



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

April 2026

Overview:

April was a strong month of growth, partnerships, and program expansion for the Don Ryan Center for Innovation. The team continued to build momentum at The COVE through new tenant activity, program onboarding, and strategic partnerships. Significant progress was made in AI initiatives, economic development projects, and community engagement, including the successful launch of the inaugural Founders' Forum.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- First meeting with Flex & Fit (STARTUP)
- Effervescent Yoga re-kickoff meeting
- Signed new STARTUP companies: Airbana Technical Solutions and Command Finance Group
- Met with ChaseGolf Travel and her expansion. Will join Growth Program
- Diligence discussion with new AI company (meeting set for May)
- Met with Palmetto Padel Club regarding development opportunity

STARTUP Companies

Our STARTUP pipeline continues to grow, with new diligence meetings and program milestones achieved.

- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**
- **Diversity Nursing (Hardeeville)**
- **Amia Marcell**
- **Belleau Woods Tavern (HEROES)**
- **Buysight.ai**
- **221B Studios**
- **Rosano**
- **Flex & Fit Body Training**

GROWTH Companies:

Supporting established businesses in their expansion efforts remains a priority for DRCI.

- **Bluffton Electric - Graduated**
- **Effervescence**

THRIVE Companies

Ongoing long-term work with established Growth companies

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**
- **Delta Roofing**

Mentor Program

- Mentor meetings with new mentors
- Recruited new mentor from Beaufort Memorial Hospital
- Continued mentor engagement and onboarding

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Hosted and launched first Founders' Forum (sponsored by Southern Barrel Brewing)
- Signed new Landing Pad tenant: JP Morgan Chase
- Ongoing lease work for The COVE and tenant negotiations
- Tours conducted with Chase Bank and other prospective tenants
- Met with Mashburn Construction regarding Landing Pad space
- Discussed commercial property on Highway 170 with Walter Nester for potential new business
- Continued work on Project Helicopter EDIP
- Presented Bluff Ortho project to Town Council
- Continued planning and development of Founders' Forum series
- Attended GBCC Coffee & Connections
- Participated in BCEDC Board meeting
- Conducted multiple 1:1 calls with interested companies
- Informational interview with Kaylee Criss
- Continued budget discussions and planning

- SharePoint review and clean-up
- Installed new whiteboards in Landing Pad offices
- Continued development of TOB AI training guides
- Ongoing Madison AI meetings (executive and growth management builds)
- Ongoing development of AI business tools workshop
- Conducted follow-up interviews for summer interns
- Extended offer to summer intern Sofia Giordani
- Continued work on T-Mobile Hometown Grant application

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Continued joint marketing planning efforts with Hardeeville.
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** BCEDC temporarily moved to the Landing Pad to allow more space at The HUB. 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.
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Paul Arvantides is a member of the HBA Lowcountry Partnerships Committee
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board