



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

June 2025

Overview:

June was a dynamic month of planning, progress, and partnership-building at the DRCI. From board development and CEO transition planning to AI innovation and ongoing STARTUP engagement, DRCI continued to move forward strategically. The team also advanced key initiatives around workforce development, entrepreneurship education, and digital innovation—all while enhancing relationships with local and regional partners to better support our entrepreneurial community.

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**
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- Signed up Diversity Nursing Academy for the Hardeeville STARTUP programming beginning mid-July.
 - Met with Maggie Harrington – Diligence meeting set – Startup Candidate
 - Met with Teras Hagans – diligence scheduled, site tour conducted – Startup Candidate
 - Follow up Diligence meeting with Your Sound Stage – Startup Candidate
 - Conducted COVE tour with Aqeela Aiken (Bright Beginnings)

TRADEUP Companies:

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

- **Revival Renovations - Graduated**

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

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

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- Met with several potential mentors including Adam Weiss (referred by Mayor Williams)
- Continued tracking mentor engagement and matching with program needs

Economic Development Update

- Continued planning of exploratory questionnaires to guide development of digital AI agents for future business needs
- Conducted COVE tour with BCEDC for strategic planning and placement
- The Goddard School continues moving forward with its Washington Square location—support included second reading EDIP preparation and coordination with TOB Growth Management
- Presentation packet and planning support provided for 97 Goethe and Sunshine Bluffton Group, LLC
- Strategic meeting with Alex Navarro (HBA) – confirmed interest in 2nd floor COVE office space
- Toured 119 Persimmons Street as part of site and community development initiatives
- Met with Hilton Head Boys & Girls Club to support their strategic planning efforts
- Call with FlashAI and BCEDC to discuss emerging opportunities in AI and economic development
- Meeting scheduled with Josh Gruber (Hardeeville) for continued town-level collaboration

Operations, Events and Meetings:

- Hosted GBCC Lunch & Learn at The HUB
- Spoke at GBCC Coffee and Connections and “Know Your Benefits” events
- Reviewed and posted new job description internally
- Worked with Coca-Cola on second hiring event
- Hosted BCEDC intern for DRCI overview and ecosystem education
- Completed second reading presentations and packets for Sunshine Bluffton Group, Ninety Seven LLC, and The Goddard School
- Continued development of “SpeedBuild” AI solution
- Began setup of Microsoft Copilot Studio for internal use in creating digital agents
- Developed framework for refreshed DRCI website and digital presence
- Researched fall AI training offerings to be presented by DRCI
- Booked AI demo for Bluffton Rotary Club and AI roundtable with Hilton Head Prep
- CEO Transition meeting to support organizational continuity

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Signed up Diversity Nursing for the Hardeeville STARTUP program. Planning another meeting with Josh Gruber for July
- **BlacQuity:** Next Cohort is in the Fall
- **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 graduated the Leadership Program for 2025
- **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