

Business



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Wilton-based Drinks Americas Holdings Ltd., owner of the Rheingold brand, has connected with Savannah Distributing Co. to distribute its beer throughout Georgia. It shipped its first container of 2,000 cases Thursday.

MOVING SOUTH

Rheingold Beer bringing its New York heritage to Georgia

By Richard Lee
Staff Writer

Don't look for Rheingold Beer to be the sponsor of Atlanta Braves games any time soon, but the beer that made a name for itself as the sponsor of the fledgling New York Mets in the 1960s hopes to hit one out of the park with its newest distributor in Georgia.

Wilton-based Drinks Americas Holdings Ltd., owner of the Rheingold brand, has connected with Savannah Distributing Co., which distributes alcoholic beverages throughout Georgia. It shipped its first container of 2,000 cases Thursday.

Joe Nanna, Savannah Distributing general manager, researched how well a beer with a deep metropolitan New York heritage would be accepted in the Deep South before contacting Patrick Kenny, president and chief executive officer of Drinks Americas, which launched Rheingold in 2010.

"My first reaction was, besides my being from the Bronx, how many

"It has a great story. The only place they can compete is in its history. I'd do something to bring back the Miss Rheingold contest."

Julie Johnson, editor of All About Beers in Durham, N.C.

Georgians are going to relate to Rheingold," Nanna said. "After speaking to consumers and retailers, preliminary street indications for our rollout are very exciting. A good-tasting beer with a great New York history will sell. The retro timing couldn't be better."

The arrival in Georgia is part of a strategy to sell the beer up and down the eastern seaboard and into the Midwest. Besides Georgia, Rheingold is now being sold in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania, and there are plans to extend the reach to Ohio, Maryland, the District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky, Mas-

sachusetts, Michigan and Florida.

The beer should be available in the latter two states by the end of the month.

"Distributors are calling us," Kenny said. "We're willing to ship it and give it a shot. There are plenty of New Yorkers in Florida."

He cited the popularity of Brooklyn Lager as an example of how a beer with New York roots can be accepted by beer drinkers across the country.

Drinks America has tweaked the original recipe to match modern tastes, Kenny said, adding that Rheingold is brewed at Lion Brewing in Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

Marketing will be crucial for Rheingold's success because it is an American lager, like its competition — the major national breweries in the United States, said Julie Johnson, editor of All About Beers in Durham, N.C.

"It has a great story. The only place they can compete is in its history.

I'd do something to bring back the Miss Rheingold contest," she said, referring to the beauty contest Rheingold promoted during its heyday a half-century ago.

Kenny, who started Drinks Americas six years ago, is banking on the potential of Rheingold to help elevate the company's shares from the depths of the over-the-counter penny stock category. Drinks Americas closed in Thursday trading at 1 cent per share.

"We think it has tremendous value," he said.

The company, which also produces Willie Nelson's Old Whiskey River Bourbon, Trump Super Premium Vodka, Olifant Vodka and Aguila Tequila, reported net sales of about \$144,000 in the second quarter ended Oct. 31, 2010, compared with \$15,000 for the same period in 2009. Sales of Rheingold in the second quarter of 2010 were \$106,000. Drinks Americas' loss for the quarter narrowed to \$850,000, from \$1.64 million in the year-ago period.