

**To: Knoxville News Sentinel, Business Desk**

**Re: Proposed guest article for Sunday Business Section**

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### **What if Oak Ridgers lead the way in responding to our unemployment crisis?**

While a business can let people go, to slow the decline in cash flow, it just doesn't seem right to tell a family or community member to leave for the same reason. If our community unemployment was an isolated case, people could earn income elsewhere and send the money home, but it's not isolated.

A crisis often has seeds for both disaster and opportunity. The disaster is evident in the United Way organizations that are overwhelmed with requests for assistance, a State Unemployment Security Fund which could go broke next year, if unemployment levels stay high, and 20-year staffing recruiters who have never seen so many seekers for so few openings. So, where is the opportunity?

What if existing efforts to resolve our unemployment situation were upgraded and integrated, into creating one of the most innovative, empowering, cost effective, business generating and replicable responses to unemployment in our community and adjacent areas?

Would not such an effort and successful outcome generate publicity to help meet existing economic development goals, by showing that we are a community which cares about its members and workforce, both in good and stressful times?

The unemployed, especially active job seekers, would benefit from anything which expedites the path to gainful employment. What if we could foster opportunities, activities and projects which would attract the unemployed to participate, in ways that would lead to greater awareness of work opportunities, resume building credentials, and solutions to specific community challenges.

For example, what if we were to apply Lean production concepts to workforce flow in our community? Lean production is getting more of a desired result for less – less effort, cost, motion and time. Any job hunter knows, often in hindsight, that there is a tremendous amount of waste in the process. Employers and staffing agencies that spend days handling hundreds of applications for a few openings are no doubt thinking there must be a better way.

The application process is getting better with online forms and automation, but there is still much opportunity for time-saving improvements, especially for applicants. And then, there are the unemployed, with little or no computer literacy, who are struggling on the most difficult side of the digital divide.

When there are so few jobs, the need for job creation and development of viable small businesses takes on a greater urgency. For some entrepreneurs, this is the opportunity they have been planning for. Others, out of a sense of urgency, may jump into business opportunities prematurely, or be drawn in by opportunistic scammers.

What if we could tap our large unemployed human resource base, in ways that produce profitable solutions, which individuals, project groups and small businesses could provide in fields of education, energy, health care, human services, the environment, etc.

Our economic crisis, related unemployment and workforce flow is a complex issue. But what better place is there than Oak Ridge to take on such a challenge - with so much expertise related to complex systems, crisis response preparedness, energy, education, environmental management and technology. We are at the heart of the Innovation Valley and Tennessee Technology Corridor. Surely we can orchestrate our human energy and technology to shine in leading the way with solutions that mitigate disaster and maximize opportunity for those willing and able to do productive work.