

## **A half century of wealth creation**

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In 1957, one of America's most diverse industrialists, Henry J. Kaiser, opened an aluminum plant in Ravenswood, W.Va., of all places. Good labor and cheap energy made the plant viable.

The plant was split in two in 1999. Now part of Century Aluminum, the smelter side of the plant marked its 50th anniversary this month. The other side, the Alcan Rolled Products' mill, is its largest customer. The two are the No. 1 and No. 3 employers in Jackson County, and the wages are good.

Century is the largest customer of Appalachian Power in West Virginia. The two have a good relationship in which the electric rates are based on the price of aluminum.

When the price falls, so do the rates charged by the power company. The twin plants have survived major changes in the industry and in their ownership over the years. For example, in 1974, the U.S. produced 34 percent of the world's aluminum. Today, the figure is down to 7 percent. Where once the nation had 34 smelters, today it has 13.

The Ravenswood plant is now the oldest aluminum smelter in the United States.

Century's other smelter is in Iceland, where it is powered by hydro and geothermal power. Century hopes to open a second plant in Iceland by 2013. But officials point out that Century is still investing in the Ravenswood plant. It has put \$32 million in the plant since acquiring it in 1999. Safety is a top concern, and the company has cut its injury rate in half over the past five years.

In its first 50 years, the Ravenswood plant has been a blessing for Jackson County and the state. It is a valuable asset that has continuously adapted to new challenges. Here is wishing it another powerful 50 years -- at least.