



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

March 2026

Overview:

March was marked by strong momentum in facility activation at The COVE, continued advancement of AI initiatives, and active engagement with entrepreneurs, partners, and the broader business community. The team focused on tenant development, program growth, and regional leadership through presentations, events, and strategic partnerships, while continuing to build capacity for innovation and economic impact in Bluffton and the surrounding region.

Entrepreneur Program Update

- Diligence meetings with Airbana Technical Solutions and Charles Griswald
- Conducted several 1:1 introductory and diligence calls with prospective entrepreneurs
- Signed 2 new STARTUP Companies - Flex & Fit Body Training and High Tide Pediatric Dentistry (starting in April)
- Signed 1 returning GROWTH Company – Effervescence Yoga Spa
- Delta Roofing graduated the GROWTH Program and started THRIVE

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)**
- **Buysight.ai**
- **221B Studios**
- **Rosano**
- **Flex & Fit Body Training**

GROWTH Companies:

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

- **Bluffton Electric**
- **Effervescence**

THRIVE Companies

Ongoing long-term work with established Growth companies

- **Universal Bookkeeper**
- **HardeeGreens (Hardeeville)**
- **Delta Roofing**

Mentor Program

- Continued mentor alignment and engagement conversations
- Matched mentors with new program participants
- Ongoing refinement of program expectations and structure

Operations, Economic Development, Events and Meetings:

- Launched new DRCI website
- JetZero officially moved into The Landing Pad
- Sent two Letters of Intent (LOIs) for first floor tenants at The COVE; one signed
- Continued work with contractors on first floor upfit and second floor bid planning
- Hosted multiple tours of The COVE for realtors, Coastal States Bank, and stakeholders
- Presented Town Council resolution for USCB 20/20 project
- Attended State of Jasper County meeting
- Participated in HBA Lowcountry Partnership meeting with Hardeeville leadership
- Hosted and presented at GBCC Lunch & Learn (AI presentation by David)
- Hosted GBCC Get to Know Your Chamber event at The COVE
- Hosted GBCC Business Over Breakfast with Memorial Health at The COVE
- Hosted GBCC Ambassadors at The COVE
- Hosted and presented to Beaufort County Senior Leadership
- Planned Business Owners Networking Event at Southern Barrel

- Attended FY27 Budget meeting
- Sent Hardeeville Annual Report
- Participated in Annual Women’s Summit of the Lowcountry preparation
- Finalized execution of Madison AI contract
- Conducted Madison AI kickoff meeting and began onboarding process
- Reviewed Madison AI ingestion files
- Continued development of AI Best Practices document
- Collaborated with Town of Bluffton IT and Executive Department on AI policy updates
- Continued development of AI agent for property tax and developer fee support
- AI education preparation with Rob Hickernell
- Conducted phone and second-round interviews for potential summer interns
- Continued work on T-Mobile Hometown Grant application

Partnerships

Key Collaborations:

- **Hardeeville:** Sent annual report to leadership. Set up strategic planning meeting for 2026-2027.
- **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. Hosted several GBCC events at The HUB and The COVE.
- **Hilton Head – Bluffton Chamber:** Collaborating with HHI Bluffton Chamber for JobsNow 2026 Job Fair scheduled for March 26th.
- **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