

Exhaust System Maker Maremont Grows Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley Facility

LOUDON, Tenn., -- The economic downturn seems to have only strengthened after market exhaust manufacturer Maremont, located in Loudon, Tennessee. The facility has just ended a hiring cycle that has added 50 new workers and a second shift.

"Our aftermarket equipment allows individuals to drive their vehicles longer," said company owner Ken Banks. "That's especially important in times like these."

The recent hires bring Maremont's workforce here to about 350 employees.

"Spring is traditionally good for us," Banks said. "But these are permanent, not seasonal, hires."

The company has nearly 100 other employees, most of them in support services in Schulenburg, Texas and Toronto, Canada.

The plant, which has operated in Loudon, in the southwest corner of the five-county Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley, for forty years, distributes mufflers, after market catalytic converters and performance equipment to retail chains, warehouses, independent shops and by single-piece deliveries nationwide under three brand names - Maremont, IMCO and Cherry Bomb.

"We've found an excellent home in Loudon," said Banks. "We've had no problems finding qualified hourly and exempt employees with the necessary skill base."

Those skills have allowed Maremont to begin manufacturing more of the components it needs.

"That's a big advantage compared to having to buy a component," Banks said. "Nearly 95 percent of our parts are now manufactured in Loudon. This, and expansion of our original equipment service [OES] business with Ford, explains our job growth."

Maremont is part of the Innovation Valley's strong auto supply industry concentration. Materials science and alternative fuels research at nearby Oak Ridge National Lab and the National Transportation Research Center in Knoxville -- as well as the University of Tennessee-Knoxville's highly ranked engineering and its logistics/supply chain programs -- supply professional expertise to the region's auto supply industry cluster.

Banks said Loudon County's central location has also helped the company.

"It fits perfectly with our distribution needs," he said, pointing to the fact that 75 percent of the U.S. population lives within a day's drive of the Innovation Valley.

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