

IN THE NEWS

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by **Chloe Miller**

Jackson's RJ's Metropolitan Ice Cream Co. named one of Michigan's Best Small Businesses

JACKSON, MI – A Jackson ice cream and burger shop has landed on the list of Michigan's Best Small Businesses.

RJ's Metropolitan Ice Cream Co., 135 E. Michigan Ave., is among 11 businesses statewide being recognized by the Michigan Small Business Development Center.

It was chosen because of its efforts in opening and growing its downtown Jackson business, as well as its involvement in the community and other Jackson-area businesses, said Shawn Preissle, Michigan SBDC of Greater Washtenaw Region's associate regional director.

"When I was finally introduced to (owners) Robert and Yvette Wilke when they were planning to move to their new location, I was so excited to work with them because they had left such an impression in Jackson County, especially with minority-owned businesses," Preissle said.

These awards will be handed out at the 19th-Annual Michigan Celebrates Small Business Awards Gala on Tuesday, May 2, at Michigan State University's Breslin Student Events Center in East Lansing.

RJ's Metropolitan Ice Cream Co. was created in 2014 as RJ's Heavenly Delights, an outlet for Robert and Yvette Wilke to heal after the death of their son R.J. They always wanted to move downtown, so when the Metropolitan Ice Cream Co. store became available on Michigan Avenue they moved and created RJ's Metropolitan Ice Cream Co. in 2021.

They sell a range of burgers, ice cream cones, shakes, malts and many more sweet treats.

But Robert and Yvette don't only put their hearts into their business, they give to those around them, Yvette said. They serve on several community boards, mentor other growing small businesses through the Lean Rocket Lab LOCAL program and help other Black-owned businesses grow through their organization Jackson's Black Excellence.

"It was hard when we were starting off. We kind of didn't know where to turn or stuff like that," Yvette said. "So, now we kind of want to help others find their way because it's probably somewhat intimidating when you haven't

seen maybe people like you.”

Through Jackson’s Black Excellence, they recently helped KeniKakes & More move into a new brick-and-mortar location, thanks to the help of a \$10,000 sponsorship from True Community Credit Union.

Related: KeniKakes & More is moving into new brick-and-mortar shop

They are honored to receive this state award, Yvette said, especially for the exposure and future opportunities that could come from it.

“I want to really take full advantage of all the networking opportunities (and) the new businesspeople we can meet,” Yvette said.

Other winners of the award are:

- City Shield Security Services – Wayne County
- Barney’s BakeHouse Bakery – Bay County
- Eagle Link LLC – Delta County
- Freedom Counseling LLC – Kalamazoo County
- Groovy Donuts – Ingham County
- Ludington Meat Co. – Mason County
- Sand Bay Marina Sales, Service & Storage – Presque Isle County
- Stafford’s Hospitality Inc. – Emmet County
- Thumb Roast Coffee – Sanilac County
- Wood Shop Social Kitchen & Bar – Isabella County

The SBDC’s mission is to help Michigan small businesses succeed by providing no-cost consulting to businesses throughout Michigan, officials said. For more information, visit michigansbdc.org.