



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

July 2026

Overview:

July was marked by continued program growth, regional collaboration, and significant progress in activating The COVE and expanding DRCI's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The team successfully hosted the second Founders' Forum, welcomed new program companies, advanced branding and marketing initiatives, strengthened partnerships, and submitted a Letter of Intent to establish the SC Lowcountry Technology Hub.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- Onboarded six new STARTUP and GROWTH companies beginning between July and September and coordinated mentor requests.
- Conducted diligence meetings with Max Experience, Oceana Blue, Leli Holmes and other prospective clients.
- Met with Chase Golf regarding STARTUP enrollment.
- Met with Leah Papka regarding site selection and Washington Square opportunities.

Program Companies

- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**
- **Belleau Woods Tavern (HEROES)**
- **Buysight.ai**
- **221B Studios**
- **Rosano**
- **Airbana**
- **High Tide Pediatric Dentistry**
- **Keora Finance**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**
- **Delta Roofing**

Mentor Program

- Met with prospective mentors to expand support resources for DRC clients.
- Continued recruitment efforts to strengthen mentor expertise across key industries.

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Hosted the second Founders' Forum at Southern Barrel Brewing Company.
- Hosted Duravant's global Shark Tank-style Innovation Challenge
- Presented the DRCI update to Hardeeville City Council.
- Hosted the OneBlood mobile blood drive.
- Attended several Greater Bluffton Chamber Coffee & Connections, Business After Hours, ribbon cuttings.
- Attended several Hilton Head-Bluffton Chamber ribbon cuttings and Executive Networking session
- Participated in the Town of Bluffton Entertainment Venue Exploratory Workgroup and continued committee planning.
- Continued lease development, tenant coordination, signage planning, and Mashburn upfit selections for The COVE.
- Second meeting with Bob Manning regarding DRC marketing video development.
- Updated the DRCI Strategic Plan.
- Transitioned Evan Welsh to full-time Innovation Manager and continued Business Engagement Manager interviews.
- Submitted an SCRA Regional Innovation Hub Letter of Intent for the SC Lowcountry Technology Hub.
- Advanced planning for the DRC AI Tech Community / Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange.
- LinkedIn Sales Navigator training with Keora Finance.
- Coordinated implementation discussions with Monday.com and HoneyBook.
- Reviewed social media agency proposals and advanced rollout planning for the new DRCI brand.
- Provided website and social media recommendations to CAV Integrated Homes.

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Continued joint marketing planning efforts with Hardeeville. Started filming for Shop Local Video, presented at City Council Meeting, Founders' Forum booked for September 17 in Hardeeville
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects. Attended board meeting.
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended. Hosted several GBCC events at The HUB and The COVE.

- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in ribbon cuttings and networking events
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Paul Arvantides is a member of the HBA Lowcountry Partnerships Committee