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## Knoxville Sign Workers Respond Creatively to Company Closing

KNOXVILLE, Tenn., March 10 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ – When Knoxville-based sign maker Image Point in Knoxville abruptly went out of business in January, 270 laid off workers took matters into their own hands.

First, they created a Facebook account to share tips on navigating through the unemployment benefits system, fighting depression, and, of course, finding another job. Eventually the site morphed into a human resources tool viewed by potential employers.

Working together – and communicating actively – paid dividends in other practical ways.

For instance, several managers began sharing lists of contacts throughout the industry with local economic developers involved in the regional Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley economic and workforce development initiative.

What emerged surprised regional economic developers.

"We realized that the Innovation Valley had become the sign industry capital of the country," said Bryan Daniels of the Blount Partnership, which participates in the five-county Innovation Valley effort. "Jobs in, literally, dozens of supply companies in the area would be affected if we did nothing."

With the industry contacts in hand, Daniels and his colleague Kyle Touchstone of Knoxville Chamber started working the phone lines to get other sign companies to take tours, find office space, and recruit the talent they need.

So far, five companies have come to the Innovation Valley, another five have committed, and about half of the former Image Point employees have found jobs locally. Some companies came on their own and responded only days after the Image Point announcement by establishing a new presence here. The others have been recruited.

"I give the former employees all the credit for sticking together as a community and for coming to us with valuable contacts," said Daniels.

"All of this allowed us to connect the demand for the products, services and talented people with the right companies," said Kyle Touchstone of the Knoxville Chamber.

Innovation Valley officials are hopeful that the new sign companies eventually will hire even more former Image Point employees.

For their part, sign companies officials say they appreciate the proactive, economic development effort.

Participating in Innovation Valley Inc. are the Blount County Chamber of Commerce, Knoxville Chamber, Loudon County Economic Development Agency, Oak Ridge Economic Partnership, The Roane Alliance, and Tellico Reservoir Development Agency. For more information, contact Garrett Wagley, 865 / 246-2661, gwagley@knoxvillechamber.com or visit [www.innovationvalleyinc.com](http://www.innovationvalleyinc.com).

Source: Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley

CONTACT: Garrett Wagley of Knoxville-Oak Ridge Innovation Valley,  
+1-865-246-2661, gwagley@knoxvillechamber.com

Web Site: <http://www.innovationvalleyinc.com/>