



## Distillery Labs announces new Executive Director

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Chris Setti, CEO, Greater Peoria EDC [csetti@greaterpeoriaedc.org](mailto:csetti@greaterpeoriaedc.org)

(July 25, 2023 | PEORIA, IL) – Distillery Labs has named Doug Cruitt, MBA, as its new Executive Director. The technology and innovation center launched in 2020 as part of the larger Illinois Innovation Network.

Cruitt comes to Distillery Labs as the founding principal of RIVR Strategic Coaching, a boutique strategic consulting and coaching firm specializing in entrepreneurship, leadership, self-improvement and strategic support to help others grow, lead and succeed. He also serves as a mentor at Distillery Labs, a mentor at the University of Illinois iVenture Accelerator program, is a committee member for the Peoria Chamber of Commerce Community Leadership School, and has founded or helped others launch and scale more than 15 startups over the course of his career.

“The role of Executive Director at Distillery Labs sits at the convergence of three things that I am most passionate about (outside of my family): community, entrepreneurship, and positively impacting the lives of others. To be given the opportunity to be a part of building and leading Distillery Labs is truly an honor. I look forward to stepping into this role to serve and support entrepreneurs throughout the region,” said Cruitt.

Cruitt takes over for Paul Leamon, the organization’s first executive director, who has remained as a consultant to Chris Setti, CEO of the Greater Peoria Economic Development Council (GPEDC), who has been the interim head of Distillery Labs since April of 2022.

“The search was pretty amazing. We had a great panel of community stakeholders from the economic development and entrepreneurial space,” explained Setti. “What stood out about Doug is that he has a really interesting background of working in corporate structures, but also in more entrepreneurial ventures. He’s done mentoring with some of our startups and is big on studying and teaching leadership. And I think that this job, in addition to being a leader of Distillery Labs, is a community leadership position.”

“A big thanks goes to Chris Setti – and the GPEDC Board – for allowing Chris to step in and guide Distillery Labs these past 15 months,” said Bob Sehring, CEO of OSF HealthCare and chairman of the Distillery Labs board. “A strong foundation has been laid, and we are excited to welcome Doug as executive director. We look forward to him expanding the already welcoming entrepreneurial and innovative spirit that exists throughout the Greater Peoria community. We know under his leadership the relationships with already established community partners will continue to grow and ideas and new concepts will flourish, making this area even more attractive to businesses looking to recruit forward-thinking individuals, the best and brightest.”

Distillery Labs, which is funded through a \$10 million grant that is part of the larger Illinois Innovation Network, will be located on Adams Street in downtown Peoria in the Thomas Building, a 50,000 square foot facility formerly occupied by Illinois Central College. Construction on the space will begin in late August. A ceremony celebrating the start of construction will be held on Thursday, August 17 at 10 am at Distillery Labs, 201 SW Adams St., Peoria.

Distillery Labs will ultimately be a tech, innovation and incubation community designed to foster opportunity throughout the greater Peoria region. It will have classes, workshops, public-private partnerships, student opportunities, and more.

Cruitt, who starts his new role July 31, is excited about the opportunities and possibilities that lie ahead.

“Building a strong startup community and entrepreneurial ecosystem is not a linear process where we can accurately predict its growth and evolution. The entire ecosystem will take many shapes and sizes over the coming years, decades, and beyond. I believe that at any given time, our ecosystem will be only a fraction of what it will become. And that should excite people. Look at all the resources we currently have in our region to support entrepreneurs. Look at the startup success stories of years past as well as the ones happening right now. Look at the momentum building around the region as a whole thanks to initiatives like Choose Greater Peoria and others,” said Cruitt. “Look at how well our region gives back to its community through supporting non-profits. Look at the pride and love that most citizens have for this place they call home. Look at the midwestern work ethic and resilience of its people. As you take a step back and look at all these things, recognize that this is only a fraction of what we will one day be. How exciting is that? Now, think about what our region will look like when we are globally recognized as a hub for entrepreneurs to launch and grow companies, drive innovation, and spur economic growth.”

To learn more, visit [www.DistilleryLabs.org](http://www.DistilleryLabs.org).