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News Releases

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Maine business becomes first in the state to sign agreement with ICE Whitney Wreath partners with ICE to ensure legal status of workforce

WHITNEYVILLE, Maine - A wreath manufacturing company has become the first business in Maine to sign an agreement with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to strengthen hiring practices and to combat the unlawful employment of illegal aliens.

Whitney Wreath President and CEO David Whitney and the Special Agent in Charge of ICE's Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) in Boston, Bruce M. Foucart, signed the IMAGE or "ICE Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers," agreement during a ceremony at the company's headquarters in Whitneyville, Maine.

"IMAGE is a voluntary program that allows private industry to partner with ICE to reduce unauthorized employment and the use of fraudulent identity documents," said Special Agent in Charge Foucart. "We applaud Whitney Wreath for its unwavering pledge to maintain its image in the community as a reputable employer and good corporate neighbor."

Whitney Wreath is one of the largest producers of fresh holiday wreaths and home decorations in the nation. Since 1984, Whitney Wreath has been providing fresh, full balsam wreaths to families throughout the U. S. In 2009, Whitney Wreath was selected as the provider of holiday balsam products for L.L. Bean. Winning this competitive selection process, along with Whitney's long-standing relationship since 1993 with QVC, one of the largest multimedia retailers in the world, established Whitney Wreath as the largest mail-order Christmas wreath company in the United States.

"Whitney Wreath values its partnership with ICE as a proud member of the IMAGE program," said CEO David Whitney. "Today, we share that pride with our most valuable resource, our employees, and call on other employers to follow our lead and join us in this very important program."

To qualify for IMAGE certification, Whitney Wreath performed the following requirements:

- Conducted self-assessments of their hiring practices to uncover vulnerabilities that could be exploited by illegal aliens;
- Enrolled in employment eligibility verification programs, such as E-Verify and the Social Security Number Verification Service;
- Trained their staffs on IMAGE Best Practices and how to use the new screening tools;
- Underwent a Form I-9 audit conducted by ICE.

Undocumented workers create vulnerabilities in today's marketplace by presenting false documents to gain employment, completing applications for fraudulent benefits, and stealing identities of legal United States workers. To combat this, ICE initiated the IMAGE program in 2006.

All IMAGE members must participate in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) E-Verify employment eligibility verification program. Through this program, employers can verify that newly hired employees are eligible to work in the United States. This Internet-based system is available throughout the nation and is free to employers. It provides an automated link to the Social Security Administration database and DHS immigration records.

Upon enrollment in and commitment to the IMAGE Best Employment Practices, program participants are deemed "IMAGE certified," a distinction DHS and ICE believe will become an industry standard. IMAGE also provides to all employers free training on the Form I-9, fraudulent document detection, and building a solid immigration compliance model.

Companies interested in more information on the IMAGE program can call the ICE office in Boston at (617) 565-6286, or visit [www.ice.gov/IMAGE \(http://www.ice.gov/image\)](http://www.ice.gov/IMAGE) .

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U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security.