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“Digital Factory” Program Launches in Tennessee
Trains and places rural workers into Internet-based jobs

Nashville-based [cTechnology, Inc.](#), [VisionPerry](#), and the Tennessee Department of Labor have launched a joint initiative in Linden, Tennessee to bring Internet-based jobs to rural Tennessee communities. The launch is part of the [Rural Technology Assistance Grant Program](#) sponsored by the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development through the Southwest Tennessee Development District to **pilot new economic models of rural job creation through links to broadband and education.**

Perry County was chosen for the initial launch site due to the presence of the **ARRA-funded VisionPerry program** which had already placed computers into a storefront training facility provided by [Connected Tennessee](#) through its Computers for Kids program, and broadband services to its facility provided by local telephone company, TDS.

Michael Dumont, Director of the VisionPerry project said, “When we were approached by cTechnology with this concept we immediately saw the potential for the community to **shift from an manufacturing mindset, to a knowledge and services-based economy mindset.** The Digital Factory is the **first real spark of commercial activity that is bringing real new job activity.** Realistically, this is one of most logical things we could be doing in this economy.”

The concept was also recommended by Mark L. Williams of the [Strategic Development Group, Inc.](#) which provided final recommendations to the State on Perry County’s options. Early in 2009, Perry County had the highest unemployment rate in the U.S. and was the focus of an intense ARRA and state-funded effort to inject new jobs into the community.

A recently published economic development report by the Strategic Development Group **portrayed the plight of Perry County in the post-manufacturing marketplace** as rural manufacturing continues to re-locate or simply go out of business. Most rural communities in the Southeast and Delta region face similar obstacles and **must find ways to “retool” for the 21st Century economy.**

The Digital Factory program is aligned in close partnership with the [Tennessee Department of Labor & Workforce Development](#) and the [South Central Workforce Alliance](#). Persons seeking to work in the Digital Factory are first given an orientation about the world of online work by the Digital Factory staff at the VisionPerry facility and then, if they desire to pursue the program further, are sent to the Tennessee Career Center for basic skills evaluation, qualification, and registration. The training courses are paid for through federal [Workforce Investment Act](#) (WIA) funding. **After training, the Digital Factory helps place workers directly into online projects through its online work partners.**

“The number of work opportunities available via the Internet is enormous and rural communities have a marketable set of advantages such as a low cost of living and a very reliable workforce.”, says Paul Van Hoesen, Director of cTechnology. “The model we are piloting is rapidly scalable, sustainable, and leverages these advantages. **We believe it has national potential for 21st Century rural job creation, and as a catalyst for rural entrepreneurship.**”

The Perry County Digital Factory **will initially create three production lines requiring increasing skills**, similar to a standard factory concept. The first line will be simple “piecework” where workers are asked to do data entry, visual identification, or “find, cut and paste” type of projects. These projects are typically known as [crowdsourcing](#). cTechnology partner [Bizooki.com](#) of Nashville provided the first real test of the Digital Factory in a crowdsourcing project with workers generating from \$8-\$19 an hour in bursts, depending on speed and the per-piece rate of pay. This work is project-based and sporadic, but excellent for the underemployed and youth in rural areas. Bizooki and cTechnology are seeking deeper partnerships with U.S. groups who need a reliable source of U.S.-based crowdsourcing

workers and differentiate from lower-cost international competition.

The second line will recruit virtual Call Center workers and plug them into online call center opportunities, which have been researched or recruited by the Digital Factory team. **The Digital Factory environment provides the necessary broadband, computer, and phone line to begin** this work and the training and certification is provided by the TN Career Center through WIA funding. Online partners include www.liveops.com which provides a platform for virtual call center workers and companies who contract them.

The third line is a skilled line to develop LAMP Programmers. LAMP stands for Linux, Apache, MySQL, and PHP/PERL which are the most popular Open Source programming languages in the world. cTechnology has partnered with Marcus Whitney and the [Enterprise LAMP Group](#) in Nashville to train and place rural, LAMP-trained persons in these advanced, well-paid positions. These workers will require approximately 6 months of WIA-funded training and internship with Nashville-based companies, and will then be qualified for entry-level programming. **Trainees will be certified in [Zend PHP](#), [Drupal](#), and [jQuery](#) which are all basic Open Source skills.** However, entry-level work in the Open Source world pays a competitive \$15-\$25 an hour which in rural communities is competitive with any manufacturing work. Given the close proximity to Nashville, we expect the Perry LAMP trainees to travel to Nashville 2-3 times a month to link into the LAMP User Group community for training and connection to their employers. This is currently the highest skilled "line" in the Digital Factory.

cTechnology has filed for an NTIA BTOP Sustainable Broadband Adoption Grant to ramp this rural job creation concept across west Tennessee. **The Digital Factory concept overcomes the lack of broadband at home in remote rural areas** and allows the immediate introduction of new, online jobs to disconnected workers who may otherwise would have to wait for service to finally reach their rural homes.

Nashville, TN January 10, 2010 - For additional information on the Digital Factory Program, please contact Paul Van Hoesen, Director, cTechnology, Inc. paul@ctechnology.org. 615-566-6196

ABOUT cTechnology, Inc. - cTechnology Inc. is a Nashville, Tennessee-based social business whose vision and mission is to see the transformation of rural communities through cooperative education and economic development initiatives around the technology economy. We have an experienced and sophisticated team of technology and business partners that are committed to creating unique and sustainable models of rural economic and community transformation using innovative approaches.

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