



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

January 2025

Overview:

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI) remains steadfast in its mission to foster innovation and economic development in Bluffton. With a mix of newly launched programs, strategic planning, and collaborative partnerships, we continue to drive impactful outcomes that benefit our entrepreneurs and the local economy.

In January, we launched initiatives that align with our strategic vision for 2025–2026. We also onboarded new program participants, expanded mentorship opportunities, and deepened our collaborations with local organizations to provide a robust support system for businesses at all stages of growth.

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.

- **ChangePoint**
- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**
- **Dig Your Photos - Graduated**
- **Mencias Cleaning (Rebranded and is now Lowcountry Fresh Start Cleaning)**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- ***New - Trisha Zerhung Fertility Consulting**

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:

- **Bluffton Electric**
- **Delta Roofing**
- **Noble Hearts Human Resources**
- ***New - Hardee Greens (Graduated STARTUP and is now in Hardeeville GROWTH Program)**

THRIVE Companies

Successfully launched the new THRIVE program: The THRIVE Quarterly Business Review Program is a comprehensive service designed to help business owners and key managers evaluate performance, set strategic goals, and develop actionable plans for growth. Through structured quarterly meetings, the program focuses on analyzing financial health, key performance indicators (KPIs), and market opportunities while addressing challenges and refining strategies. It provides a collaborative framework for sustained success and long-term planning. It provides opportunity for our graduating companies to continue to engage with the Don Ryan Center in a meaningful way to promote long term sustainability and success.

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **Beachside Tire**

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- Received and processed new mentor requests for upcoming program companies
- Secured mentors for Nexus Tech and Simply Stated
- Onboarded 3 new mentors

Economic Development Update

Key Efforts in November:

- Working with prospective tenants for building A. The goal is to have at least the top floor fully rented out before the space opens in late 2025
- Working with potential EDO company CS Instruments, who are looking for HQ space in Bluffton. Staff is collecting data for the grant to present to Council in the very near future. This prospect came through our partnership with the BCEDC
- Had a call with SCA to discuss office space opportunities at The HIVE and grant opportunities for the new building through SCA

- Advanced efforts for the Town packet and presentation on EDIP items for an upcoming Council meeting

Events and Meetings:

- Attended the Beaufort Regional Business Council meeting at TCL
- Represented DRCI at the GBCC Member Benefits meeting as a sponsor
- Participated in the BCEDC CONVERGE Summit
- Engaged with the HHI Chamber Military & Business Alliance at The HUB
- Coordinated with HHCA on Shark Tank 2025. An entrepreneurship class will commence in February, followed by the Shark Tank event in late April or May
- Ongoing website updates for program companies
- Collaborated with Tom Henz to plan an AI-focused event

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Meeting with Josh Gruber and Neil Parsons. Overview of 2024 and ongoing discussions for 2025 plans
- **BlacQuity:** We continue to be open to opportunities for collaboration
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration, sponsored and attended the Converge Conference
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended. Continuing to host lunch and learns for the GBCC and planning more for February
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Attended several groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, and working an AI Education Series with the Chamber. Paul is in the Leadership Program for 2025 and DRCI is hosting their meetings at The HUB. Engaged with the HHI Chamber Military & Business Alliance at The HUB
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Multiple meetings with Alex Navarro about various partnership activities like information sessions for their association members, potential clients and how to reach them and made the introduction to BCEDC
- **SBAC:** Paul Arvantes is a member of this board
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board
- **Beaufort Digital Corridor:** David Nelems is a member of this Board

