

## On Being Grateful...



**From** Henry Rock <contact\_point@citystartuplabs.com>

**To** <sjohnston@tuesdayforumcharlotte.org>

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## ON BEING GRATEFUL

*Before going any further, let's start off with a thank you — an appreciation for our \*partners, stakeholders and the people we are honored to serve.*

(\*see list below)

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You haven't heard much from us directly this past year, in part, because we had our heads down doing the work, and also because we wanted to make sure that we gave you something to consider, celebrate and support.

After acquiring **BlkTech Interactive** and the **BlkTech Charlotte** brand (BTI/BTCLT) in 2021 and producing Charlotte's 1st annual **AfroFuturism Fest** last year, we wanted to reimagine how to work with this asset around building new tech ventures, while also developing needed Black tech talent. With the efforts of Rashaan Peek (who has taken on a new role at Center City Partners) and the generosity of Lowe's Home Improvement, we explored several initiatives this year. They included the 2nd Annual AfroFuturism Fest in the Summer, a 3-part **Coding & Switching Series** for navigating building a tech career, and an **HBCU Social Impact Hackathon** in the Spring.

Of particular importance, were the inroads made with the design and development of the **BTI Startup Studio** – an alternative to the accelerator/incubator approach that City Startup Labs has been conducting for years and a likely catalyst for creating new Black technology startups.



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In the New Year, BTI will be doubling down on developing tech ventures, while also convening tech talent through these initiatives. The 3rd Annual **AfroFuturism Fest** will showcase the intersection of technology and culture through ideation, creation and a celebration of inventiveness and innovation over the Labor Day weekend. And the hackathon will be featured at the fest, rather than as a stand-alone.

The **Coding & Switching Series** will expand to include podcasts of interviews with Black tech professionals and entrepreneurs from around the region and beyond along with convenings for local Black tech talent.

Also, in the New Year, the **BTI Startup Studio** is set to function as the *Labs* of City Startup Labs – serving as a platform for experimentation and the exploration of market opportunities for Black tech ventures.

BUT WAIT, THERE'S MORE...

On the other side of City Startup Labs, we have our work with justice-involved persons through the **ReEntry Entrepreneurship Program (REEP)**. 2022 started with the award of nearly \$1 million over 3 years in ARPA funding from Mecklenburg County.

This funding was just the shot in the arm that REEP needed to go from servicing one cohort per year to two. It gave us the wherewithal and runway to maintain our unique approach to working with these aspiring entrepreneurs, as they flesh out new skills and their ideas for income generation.



In late August, we kicked-off the most recent REEP class, but regrettably lost a classmate and friend – SanPreece Green - who passed away on November 3rd.

Another wonderful opportunity for REEP has been the **Restorative Pathways** project, which unfolded last year as a pilot with our client Atrium Health. With Atrium being intentional about becoming a fair-chance employer, we were contracted to design, develop and deliver an initiative that recruited, trained, onboarded and assisted in transitioning justice-involved persons from jobs into careers in healthcare.





*Dravia Hendrix, Atrium Teammate of the Month & RP Alum*

In the New Year, we'll expand the effort into Winston Salem, NC (AH Wake Forest Baptist) and subsequently into Georgia and elsewhere, as Atrium Health continues to enlarge their footprint.

Lastly, CSL has a colab between both REEP and the BTI Startup Studio on the drawing board: ReEntry Connections or **ReConnex** – to address the digital divide experienced by returning citizens. Stay tuned for more about this exciting social venture.

**THAT'S AMAZING, YOU'VE MADE IT TO THE END!**

*As you can see, we have been up to quite a bit this year and have plenty to be grateful for. It's our hope that you too, will take a moment to cherish your blessings during this holiday and throughout the remainder of the year.*

*With Gratitude ~*

*Henry Rock*

\*And a special thanks to our partners and funders: Ally Bank, Atrium Health, Bank of America, Center for Community Transitions, Center for Digital Equity, Charlotte Area Fund, Duke Energy, Freedom Fighting Missionaries, LendingTree, Lowe's Home Improvement, Mecklenburg County, Reentry Partners of Mecklenburg County, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and Wells Fargo Bank.



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9319 Robert D. Snyder Rd.  
Charlotte, NC 28262, United States

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