



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

July 2025

Overview:

July marked an important transition at the Don Ryan Center for Innovation as Paul Arvantides officially stepped into the role of CEO on July 1. David Nelems will now serve as Director of Special Projects, continuing to support long-term initiatives. Renovations and improvements to the DRCI facility also began, aligning with organizational planning and space development. The team advanced AI integration work, expanded mentor and board engagement, and made progress in both strategic partnerships and programmatic support for Bluffton's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Entrepreneur Program Update

STARTUP Companies

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

- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**
- **AMA Private Dining**
- **Lisa Sulka Consulting**
- **Vital Bridge Wellness**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**

GROWTH Companies:

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

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

THRIVE Companies

Ongoing long-term work with established Growth companies

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

TRADE-UP Companies

- Held a facilitated meeting with **Revival Renovations** and Vieira Cabinetry alongside mentor Caprice Thorsen to explore a potential merger

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- Held meetings with mentors for Diversity Nursing Academy
- Continued evaluation of new mentor candidates

Economic Development Update

- Continued planning of exploratory questionnaires to guide development of digital AI agents for future business needs
- Worked with BCEDC on marketing available COVE lease space
- Advanced tenant discussions for 1st floor COVE space (referral from HBA)
- Reviewed available office space with Fred Hamilton
- Discussed office space expansion needs with Greater Bluffton Chamber and SCA

Operations, Events and Meetings:

- Hosted GBCC Lunch & Learn at The HUB
- Spoke at GBCC Coffee and Connections and “Know Your Benefits” events
- Met with Hilton Head Preparatory School leadership to discuss AI in education and potential partnership with their Institute for Business and Innovation
- Met with Steve Riley and David Nelems for strategic planning
- Met with marketing partners from BCEDC and Town of Bluffton to align on promotion of The COVE
- Gave AI speech and live demo on behalf of SBAC in Savannah to an audience of over 80 people
- Continued work on ClearGov metrics for TOB strategic plan
- Press release for CEO transition announcement
- Participated in GBCC’s Coffee & Connections at CAV Integrated Home
- Met with Town of Bluffton interns to introduce DRCI operations

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Diversity Nursing starting the Hardeeville STARTUP program on July 29th. Scheduled regular quarterly updates with Hardeeville City Manager Josh Gruber
- **BlacQuity:** Next Cohort starts August 20
- **Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation:** Ongoing collaboration on multiple impactful projects including collaboration. Attended board meeting.
- **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 ribbon cuttings.
- **SBAC:** Paul Arvantes is a member of this board
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Met with Alex to discuss space at the COVE and potential tenants for the first floor
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board
- **Beaufort Digital Corridor:** David Nelems is a member of this Board