



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

**April 2025**

### **Overview:**

April has been an active and engaging month at the Don Ryan Center for Innovation (DRCI). From new diligence meetings and mentor matches to presentations and ongoing work on our facility and programs, the DRCI team continues to advance entrepreneurial growth and community connections in Bluffton and beyond.

### **Entrepreneur Program Update**

**STARTUP Companies** DRCI welcomed continued momentum among startups, with diligence efforts and mentorship onboarding paving the way for future program participants.

- **ChangePoint**
  - **OPFOB**
  - **Part of the Family**
  - **AMA Private Dining**
  - **Trisha Zerhung Fertility Consulting (Pausing for Maternity Leave next month)**
  - **Lisa Sulka Consulting**
  - **Vital Bridge Wellness**
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- Initial phone call with Ted Bilman, exploring a new companion care service
  - Diligence meeting held with Your Sound Stage
  - Diligence meeting with Miler Orthodontics
  - Kickoff meeting with Vital Bridge Wellness
  - Mentor setup and program schedule confirmed for Launch Consulting (start date April 24)
  - Mentor request processed and schedule prepared for Bright Beginnings (start date May 7)
  - Met with Abby H. regarding a potential coffee shop venture; referred to SBDC for further support

### **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**
- **Simply Stated (Graduated)**
- **Nexus Business Technology**

### **THRIVE Companies**

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

### **Mentor Program**

#### **Mentorship Network:**

- New mentor onboarding: Jennifer Minks
- Continued coordination of mentor meetings and scheduling for new program participants

### **Economic Development Update**

- Ongoing support for The Goddard School with multiple interactions around EDIP grant process and growth management coordination
- Completed decorating and finish selections for Building 100

- Conducted onsite progress review of Building 100 with contractors, architect, and TOB staff
- Active fieldwork with HR on updated job descriptions and compensation ratings for two DRCI positions
- Completed pricing review and implemented updates across DRCI programs
- Engaged in Placer.ai demo training to evaluate data-driven site and customer insights
- “SpeedBuild” AI product development continued with focus on vendor and supply chain planning

### Operations, Events and Meetings:

- Spoke at the Greater Bluffton Chamber of Commerce (GBCC) "Know Your Benefits" monthly meeting
- Gave two AI presentations for Hampton Lake's Lecture Series and The Crescent
- Attended the Novant Health groundbreaking ceremony
- Meeting with James Damico from South Atlantic Bank to explore partnership opportunities
- Check presentation to CIS Instruments and the Beaufort County Economic Development Corporation
- Marketing video planning meeting for DRCI promotions

### Partnerships

#### Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Meeting with Josh Gruber to review the City’s small business plans and explore a new networking event for business owners
- **BlacQuity:** Met with Gwen Chambers to explore collaborative initiatives
- **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 Arvantides 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