

## Q&A with Alex Andrew

Elizabeth Cromwell Talks with

Venture Central Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Builder Alex Andrew

Following a nationwide search, Venture Central, a collaborative project to support regional entrepreneurship, announced the selection of Alex Andrew to lead the organization as its first Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Builder. Venture Central has received support from GO (Growth and Opportunity) Virginia, a statewide economic development initiative driving regional economic growth by incentivizing collaboration between business, education, and local government. Andrew will assist the board in developing and executing the strategies and goals of this innovative new 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce President Elizabeth Cromwell spoke with Andrew about his new leadership role.

### Can you explain the concept of entrepreneurial ecosystem building?

Let's start by defining what an entrepreneurial ecosystem is. Basically, it's all the components necessary for entrepreneurs to start and grow successful companies. This includes traditional components like founders, of course, as well as resources, connections, and talent, but also more nebulous things like building a narrative, culture, and access.

Taking this a step further, the idea of entrepreneurial ecosystem building is to take a systemic look at the ecosystem, identify gaps, and look for ways to fill them. And importantly, doing it in a way that is driven by local entrepreneurs, and keeping financial sustainability, diversity, and inclusivity top of mind.

### What is your vision for Central Virginia's ecosystem?

One of the things that makes this region special is the caliber of talent we have and the breadth of resources. Put simply, we already have many of the components of a thriving ecosystem. What we need to improve upon is the ability for entrepreneurs to access the resources they need, when they need them. We're already seeing some great efforts on this front—including the Hub platform from the Charlottesville Business Innovation Council, the Small Business Development Center's business advisors and entrepreneurship programs, among others.

When I talk to people here, I don't think anyone wants this region to try to copy Silicon Valley—there's a strong pride in the quality of life here and a recognition that there are benefits to not growing too big too quickly. That said, I firmly believe this region has the potential to be internationally recognized as an entrepreneurship hub and that's what we're trying to achieve with Venture Central.

### How will you achieve that vision?

It's going to take the commitment of folks all across the community—and the great news is, there's a real passion among the entrepreneurs and support organizations here to make this successful. We're fortunate to have generous support from Charlottesville City, Albemarle County, UVA, the Chamber, and the Commonwealth's Growth and Opportunity program to first figure out what's needed, and then realize it. It's an exciting time, and there's a lot to do, and I'm honored to be a part of this effort.

### Looking to the year ahead, what are you most excited about?

Look, the last couple years have been pretty bleak—to say the least. But one of the most exciting things to me is the number of new businesses formed during the pandemic. According to the Census Bureau, Americans started 5.4 million businesses in 2021—an all-time high—and a million businesses than the previous record in 2020. We're forever changed, and more and more people are making the decision to follow their passion and jump into entrepreneurship. That makes figuring out what these new entrepreneurs need and how we can support them an imperative of utmost importance.

### How can people get involved?

Since I'm new, I want to learn from others who love this community and want to see a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem. So I'm meeting as many people as possible—whether they are entrepreneurs, want to be entrepreneurs, or are supporting entrepreneurs. And I'm not just focused on high-growth tech companies—lifestyle and main street businesses are just as important to the economic vitality and health of our



**Elizabeth Cromwell**  
*President and CEO of the Charlottesville  
Regional Chamber of Commerce*



**Alex Andrew**  
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community. My email address is alex@venturecentralva.com. I welcome an opportunity to connect with you as we build a more robust entrepreneurial ecosystem for now and well into the future.

The GO Virginia Region 9 footprint includes the City of Charlottesville and the Counties of Albemarle, Culpeper, Fauquier, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, Madison, Nelson, Orange, and Rappahannock. Additional support for Venture Central is provided by the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County, the University of Virginia, and the Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce.

### HELPFUL LINKS:

GO (Growth and Opportunity) Virginia  
[GOVirginia.org](http://GOVirginia.org)

GO Virginia Region 9  
[GOVirginia9.org](http://GOVirginia9.org)

**Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce** 434-295-3141 [cvillechamber.com](http://cvillechamber.com)

The Charlottesville Regional Chamber of Commerce advocates, convenes, and engages to strengthen business in the greater Charlottesville Region.