

## Gamesa picks Cambria

By JEFF McCREADY

EBENSBURG — Gamesa Corp. of Spain will build its first U.S. factory in the Cambria County Industrial Park, Gov. Ed Rendell announced Friday. A cold January wind buffeted the tent where Rendell spoke. But 236 workers will be making windmill turbine blades by the end of the year in a 194,000-square-foot, \$25 million plant on the same site.

The plant – made possible through \$9.3 million in state assistance – will be the first to be built in the new South Park Complex. Gamesa, based in northern Spain, is the world's second-largest wind-energy manufacturer. Construction here is expected to begin in March. The local project is part of a \$40 million investment Gamesa is making in the state. Projections are that its development of wind farms and its two offices in Philadelphia that were announced earlier will create as many as 1,000 jobs during the next five years.

“Not only is this one of the most significant economic development announcements in decades in the Johnstown area, but it also represents a significant turnaround with Pennsylvania luring high-paying manufacturing jobs from overseas,” Rendell said. The Gamesa project is being praised because it has attracted foreign investment, brings new manufacturing jobs to the region and promotes Rendell's goal of increasing use of renewable energy in the state.

Several hundred construction jobs will be created, as well as spinoffs as Gamesa purchases goods and services for the construction and operation of its new plant. “This is the greatest news we've had in a long, long time,” said businessman L. Robert Kimball, who has seen the ups and downs of the Cambria County economy in 52 years of running his engineering and architectural business in Ebensburg. Kimball said his company, L. Robert Kimball & Associates, 615 W. Highland Ave., is doing some work in preparation for the reopening of the former Bethlehem Mine 33 – another positive economic development.

Dennis Yablonsky, community and economic development secretary, said bringing Gamesa here helps carry out Rendell's promise of helping small- and medium-sized towns. Cambria and Somerset counties have a seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 7.4 percent, the highest rate of the state's 14 major areas. Officials pointed out that it was a joint federal, state and local effort that led Gamesa to choose Cambria County from among seven or eight sites throughout Pennsylvania.

Rendell praised U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Johnstown, for his role in bringing the company here. Gamesa had considered a Johnstown location as well, but Ron Repak, Johnstown Redevelopment Authority executive director, said the manufacturer was looking to be near a four-lane highway. The South Park Complex is at routes 22 and 219.

“I'm just glad it decided to come to our area,” Repak said, noting that the competition was fierce. The deal was sealed when Linda Thomson, Johnstown Area Regional Industries president, and state officials went to Spain last month. “This is an economic developer's home run,” said Ron Budash, executive director of Cambria County Industrial Development Corp., which runs the industrial park. “We don't hit that many home runs.”

Gamesa CEO Juan Ignacio Lopez Gandasegui said the plant will consist of three blade-producing lines. Thomson expects hiring to begin in the third quarter of this year. The state is contributing almost \$400,000 for job training. Those hired will go to Spain and work in a Gamesa plant there as part of their training, said Alberto Gros Isla, who is coming here from Spain to manage the plant. He said wages have not been set, but will be in line with those being paid in the area and will include benefits.