygen sensors, ignition coils and spark plugs, and now a full-scale automotive assembly plant in Williamstown," Rockefeller said. "We have all worked very hard – government, business and most importantly, West Virginia's workers – to put our state on the map, and it's clear the rest of the world is realizing that West Virginia is a world-class place to do business."

Senator Rockefeller first met with Hino Motor officials in 2001 in Tokyo, Japan during the Foundation's fourth trade mission to Asia. While Rockefeller was meeting with officials in Tokyo, Ellen Cappellanti and John Smolak (board members of the Foundation and ambassadors on the mission) met with company officials at Hino Motor's plant in Hino City. Rockefeller also led a Foundation-sponsored mission to Japan with Governor Manchin in 2005.

"The Foundation's missions to Japan continue to benefit the State," said Ellen Cappellanti, President of the Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation. "These relationships take a good deal of time and effort to build, but continue to pay off in huge dividends for our State and its citizens. I'm proud that Senator Rockefeller and the Foundation played an important role in this latest announcement."

Governor Manchin, the West Virginia Development Office and its overseas office in Nagoya, Japan we're integral to the effort to bring the company to the State. In fact, Governor Manchin played a key role in final negotiations with company officials. "Governor Manchin did a particularly hard closing. This could not have happened without him pulling that together," said Rockefeller.

For a while no one knew exactly who was interested in the 194,000-square-foot facility or what the prospect intended to do with it. Mayor Jean Ford

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said that as the deal neared completion, rumors ran rampant. At City Hall, "We had a saying – 'Hino. We know. But we can't say so.'"

Now the word is out, and not just in West Virginia. "Around the world, business leaders are taking notice that West Virginia can compete in the global economy and has become a major center of American automotive manufacturing," said Rockefeller.