

Alumni Spotlight: Jennifer McDonald

2016



Jennifer McDonald, a 2016 graduate of the Master of Agribusiness (MAB) program was selected as the 2022 K-State Global Campus Alumni Fellow. She was on campus April 19-22 to accept her award and talk with students and faculty.

"Anyone can have a dream to start a business and inspire others to the same. Having my name on a banner outside of Waters Hall [as the Alumni Fellow] means that if I can do it, others can do it," McDonald said.

McDonald is founder, CEO and head winemaker at Jenny Dawn Cellars. She founded the company in 2016, launched her first wine in 2017 and opened the Wichita urban winery in Union Station in November 2019.

Prior to starting the winery, McDonald worked as a human resource and recruiting professional for over 10 years for Wichita businesses, including Wolters Kluwer, Redguard, Cargill, Zerochoas and Koch.

"I enjoyed working with agriculture students helping them find careers in the companies I worked for. Then I started thinking about a career in agriculture for myself," McDonald said. "When I started the MAB program, I knew I wanted to one day open a winery. The MAB program allowed me to look at the business as a whole, helped me determine the financial structure I would need, and how I would develop and sell my products. It was a good fit for me with the classes online as well as in person."

McDonald started her career in winemaking at home and won a gold, three silvers and two bronze medals from the Kansas Winemakers and Grape Growers Association. As part of the MAB program, she developed research data on consumer wine preferences and developed a business plan for an urban winery for her thesis.

"My MAB thesis laid the foundation for my business plan. The research allowed me to create a business model working with growers in Kansas and building a supply chain in California to



produce wines," she said.

Her Kansas Chardonnay received a silver medal in the 2021 San Francisco Chronicle wine competition. McDonald won the 2017 and 2019 Chardonnay Best of Class in the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition and a bronze for her pinot noir in 2019. Her 2016 chardonnay and pinot noir won a silver and bronze medal in the New World International Wine Competition.

She is active in Urban Professionals, the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary, Leadership Kansas and Pipeline Entrepreneurs.

McDonald has received the Wichita Innovations in Business Award presented by Young Professionals of Wichita. She was recognized by the Wichita Business Journal in 2017 as one of Wichita's top 40 people in business under age 40 and received the publication's 2018 Innovation and Enterprise award, and the 2020 Women in Business award. In 2019, she received the Distinguished 400 Award by the African American History Commission and in 2021 received the Black Women Owned Business of Distinction from the Heartland Black Chamber of Commerce.

She has an undergraduate degree in public administration from Doane College. McDonald also completed Wichita State University e2e's collaborative start-up accelerator program, LaunchPrep, and has taken winemaking classes from UC Davis.

She and her husband, Matthew, have two children, Desmond and Emma.

Hear more of Jennifer's story at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGLf31tG5Os>.

Why Purple?



Why did Jennifer choose purple as the brand color for Jenny Dawn Cellars?

“Purple is the color of grapes. Purple is the color of royalty, and we are a premium wine brand. And I’m a K-State Alum!”



Jenny Dawn Cellars storefront in Union Station, Wichita, KS; McDonald presenting to a K-State Advanced Wine Class; and McDonald and Dr. Allen Featherstone, MAB Director, at the Alumni Fellow Award Ceremony.