



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

May 2025

Overview:

May has been another active and engaging month at the DRCI. With Bright Beginnings officially starting, mentorship engagements deepening, and momentum building from April's groundwork, the DRCI team is actively scaling support for entrepreneurs across Bluffton. Focus areas include increased program visibility, refinement of internal systems, and collaboration with local government and business leaders to sustain our trajectory of impact and innovation

Entrepreneur Program Update

STARTUP Companies DRCI welcomed continued momentum among startups, with diligence efforts and mentorship onboarding paving the way for future program participants.

- **OPFOB**
 - **Part of the Family**
 - **AMA Private Dining**
 - **Lisa Sulka Consulting**
 - **Vital Bridge Wellness**
 - ***New – Bright Beginnings Academy**
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- Additional communication with Your Sound Stage about the STARTUP Program
 - Diligence meeting with Garage Experts
 - Kickoff meeting with Bright Beginnings Academy
 - Mentor setup and program schedule confirmed for Garage Experts (start date June 3)
 - Discussion with Shanice Sinclair – Diversity Nursing Academy – about STARTUP Program
 - Onsite meeting with Delta Roofing to review their new location and future plans
 - Adding additional subject matter expert Mentors for Launch Consulting and Bluffton Electric

TRADEUP Companies:

The TRADEUP program, designed to help tradespeople transition into business ownership, continues to expand.

- **Revival Renovations**

GROWTH Companies:

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

- **Bluffton Electric**
- **Delta Roofing**
- **Nexus Business Technology**
- **Launch Consulting**

THRIVE Companies

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **Beachside Tire**
- **Noble Hearts Human Resources**
- **HardeeGreens**

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- New mentor onboarding: Jennifer Minks, Donna Bailey, Joe Mediate
- Continued coordination of mentor meetings and scheduling for new program participants
- Conducting a review of all past Mentors for ongoing engagement status

Economic Development Update

- Ongoing support for The Goddard School – completed presentation for 1st reading EDIP grant consideration. Site selected at Washington Square location.
- Conducted onsite progress review of Building 100 with contractors, architect, and TOB staff
- Active fieldwork with HR on updated job descriptions and compensation ratings for two DRCI positions

- Completed pricing review and implemented updates across DRCI programs
- Engaged in Placer.ai demo training to evaluate data-driven site and customer insights
- “SpeedBuild” AI product development continued with focus on vendor and supply chain planning
- Completed demographic information request for Fraum Health – considering a new location in New Riverside

Operations, Events and Meetings:

- Spoke at the Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) "Know Your Benefits" monthly meeting
- HHI-Bluffton Chamber AI Event presentations at TCL Culinary Institute
- Attended the Beaufort Memorial Hospital groundbreaking ceremony
- Marketing video planning meeting for DRCI promotions
- Attending Leadership Class ribbon cutting event on May 20

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Working on networking event for business owners. Planning another meeting with Josh Gruber for June. Setting up a diligence meeting for Shanice Sinclair from Hardeeville who we have been advising over the last few years.
- **BlacQuity:** Spring cohort graduated
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration
- **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 represented DRCI at their monthly Member Benefits Meeting
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Attended several groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings. Paul is in the Leadership Program for 2025 and they had their ribbon cutting on their project this month. Hosted and attended the HHI Chamber Military & Business Alliance at The HUB
- **SBAC:** Paul Arvantes is a member of this board
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, no new events
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board

- **Beaufort Digital Corridor:** David Nelems is a member of this Board
- *New SCDEW – Met Noah Alexander from SCDEW at the Military & Business Alliance committee meeting and working on forming a partnership. Hosted a hiring event for Beaufort Country Schools Transportation and working on hiring event in June for Coca-Cola