



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

August 2024

Overview:

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation continues to drive economic growth in Bluffton by supporting both burgeoning startups and established companies poised for expansion.

This month, we proudly highlight our diverse range of program companies, including innovative startups and businesses that are scaling their operations and contributing significantly to the local economy.

In addition to our entrepreneur program updates, we are also actively involved in various economic development initiatives aimed at fostering commercial growth and enhancing the business environment in our community. These efforts are designed to support the continued economic vitality of Bluffton and ensure that our region remains a fertile ground for innovation and business success.

Entrepreneur Program Update

STARTUP Companies:

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation continues to be a fertile ground for burgeoning startups, driving innovation and economic growth in Bluffton. This month, we are proud to list our Program Companies cohort:

- **Hardee Greens**
- **ChangePoint**
- **Petitek**
- **OPFOB**
- **Dance Canapé**
- **Part of the Family**
- **Dig Your Photos**
- **NEW – Mencias Cleaning**

GROWTH Companies:

Our support extends beyond STARTUPS to include established companies poised for expansion. These businesses are scaling their operations and contributing significantly to the local economy:

- **Beachside Tire**
- **Bluffton Electric**
- **LaSource**
- **Delta Roofing**
- **Custom Audio Video**
- **Universal Bookkeeping**
- **Noble Hearts Human Resources**

Economic Development Update

Key Efforts in August:

Council Presentations:

- First reading of an ordinance authorizing an economic development incentive agreement between the Town of Bluffton and Reed Commercial Partners.
 - Raider drive commercial flex building of approximately ten thousand square feet.
 - Parkway offices at Hampton Lake consisting of three buildings totaling approximately twenty-eight thousand square feet.
- Presentation to Council asking for approval to authorize a contract amendment to the master agreement for the development of commercial property within the Buckwalter multi county industrial park
- **Childcare RFP:** David Nelems contributed to the creation of the Staff Report for the Council, which outlined the due diligence steps, narrative, and decision-making process used by the DRCI Board and TOB staff to recommend Bright Beginnings for the Childcare RFP. He also participated in the Executive Session to support the evaluation process.
- **Bluffton Yards** – Follow-up with the approved grant paperwork and status of the project
- **Encompass** – After a hiatus, the Company is interested in restarting the process related to the Economic Development Ordinance.

Operations and Marketing

- **AI Speaking Requests:** New requests from the Beaufort Digital Corridor, The Hilton Head Bluffton Chamber of Commerce Staff and the Womens networking group at Hampton Lake. DRCI has presented the AI prestation to more than 500 people as of the end of August.
- **Grant Discussions:** The Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI) is currently exploring the possibility of securing an SBA grant to support the establishment of a Women’s Business Center. We believe we are uniquely qualified for a grant of this type, given our proven track record in fostering entrepreneurial growth and our strong community ties. While we understand that the application process may take some time, we have high hopes for a successful outcome and are committed to seeing this initiative through to fruition.
- **Survey:** Working on Clemson survey creation for interviewing DRCI graduates
- **Board Committee Meeting:** Meeting with Board officers discussing possible changes to by-laws

Events and Meetings:

DRCI Board meeting was held on August 8th

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- **70 Mentors:** Our expansive network of 70 mentors continues to provide invaluable guidance and support to our entrepreneurs, fostering growth and innovation.

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Scheduled Lunch and Learn with SBAC for early fall.
- **BlacQuity:** Fall Cohort started at the end of this month
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration meeting with Beaufort Digital Corridor and BCEDC.
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended the 2024 Grassroots tour with SC Chamber of Commerce
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Attended several groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, and working an AI Education Series with the Chamber. Paul started Leadership classes at HHI/Bluffton

Chamber Leadership Program for 2025. Coordinating with them to host the Leadership meetings at The HUB

- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Registered to be a vendor at the Hispanic Business Associations Expo in October. Signed up new STARTUP customer Mencias Cleaning who we ment when speaking at one of their events
- **SBAC –** Working with SBAC to host a lunch and learn on funding at DRCI and Hardeeville in September
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board and attends each monthly meeting

This report underscores the Don Ryan Center for Innovation’s pivotal role in driving economic development, fostering innovation, and building a resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bluffton. Our initiatives continue to position the Town as a beacon of progress and opportunity.