



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

March 2025

Overview:

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI) continues its commitment to fostering entrepreneurship and business growth in Bluffton. March has been an active month, with new mentorship engagements, strategic meetings, and program advancements that further solidify DRCI's role in supporting innovation and economic development.

Entrepreneur Program Update

STARTUP Companies DRCI continues to attract and support new startups, with a strong pipeline of entrepreneurs actively engaging in our programs.

- **ChangePoint**
 - **OPFOB**
 - **Part of the Family**
 - **AMA Private Dining**
 - **Trisha Zerhung Fertility Consulting**
 - **Lisa Sulka Consulting**
 - ***New - Vital Bridge Wellness**
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- Strong Pipeline: HR Consulting Company, Music Studio, Miler Orthodontics, Blasch, Bright Beginnings (May start)
 - Conducted a pre-diligence meeting with Emily Melious for potential inclusion in the STARTUP program
 - Met with Tom Rougeux about starting a new machine shop in Bluffton
 - Continued engagement with existing program companies to ensure their progression and success

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**
 - **Hardee Greens (Graduated STARTUP and is now in Hardeeville GROWTH Program)**
 - **Simply Stated**
 - **Nexus Business Technology**
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- Simply Stated featured on QVC again, further increasing brand visibility
 - Continued engagement with program companies to provide necessary support and guidance

THRIVE Companies

Successfully launched the new THRIVE program: Two recent graduates from the GROWTH Program have moved to THRIVE providing opportunity for our graduating GROWTH 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**
- **Noble Hearts Human Resources**

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

DRCI is strengthening its mentor network to provide valuable guidance to entrepreneurs.

- Held a new mentor phone call with Mary Wright
- Conducted mentor meetings with new mentors John Clarke and Evan Welsh
- Met with two additional potential mentors for program expansion

Economic Development Update

- Met with Boys and Girls Club of the Lowcountry to discuss potential space in the new DRCI building
- Checked in with Trey Scott from The Goddard School—confirmed progression on Washington Square location connected him TOB Growth Management. Began process for EDIP grant program
- Fielding interest for first-floor office space in the new building
- Miscellaneous communication with EDIP grant recipient, Encompass
- Participated in BCEDC presentation of grant check for CIS Instruments

Operations, Events and Meetings:

- Hosted and spoke at Beaufort County Senior Leadership Day
- Updated job description for Innovation Manager
- Worked with TOB HR to create job description for Director, Special Projects.
- Paul Arvantides attended leadership events in Columbia for two days as part of the Bluffton/HHI Chamber Leadership Program
- Working on new AI service, “SpeedBuild”. Sourcing supply chain for fulfillment
- Toured the new DRCI building
- Attended the Bluffton Regional Business Council meeting
- Presented at the Greater Bluffton Chamber’s “Know Your Benefits” monthly meeting
- Hosted SC Cyber Academy for two days
- Gave a speech at the USCB Business Chapter
- Attended an initial DRCI budget meeting with executive staff and finance
- Lunch with Board Member Jim Biggs to discuss DRCI initiatives
- Conducted a marketing meeting with Sage Thorsen
- AI training session with Councilman Dan Wood
- AI brainstorming sessions with various mentors

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

- **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, 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
- **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