



Director's Report – Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI)

September 2026

Overview:

September was a month of continued program growth, facility progress, and expanded regional engagement for the DRC. The team launched the Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange, welcomed and restarted STARTUP companies, advanced major grant initiatives, expanded media and marketing efforts, and continued preparations for The COVE's completion and grand opening. DRC also strengthened its presence in Hardeeville through Founders' Forum and continued collaboration with regional business and economic development partners.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- Conducted diligence meetings with prospective program clients, including St. Gregory the Great Pre-K program, AnkerBlu, and LCN Consulting.
- Restarted ChangePoint in the STARTUP Program and held the first program meeting.
- Began work with Max Xperience as a new STARTUP Program company.
- Held kickoff meetings with new program companies BAF Bombs and Leli Holmes.
- Held a STARTUP Program kickoff meeting with Dream Vacations.

Program Companies

- **OPFOB**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**
- **Belleau Woods Tavern (HEROES)**
- **Buysight.ai**
- **221B Studios**
- **Rosano**
- **High Tide Pediatric Dentistry**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**
- ***New - Oceana Blue**
- ***New – Max Xperience**
- ***New – B.A.F. Bombs**
- ***New – ChangePoint**

- ***New – Dream Vacations**
- ***New – Leli Holmes**

Mentor Program

- Met with prospective mentors to expand support resources for DRC clients.
- Continued mentor engagement and coordination to support new and returning program companies.

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Scheduled and continued installation of interior signage for The COVE.
- Continued coordination of The COVE second-floor upfit, which is nearing completion, and completed a walkthrough and punch list of remaining items.
- Coordinated lobby furniture installation and setup at The COVE.
- Began the Re-Create upfit at The COVE.
- Participated in planning discussions for The COVE Grand Opening.
- Launched the Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange with 15 participants representing local business, technology, and innovation.
- Hosted Founders' Forum at Rio Chico in Hardeeville, bringing together local business owners for networking and peer discussion.
- Hosted the Greater Bluffton Chamber Lunch & Learn at The COVE.
- Hosted the OneBlood mobile blood drive.
- Attended the Greater Bluffton Chamber State of Growth event and Coffee & Connections networking events.
- Attended the Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry Awards Gala.
- Visited local businesses at Bluffton Farm & Flea to support outreach and engagement efforts.
- Met with the Hilton Head Island-Bluffton Chamber to discuss future collaboration and engagement opportunities.
- Continued development of a streamlined EDIP process and tracking system.
- Paul is on the Entertainment Venue Exploratory Workgroup and it's hosted at The COVE twice a month.
- Continued development of the SCRA grant application, supporting materials, project budget, and draft proposal.
- Met with SCRA to discuss potential grant funding opportunities and support for DRC initiatives
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Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Joint marketing planning efforts with Hardeeville. Founders' Forum held on September 17 in Hardeeville at Rio Chicos.
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects. Attended board meeting. Participated in a Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation meeting and presented to LCN Consulting, a company considering relocation to the Lowcountry. Met with the South Carolina Department of Commerce at the invitation of BCEDC and presented DRCI initiatives and opportunities.
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended. Hosted several GBCC events at The COVE and attended the State of Growth.
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in ribbon cuttings and networking events, Met to discuss future collaboration and engagement opportunities.
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Paul Arvantides is a member of the HBA Lowcountry Partnerships Committee. Partnership meeting with HBA to see how we can collaborate more. Attended the HBAL Awards. Recorded Hispanic Heritage month social media reel with the HBAL.
- **Regional Citizens Committee:** Paul Arvantides is attending meetings to help in evaluation and strategy