



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

July 2024

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 cohort:

- **Hardee Greens**
- **ChangePoint**
- **Petitek**
- **OPFOB**
- **Dance Canapé**
- **Part of the Family**
- **NEW - Dig Your Photos**

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:

- **Beachside Tire**
- **Bluffton Electric**
- **LaSource**
- **Delta Roofing**
- **Custom Audio Video**
- **Universal Bookkeeping**
- **Noble Hearts Human Resources**

Economic Development Update

Overview:

Key Efforts in July:

Operations and Marketing

- **AI Advancements at TCL:** Delivered the third presentation on AI, focusing on cutting-edge applications across various sectors.
- **AI Speaking Requests:** One of our strategic initiatives is to be recognized as the “thought leader of artificial intelligence in the low country”. We held 4 AI Speaking events this month. TCL Colleton, ToB – Debbie's team, National Association of Information Officers about the technology and are scheduled to speak to Hilton Head/Bluffton Chamber of Commerce staff, The Sea Pines CountryClub, the Beaufort Digital Corridor and a group at Hampton Lake
- **Grant Discussions:** Engaged with the Department of Commerce to explore potential grants and funding opportunities, reinforcing our financial foundation for future projects. Narrowed it down to two grants we will potentially apply for
- **Survey:** Working on Clemson survey creation for interviewing DRCI graduates
- **Ecosystem Partners Collaboration Meeting:** Met with John O’Toole from BCEDC and Jess O’Brian from the Beaufort Digital Corridor about partnering on key economic issues for the benefit of both South and North Beaufort County

Events and Meetings:

- **Presentations and Trainings**
 - Presented at the Bluffton Men’s Fellowship Club at the Crescent Point Golf Club
 - AI Training for ToB’s Debbie, Tia and Lyndee on AI
 - AI Presentation for TCL Colleton
- **Meeting –** Met with Sam Johnson about funding for existing and possible new second location. Several meetings with Dave Elliot on his progress on See The Day
- **Collaboration with Town Officials:** Maintained regular interactions with Assistant Town Manager Chris Forster and the BCEDC to stay aligned on emerging opportunities.
- **Childcare RFP Reviews:** Evaluated various proposals to identify potential collaborations and opportunities in childcare services. Hosted two final candidates at DRCI with a panel of judges (from TOB and DRCI Board) to listen to each pitch and select a winner.

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- **70 Mentors:** Our expansive network of 70 mentors continues to provide invaluable guidance and support to our entrepreneurs, fostering growth and innovation.

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Scheduled Lunch and Learn with SBAC for early fall.
- **BlacQuity:** Spring cohort graduated. New cohort starts in the Fall.
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration meeting with Beaufort Digital Corridor and BCEDC.
- **Greater Bluffton Chamber:** Participated in numerous ribbon cuttings, showcasing the growth and expansion of local businesses.
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Attended several groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, and working an AI Education Series with the Chamber. Paul was accepted into the HHI/Bluffton Chamber Leadership Program for 2025
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Registered to be a vendor at the Hispanic Business Associations Expo in October
- **SBAC –** Working with SBAC to host a lunch and learn on funding at DRCI and Hardeeville. Also had a discussion regarding potential customer in need of financing.
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board and attends each monthly meeting

This report underscores the Don Ryan Center for Innovation's pivotal role in driving economic development, fostering innovation, and building a resilient entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bluffton. Our initiatives continue to position the Town as a beacon of progress and opportunity.