



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

November 2024

Overview:

The Don Ryan Center for Innovation continues to play a vital role in Bluffton's economic landscape by enabling both new ventures and expanding companies to flourish. Our initiatives attract and support businesses that actively strengthen the local economy, driving innovation and creating jobs within the community.

This month, we are thrilled to highlight the variety of companies within our programs, ranging from innovative early-stage startups to established enterprises scaling up. These businesses are contributing significantly to Bluffton's economic momentum, cementing the area's standing as a vibrant center for entrepreneurship and growth.

In addition to our core programs for entrepreneurs, we're deeply involved in several strategic initiatives designed to boost Bluffton's business climate. These economic development projects aim to stimulate commercial growth, attract fresh investments, and secure long-term prosperity for the region.

Looking forward, the Don Ryan Center is dedicated to advancing innovation, championing local businesses, and maintaining Bluffton's position as a premier destination for entrepreneurial achievement and economic progress.

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.

- **Hardee Greens**
- **ChangePoint**
- **OPFOB**
- **Part of the Family**

- **Dig Your Photos**
- **Mencias Cleaning**
- **AMA Private Dining**

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

Key Efforts in November:

- Working with prospective tenants for building A. The goal is to have at least the top floor fully rented out before the space opens in late 2025.
- Working with potential EDO company CS Instruments, who are looking for HQ space in Bluffton. Staff is collecting data for the grant to present to Council in the very near future. This prospect came through our partnership with the BCEDC.

Operations and Marketing

- Survey of all existing and prior DRCI graduates is currently in the field. Reporting of data will occur in early 2025.
- Participated in TOB strategic Planning events
- Bi-monthly meetings with Assistant Town manager Chris Forster.
- Working on a new advertising campaign to begin in 2025 to attract Program Companies

Events and Meetings:

- The next DRCI Board meeting will occur on Thursday December 12th at 5:00pm.
- Attended Grand Opening of STARTUP client Hardee Greens production facility.
- TOB Thanksgiving event.

- Multiple diligence meetings scheduled with potential new Program Companies.
- Creating Phase II of the AI event program that will begin in 2025.

Mentor Program

Mentorship Network:

- **72 Mentors:** Our expansive network of 72 mentors continues to provide invaluable guidance and support to our entrepreneurs, fostering growth and innovation.

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Hardee Greens grand opening and ribbon cutting scheduled for November 19th. We have had initial conversations with the new City Manager, Josh Gruber. We anticipate a face-to-face meeting before the end of the year.
- **BlacQuity:** Fall Cohort at The HUB. Graduating at the end of the month
- **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 planning more for January.
- **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. David Nelems spoke with the group November 13. DRCI staff also built the website for the 2025 Leadership team project
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Multiple meetings with Alex Navarro about various partnership activities like information sessions for their association members, potential clients and how to reach them and made the introduction to BCEDC
- **SBAC:** Paul Arvantes is a member of this board
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board and attends each monthly meeting