

## 2019 KDS Graduate is Already an Entrepreneur

While most high school graduates cross the stage for their diploma thinking about college and career plans, one KDS Class of 2019 graduate already has her future in full swing with her own handmade jewelry business. McKenzie Wilbanks has been working for two years to build Kenzie's Creations, her online and in-store jewelry and accessories business.

The hard work paid off this month when the 18-year-old won the \$50,000 concept prize in the Alabama Launchpad Competition. The contest, sponsored by the Economic Development Partnership of Alabama, allows entrepreneurs to pitch their plans to a panel of judges for cash prizes. The money can then be used to grow their businesses, which is what McKenzie intends to do.

The competition is usually dominated by tech startups and innovative business models, but McKenzie's story, like her business plan, isn't like others.

"I love to paint," she said. "I've participated in art a lot, and I have a passion for creating."

McKenzie began to market her own handcrafted earrings, necklaces and jewelry. Then she branched out into T-shirts, sweatshirts, towels and iPhone cases. In addition to her website, she promotes the business using social media.



"In the beginning it was really slow," she said. "It was more like a hobby. I was getting one to three sales a week. Now it's up to 50 to 60 a week. I

participate in craft shows about twice monthly, and I restock every one of my 23 local sales locations every week."

In addition to the local shops and online sales, McKenzie sells her jewelry to vendors in Texas, Florida, and New York City.

