



MEDIA RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: Immediately
DATE: June 09, 2025
CONTACT: Tanisha Williams: (206) 592-3212, twilliam@highline.edu
Jess Underwood: (206) 592-3393, junderwood@highline.edu

Highline Nursing Instructor and Entrepreneur Named 2025 Distinguished Alumna

Jenessa Pettit has received Highline's 2025 Distinguished Alumni award and for good reason: she has accomplished a lot.

Pettit, a 40-year-old Auburn resident, is an adjunct instructor in Highline College's nursing program, a medical surgical float at Swedish Hospital and she's the owner of Mighty Mugs Coffee — a coffee stand that at one point had 8 locations.

So, how does she do it all?

"I look at the big picture and I prioritize the most important things. I focus on those things and get to the other details when I have the time," Pettit said.

Pettit started out as a Running Start student at Highline College in 2001 and took a number of classes. She then returned to Highline in 2010 to pursue an Associate of Applied Science degree (AAS). She then transferred to Bellevue College to pursue an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN).

But it wasn't all easy sailing.

"I showed up (at Highline) a mess. And they said, that's okay, I'm glad you showed up," Pettit said.

Faculty like Molly Brignall, Jeff Klein, and Allison Green offered not just education but compassion—connecting her to resources, building her confidence, and helping her see a future in professional work.

“As a first-generation college student, that support meant everything to me. It shaped the way I show up now for my own students – with empathy, encouragement, and the reminder that success is built on persistence and grit. I’m here today because the people at Highline chose to invest in me, and that continues to influence how I lead, teach, and give back,” Pettit said.

According to Tanisha Williams, Highline’s Alumni Relations specialist, “What makes Jenessa’s story even more powerful is that she returned to the very college where she once studied, and is now inspiring the next generation of nurses as an instructor.”

Pettit’s colleague and Highline instructor Johnny Nguyen said of Pettit, “Her diverse experience demonstrates her eclectic abilities and commitment to bettering society as a nurse, educator, and entrepreneur.” Nguyen was one of the nominators who recommended Pettit for the Distinguished Alumni Award.

On the business front, Pettit’s pathway into establishing Mighty Mugs Coffee began when she was a barista working at the Mighty Mugs Coffee Kent location, from ages 19-25. In 2010 she sold her 1971 Chevy and bought the coffee stand.

“It was failing and the owner wasn’t able to make it work. I took my first location and doubled the revenue in one year, during the recession,” Pettit said.

As for her advice to Highline students, especially those who are first generation, Pettit recommends that, “Whatever you do, just keep doing it. Do it tired, do it broke, do it scared, just keep doing it until you finish.”

Pettit will be recognized at Commencement on June 12. She is the 37th recipient of the award, the most prestigious award given to alumni.

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About Highline College

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves 14,100 students. With more than 80 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor’s degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, internationally acclaimed author Ann Rule, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida, Dr. Tom Jackson, former president of Cal-Poly Humboldt and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel and nurse Sandra Cravens Robinson.

