



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

**January 2026**

### **Overview:**

January kicked off the year with renewed momentum. As we geared up for the ribbon cutting of our new facility, The COVE, the month was marked by new partnerships, strategic planning, and program development. From mentor engagement to youth-focused initiatives AI education, the DRCI team continued laying the foundation for a productive and impactful 2026.

### **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**
- **Bright Beginnings Academy**
- **Diversity Nursing (Hardeeville)**
- **Amia Marcell**
- **Belleau Woods Tavern (HEROES)**
- **\*New – Buysight.ai**

#### **GROWTH Companies:**

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

- **Bluffton Electric**
- **Delta Roofing**
- **D'Flavor Custom Cakes**

## **THRIVE Companies**

Ongoing long-term work with established Growth companies

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **Beachside Tire**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**

## **Mentor Program**

### **Mentorship Network:**

- Sent out 2026 Mentor Handbook and requested recommitment confirmations
- Conducted lead mentor discussion with Molly Breazeale to align on program delivery and mentor roles

## **Economic Development Update**

- Met with Camden Brown, a potential tenant and EDIP candidate, for space in The COVE
- Continued planning for The COVE ribbon cutting scheduled for February 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Attended BCEDC Board Meeting to align on 2026 goals and regional development

## **Operations, Events and Meetings:**

- Attended and spoke at the Hardeeville Nonprofit Symposium
- Attended GBCC Coffee & Connections networking event
- Participated in planning meetings for Jobs Now 2026 with Tom Henz and AJ Harrell from TCL (scheduled for March)
- Conference call with Bluffton High School to explore a partnership for Marketing Capstone Projects
- Continued 2026 Naming & Marketing Strategic Planning efforts for DRCI programs and visibility
- Continued work on AI platform proposals (Gov.ai, Prophecy.gov, MadisonAI)
- Ongoing collaboration with Furman University for AI training programs
- Meeting with Rob Hickernell regarding in-person AI training and implementation strategies
- Continued internal development of the new DRCI website
- Held exploratory call with LinkedIn Learning to discuss a potential partnership for course access
- FY27 budget planning

## Partnerships

### Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Attended and spoke at Hardeeville Nonprofit Symposium
- **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. Working on 2026 lunch and learn schedule for the GBCC
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Collaborating with HHI Bluffton Chamber for JobsNow 2026 Job Fair scheduled for March
- **Hispanic Business Association of the Lowcountry:** Ongoing membership, Paul Arvantides is a member of the HBA Lowcountry Partnerships Committee
- **Beaufort County Airport Board:** David Nelems is a member of this Board
- **Furman University:** Ongoing collaboration through Strategic AI Program; exploring expanded offerings