

\$15-million auto parts plant-- Ronald Canada officially opened

BY PHYLLIS BARNATT

Times-Review Editor
Over 120 dignitaries, including government officials, attended Friday's official opening of Ronald Canada Inc. in the Stevensville Industrial Park on Eagle Street.

The \$15-million auto parts plant, manufactures cast-aluminum wheels for passenger cars and employs about 120 people.

Guests for the opening were welcomed by Ronald production manager John Rollo.

Erie MP Girve Fretz as representative of the federal government, brought congratulations to the firm's officials, represented by the wife of owner Karl Wirth. He presented Mrs. Wirth with a Canadian flag.

He extended best wishes from the minister of the Dept. of Regional Industrial Expansion and applauded the choice of Greater Fort Erie for the firm's location.

Ronal will receive a \$1.3 million repayable contribution from the federal government under its Industrial and Regional Development Program (IRDP). The program is administered by DRIE.

Ronal is a West German firm, founded in 1969 as Ronal Leichtmetallwerk Karl Wirth GmbH, specializing in light alloy wheels.

Ronal has four plants in Europe: Forst and Landau, West German, St. Avold, France and Teruel, Spain as well as a research centre in Switzerland. The company produces over 1.5 million wheels yearly.

The firm supplies wheels for many European cars, such as Alfa Romeo, Audi, British Leyland, Ford, Opel, Peugeot-Talbot, Rolls Royce, Saab, Vauxhall and Volkswagen. Opel, a subsidiary of General Motors, has recognized Ronal as their "Manufacturer of the Year" for four consecutive years.

Dr. Klaus Lombeck, of Ronald Canada, outlined the company's history to those assem-

bled. "The decision to go to Canada for aluminum wheel production was made in 1984. General Motor's wish to have us manufacture in North America coincided with our philosophy to manufacture where our customers are. Originally, we looked at a site in North Carolina but through export relations of the NRDC (Niagara Region Development Corporation) at the Frankfurt office Ronal changed its locale to Ontario. Stevensville was chosen because the building available was well-suited for aluminum wheel manufacturing."

Ronal serves the North American market on a "just in time" supply schedule. Dr. Lombeck assured the guests Ronal Canada's quality equalsthat of its German parent firm.

He said the firm "aims at staying innovative, and is now researching the production of magnesium wheels.... High quality standards are provided by a technical team backed by high technology testing and equipment.

"We wish to maintain a useful, dynamic spirit, flexible to the wishes and requirements of our customers."

Mr. Gotting of the German Canadian Chamber of Commerce brought best wishes and expressed his extreme pleasure that "a top quality company has come to Canada and the Niagara Region. Despite the roller coaster ride in the past years, when German investments were increasing then decreasing, it is good they have steadied now and Niagara is recognized as a good location for a successful business." He applauded the concerted, cooperative efforts of all government levels, municipal officials and the banking community in bringing Ronal to Greater Fort Erie.

Remarking on the quick decision-making abilities of Mr. Wirth in selecting the Stevensville plant site, Bernhard Braumann, Konsul of Deutsches General Konsulat

said the four-hour decision process, in his opinion, had set a record. "Rather than the normal three years needed for any decision, I hope the fast decision within four hours here will have success also follow the same fast path.... I am proud there is a world quality producer in Canada to show what a German engineering and production company can do."

Fort Erie Mayor Heinz Hummel recalled the day Mr. Wirth made his first visit to the town and was shown the industrial areas available. Escorting Mr. Wirth to the former Unit Rig plant the Mayor recalled finding one phone working on the premises. From it, calls were made to bank managers and government officials and a car rented. Within four hours Mr. Wirth had made his decision to locate Ronal here and was leaving the community for other business.

"I expect the same drive and energy shown in those four hours will make this plant a success in the years to come," the Mayor remarked. He said he was confident Ronal would play an important role in Fort Erie, and the Region's industrial growth and prosperity. He expressed appreciation for the efforts of the NRDC in acquainting German business people with the Niagara Region's potential. He presented Mrs. Hannelore Wirth with a Town of Fort Erie flag and extended best wishes to the firm's board of directors.

Niagara South MPP Ray Haggerty welcomed Ronal to the "industrial heart of North America" and on behalf of the Ontario government welcomed the firm's state of the art technology which he said would "positively enhance Ontario's reputation for excellence in auto parts technology and as a quality technical innovator."

Regional Councillor John Teal, on behalf of Regional Council, also welcomed the firm to the Region. He expressed a special pride in the NRDC's role in attracting the

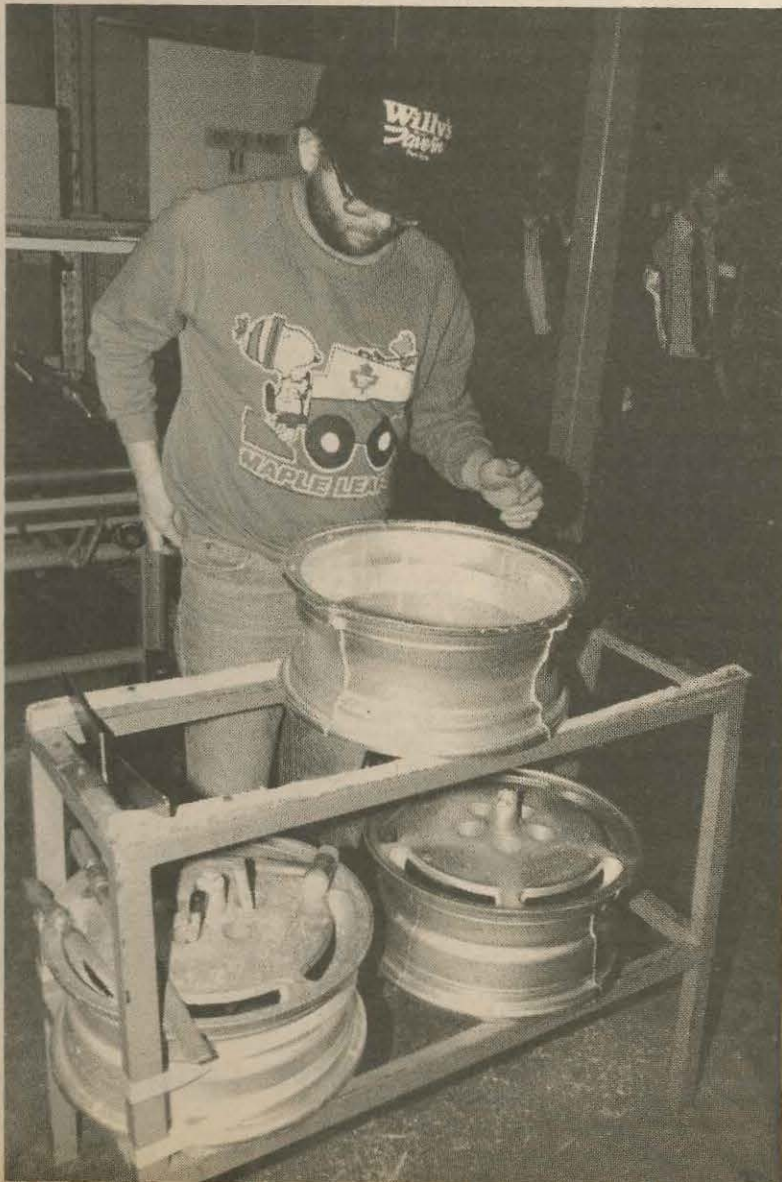
firm here, and in provided ongoing assistance.

He thanked Ronal's officials for showing that as they are corporate citizens of the world they are helping to show Fort Erie as a world class location, both profitable and friendly to come home to.

Making a presentation to Mrs. Wirth was Herman Alexander, representative of the Ontario government, European Branch, in Frankfurt, West Germany. He gave a clock,

shaped like the province and also a trillium stained glass window hanger.

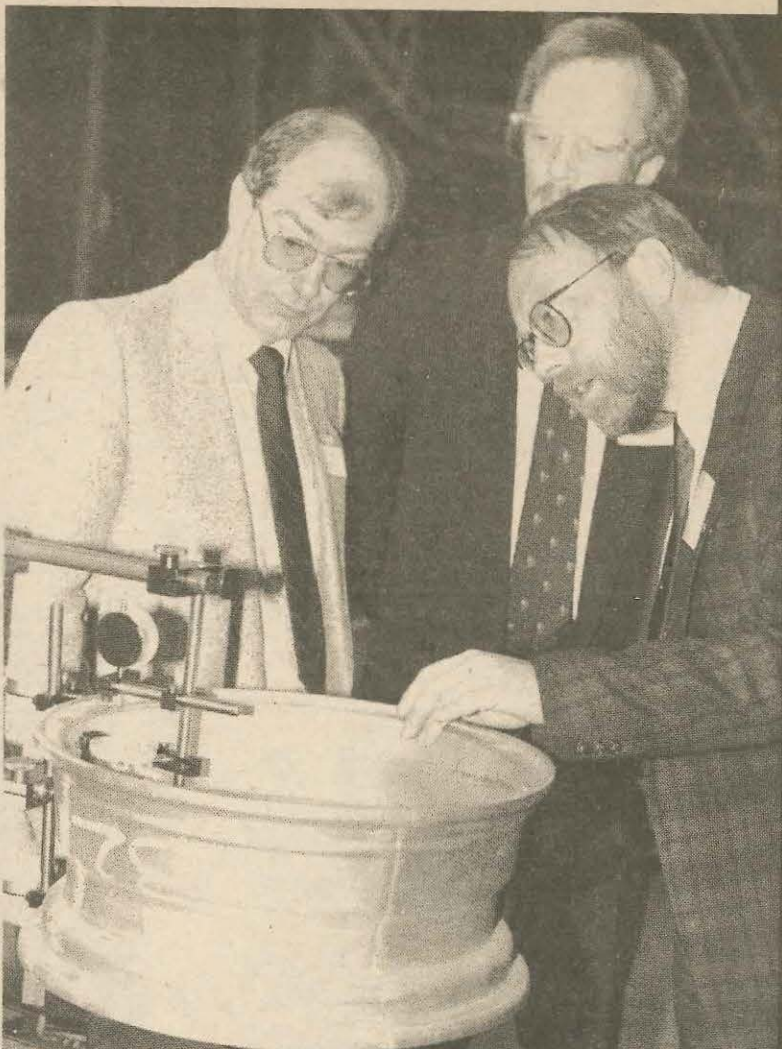
Greater Fort Erie Economic Development Officer Carolyn Bones said she was "obviously pleased (with the firm's location here) and wish them the best of luck." She said the firm had made its initial approach to the town during the time Fran Brown, the former EDO, was here in 1984-85. "The decision to come here was made just prior to my arrival in October 1986."



After 100 per cent x-ray inspection, Dave Holder of Niagara Falls is visually inspecting the wheel searching for gouges, flaws and ensuring the windows are uniform. If defects are found he must immediately tell the operators to correct casting. He will also check the wheel's radius to ensure snug fit, level of pins and record all information. Photo by Jack Britt



CNC lathes (Computerized Numerical Control) ensure uniformity of production and worker safety. The wheels arrive at the lathe, from the foundry line, and are turned inside and outside for quality finish and inspection. The machines all have state of the art safety features. The Chiron has a multi-position spindle and can drill at multiple positions. The machine is capable of eight tool changes at less than one second per tool change. All are done by air. It is regarded as one of the fastest tools in North America. Machine shop manager Ben Crabbe said safety is ensured as the operator views computerized screen controls. Photo by Jack Britt



DIGNITARIES' INSPECTION
Checking for straightness with a dial gauge on an aluminum wheel are from left, Niagara Regional Development Corporation's General Manager Matt Fischer, Mr. Gotting of the German Canadian Chamber of Commerce and Mr. Wethrauch, also of the Chamber. Photo by Jack Britt