How the Beaufort Digital Corridor is working to bolster startups and possibly the future of Beaufort's economy itself

By Mindy Lucas

On a recent Thursday night in downtown Beaufort, a few dozen people gather in a brightly lit, modern office space to talk shop.

Over drinks and appetizers of sushi and steamed dumplings they talk about what they're working on, who might be someone to connect with and, most important of all, how they can get their product or idea off the ground.

It's all part of the Beaufort Digital Corridor's TECHConnect, a monthly networking event for technology professionals to come together and meet like-minded people.

Held at what the corridor calls its BASEcamp, or the former Bank of America building at 500

Carteret Street, TECHConnect is just one of several initiatives the Beaufort Digital Corridor (BDC) has launched in recent months in an attempt to bolster not only start-up companies but Beaufort's tech community as well.

Now in its third year, the BDC is a success from the standpoint that it has filled all of its original office suites – nine to be exact – with startup companies. Ten if you're counting the corridor's own office. And now that the corridor is at maximum capacity, its leaders are looking to the future with an eye toward "graduating" these companies, or helping them go from concept or prototype, to successful tech company.

But bigger questions remain: Can the BDC, which still receives public funding, become a self-sustaining organization? And is a town the size of Beaufort capable of launching and nurturing a tech sector?

Beaufort City Councilman Stephen Murray seems to think so, and is already encouraged by what he's seeing.

"It's going really well," Murray said recently when asked about the corridor and its future. Murray, who is also a member of the BDC's board, was instrumental in bringing the idea to Beaufort and helping to get the project up and running.

Investing in an idea like the BDC is a way for the city to stabilize and grow Beaufort's economy, he said, which has had some troubling indicators in recent years.

"From 2005 to 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau says we lost about 25 percent of our 21 to 44-year-olds," he said. In addition, Beaufort had an almost 30 percent decline in per capita income for the same time period, while a home in Beaufort costs almost twice as much as the state average.

"So if our young people are leaving, people who are here are getting poorer, and the cost of living continues


BASEcamp