



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

August 2026

Overview:

August was a month of continued program expansion, strategic partnerships, and innovation-focused initiatives for the DRC. We launched our new logo, the team onboarded new STARTUP companies, advanced major grant opportunities, and continued developing the Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange. DRC also increased its visibility through regional presentations, networking events, media initiatives, and collaboration with economic development partners.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- Conducted multiple one-on-one, introductory, and diligence meetings with prospective DRCI clients and partners.
- Coordinated schedules and mentor assignments for four new program companies beginning in August and September.
- Onboarded Terasofia as a new STARTUP Program company and held its kickoff meeting.
- Onboarded two additional STARTUP companies: Vitamin Bee Wellness and ChangePoint.
- Continued business recruitment and engagement efforts with prospective clients.
- Met with David Johnson and a prospective tenant regarding business opportunities at the Washington Square development.
- Met with Kay Maxwell of SCA regarding a Bluffton company seeking commercial space and potential participation in DRCI programming.

Program Companies

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

- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**
- ***New - Oceana Blue**
- ***New – Max Xperience**
- ***Teresofia Artisan Bakery**

Mentor Program

- Met with prospective mentors to expand support resources for DRC clients.
- Continued recruitment efforts to strengthen mentor expertise across key industries.
- Coordinated mentor assignments for incoming STARTUP and GROWTH companies

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Attended the Greater Bluffton Chamber Business After Hours event at Agave.
- Attended the Greater Bluffton Chamber Coffee & Connections networking event.
- Hosted and delivered remarks at the Greater Bluffton Chamber Business Over Breakfast event.
- Participated in a Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation meeting and presented to LCN Consulting, a company considering relocation to the Lowcountry.
- Met with the South Carolina Department of Commerce at the invitation of BCEDC and presented DRCI initiatives and opportunities.
- Attended the third session of the SCEDA Institute in Greer, South Carolina.
- Attended the Beaufort Memorial Hospital Board meeting.
- Participated in the Lowcountry Partnership Committee meeting.
- Continued recruitment and interviews for the Business Engagement Manager position.
- Participated in the Town of Bluffton Entertainment Venue Exploratory Workgroup and continued research and planning associated with the initiative.
- Coordinated installation of additional Landing Pad and conference room furniture at The COVE.
- Coordinated installation of new televisions in The COVE Landing Pad, including the main space and offices.
- Reviewed artwork selections and placement options for The COVE and met with Leli Holmes regarding creative elements for the facility.
- Advanced development of the SCRA Regional Innovation Hub Grant proposal to establish the SC Lowcountry Technology Hub, building on the Letter of Intent submitted in July.
- Continued work on the Relentless Challenge Grant application.
- Distributed the Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange survey and compiled results in preparation for the September 10 launch.
- Sent invitations for the inaugural Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange meeting.
- Continued planning and development of the Lowcountry AI Tech Exchange as a regional community connecting technology, AI, business, and innovation.
- Met with SCRA to discuss grant funding opportunities and potential support for DRCI initiatives.

- Met with WHHI to discuss potential quarterly television programming featuring DRCI and continued conversations regarding future programming opportunities.
- Finalized a proposal with 221B Studios for a monthly DRCI podcast series.
- Recorded the inaugural episode of DRCI's new Bald Guys on Business podcast.
- Continued development of the podcast, including planning for future episodes.
- Continued advancement of DRCI marketing and visibility initiatives.
- Paul is on the Entertainment Venue Exploratory Workgroup and it's hosted at The COVE twice a month.

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Continued joint marketing planning efforts with Hardeeville. Founders' Forum booked for September 17 in Hardeeville at Rio Chicos, Presented and attended at Open Doors at City Hall
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects. Attended board meeting. Participated in a Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation meeting and presented to LCN Consulting, a company considering relocation to the Lowcountry. Met with the South Carolina Department of Commerce at the invitation of BCEDC and presented DRCI initiatives and opportunities.
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses and attended. Hosted several GBCC events at 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. Partnership meeting with HBA to see how we can collaborate more.
- **Regional Citizens Committee:** Paul Arvantides is attending meetings to help in evaluation and strategy