

Young Alumnus Advocates for Maine

Wildes '12 promotes the Pine Tree State

By Emma Rose Gallimore '08



ASK NATE WILDES '12 what he does for a living and he'll tell you, "I live and work in Maine." What sounds vague at first hearing is actually a powerful statement of who he is and what he believes in.

In addition to running Flight Deck Brewing in Brunswick, Wildes is also the executive director of Live+Work in Maine, an initiative that helps connect people who want to move to Maine with the array of opportunities that exist here.

Wildes is particularly suited to this work because he's a part of the demographic that he's serving. He and his wife, Jamie Pacheco '12, left Maine right after graduation to chase new opportunities. They soon realized that everything they really wanted had been here all along.

Although Wildes was born in New Hampshire, his family moved to South Portland when he was just three months old. He grew up in Southern Maine and considers himself a Mainer at heart.

"My dad is a UMaine alumnus so, of course, all through high school I wanted nothing to do with UMaine," Wildes jokes. He knew how he liked to work, but his interests were too varied to fit into a single major. He was just as interested in politics as he was in engineering.

That made him a perfect candidate for UMaine's Foster Center for Student Innovation. His father, Bruce Wildes '82, convinced him to at least visit UMaine. Renee Ward Kelly '14G, assistant vice president for innovation and economic develop-

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ment for UMaine, insisted on giving him a tour of the Innovation Center. Wildes was immediately hooked.

Kelly, he says, was the one who really convinced him that he belonged at UMaine. “She showed me that it’s a big place but there’s a spot for everyone,” Wildes said.

Wildes majored in political science, but he got his engineering fix at the Innovation Center. Pursuing all of his passions, Wildes was active in student senate and the get-out-the-vote campaign. He worked in the communications department at the Advanced Structures and Composites Center and interned in the D.C. offices of Senator Olympia Snowe ’69, ’82 L.H.D.

Through it all, the Innovation Center remained at the heart of his UMaine experience. He was excited to work and study alongside people who had chosen academic paths that were very different from his.

“I found that the most valuable experience at UMaine was access to that diver-

sity,” Wildes said. “Everybody wanted to learn but everybody was coming at it from a different angle.”

Nobody majored in innovation engineering, but Wildes did minor in it. In fact, he was the first to complete the innovation engineering minor program. Wildes also put his passion for bridging the divide between research and real-world applications to good use as an intern for Eureka! Ranch, a well-known center for applied innovation that helps businesses find new ways to innovate and grow. Before he’d even graduated, they offered him a full-time job.

The catch? He had to move to Cincinnati, Ohio.

After graduating in 2012, Wildes started what was essentially his dream job at Eureka! Ranch, founded in the late 1980s by UMaine alumnus Doug Hall ’81. Wildes called it the best graduate experience you could ask for. He traveled the world and met leaders and innovators from around the globe.

“I learned a little about a lot and had

rapid-fire practice in working with people as well as how to take action on a crazy idea, how to test and move a crazy idea to reality faster than ever before.” Nate said. “That would be beneficial at any time in life but now I feel fortunate that that was my starting point in life.”

Wonderful as the experience was, Wildes and Pacheco both missed Maine. “We missed the quality of place that Maine offered. We knew as soon as we got there [Cincinnati] that it wasn’t going to be the place we raised a family and put down our taproot.”

THE OPPORTUNITY to move back to Maine came in the form of a gubernatorial campaign that Wildes believed in. Although his candidate wasn’t elected, the results were well worth the effort.

“What UMaine taught me is that the important thing is to implement change,” Wildes said. “Public and private individuals all have an impact; the important thing is to play an active role.”

He and Pacheco quickly settled into



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their new hometown of Bath, and immediately put that philosophy into practice. Together, they started a restaurant, New Beet Market. The proceeds helped to provide healthy, locally sourced school lunches to children. Meanwhile, Wildes started Flight Deck Brewing to provide meeting space and a nexus point for community gatherings.

As they were settling in, Nate stumbled across the website of Live+Work in Maine, which was a brand-new initiative at the time. He reached out to founder and president, Ed McKersie.

"I wasn't originally going to hire someone but he convinced me that he would be a great person to lead the effort to grow it," McKersie said.

Nate started part-time and soon became the director of engagement. He traveled around the state telling employers, community groups, and government leaders about what Live+Work in Maine is all about.

The goal of Live+Work in Maine is to help employers tell the story of jobs

that exist in Maine so that individuals with the right talents can more easily find them. Wildes encourages businesses to be proactive in their candidate search so that job seekers with the right skills know how to find jobs that fit their expertise. Wildes is also working to find tools that enable people to search for jobs in a more holistic way, looking beyond the job title to the daily work and the environment around it.

"He takes his role and responsibility very seriously," McKersie said. "He knows that failure is not an option. We've got to get this right. He's a fantastic representative and public speaker."

THE COMBINATION of Wildes' public policy knowledge and his enthusiasm for life in Maine made him uniquely qualified to act as the face of Live+Work in Maine. In January 2018, he became the executive director of the organization.

While Wildes values the experience of living outside of Maine, he's also just a little bitter over the forces that led him

to look for opportunities outside the state he loves.

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When Wildes talks about opportunity, he's not just talking about jobs. He's talking about what he calls the "quality of place." Wildes loves the well-connected towns full of passionate people, the easy commutes, and the convenient access to nature. That's what makes Maine special in his mind.

"I think the State of Maine is the most tattooed state outline in the world," Wildes said. "It speaks to this deep emotional connection we have to this place. It's a special place because of the people who are here and the people who work to create this space."

People like Nate Wildes. **M**

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UMaine, USM Collaborate on MBA Program

New initiative targets working professionals

By Emma Rose Gallimore '08

ENABLED BY TECHNOLOGY, graduate-level business faculty at UMaine and USM are teaming up to introduce a state-of-the-art MBA program offered in the evening and online. The master's degree, to be awarded by UMaine, capitalizes on the resources of both institutions and the high demand by working professionals in greater Portland for access to an after-hours MBA program.

"On a large scale, we realize working in partnership with other institutions is how we advance," said UMaine Provost Jeffrey Hecker '86 Ph.D. "It's consistent with our overall philosophy."

In time, the program, which collaborates with the University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center, will likely expand to accommodate students at UME, UMPI, and other campuses in the University of Maine System (UMS).

UMaine and USM have been discussing

the idea of collaborating on an MBA for years. When UMS Chancellor James Page took office in 2012, he tapped into the ongoing discussion. He found that the key ingredients to moving from idea to reality would mean balancing resources, time, priorities, and leveraging help from the business community. After putting these key ingredients into place, it is evident that this new and collaborative MBA eliminates competition at the system level, leverages the talents of both faculties, and focuses on the workforce development needs of the state.

The University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center

The new MBA offering is part of a larger consortium of academic programs organized as the new University of Maine Graduate and Professional Center, which is based in Portland. Along with the UMaine Graduate School of Business, the other center participants include

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the University of Maine School of Law and the USM Muskie Institute for Public Policy. The Maine Center, and the new MBA program itself, were made possible by a \$7.5 million challenge grant from the Harold Alfond Foundation.

Through the MBA program and other efforts, the Maine Center creates opportunities for students by combining graduate and executive education programs in business, law, and public policy. Graduate programs in these three areas will be intertwined, allowing students to earn a degree in one subject with a specialization in another. For example, a student may earn a business degree with a concentration in public health policy.

"We know that the future of education generally is increasingly focused on interdisciplinary work," Page said.

In total, the Alfond Foundation has contributed \$9.25 million to the creation of the Maine Center and the MBA program. In the fall of 2013, Chancellor Page approached the Alfond Foundation to ask for a planning grant to help investigate the feasibility of the Maine Center. When the idea seemed workable, the Alfond Foundation doubled down with the additional challenge grant.

As part of the challenge grant, the Maine Center must raise an additional \$7.5 million from external sources over the next few years.

Of course, funding isn't the only challenge the new MBA program faced. Administrative leaders also had to make sure they were meeting the needs of students and the business community while respecting faculty concerns.

Meeting Maine's Unique Needs

Meeting the needs of students, faculty, and businesses was top of mind for everyone who brought the MBA program into being.

In his first six months in office, J. Michael Weber, dean of the UMaine Graduate School of Business, traversed the state and held more than 200 meetings with the business community, alumni, current students, educational consultants, and faculty at both UMaine and USM. He also met with administra-

tion within both of those universities.

Those meetings helped determine the shape and scope of the program. In time, MBA students will be able to choose from a catalog of concentrations. Some are fundamental to business, like marketing, accounting, and finance, while others are Maine-specific, in subjects like forestry or aquaculture.



This new technology-enabled learning structure is part of the joint venture between UMaine and USM to introduce a state-of-the-art evening MBA program.

UMaine already has a highly ranked online MBA. In 2019, UMaine's online MBA program placed among *U.S. News and World Report's* 100 Best Online MBA Programs in the world. This completely asynchronous course fits the needs of many students, but some look for a more personal approach.

That's where the Evening MBA program comes in. Technology-enabled classrooms will allow groups of students at both locations to learn from one professor at the same time. Cameras, a miking system, and the conferencing technology Zoom make it all possible.

"The setup really emulates the way businesses hold meetings across multiple locations," Weber said. "Not only are students learning in that environment, but

it's a skill they'll take forward into the business environment."

While an evening MBA program accessible across two locations has obvious benefits for students and the businesses that will someday hire them, faculty also gain something from the partnership.

"Faculty are getting more opportunities to teach a greater variety of graduate classes," Weber said.

The graduate school will also provide additional support for research and faculty development that wasn't previously so accessible. Giving everyone access to the learning opportunities they need is what the new MBA program is all about.

An Innovative Program with a Future

When UMaine Advisory board member Jay Cromarty '78 graduated from UMaine there was no part-time MBA program. "So I left the state and moved to Massachusetts and was able to get a job in the industry and get my MBA at night."

The new MBA program will provide the citizens of Maine with a nationally ranked program, which will facilitate our ability to keep the best and brightest here at home. At the same time, students from out of state can come to UMaine to build special expertise in high-demand areas of business.

Concentrations like food studies will encompass growing industries. Last year alone, the craft brewing industry contributed more than \$260 million to the Maine economy. It's in Maine's best interest to train future business leaders in these lucrative areas of business.

"The trend across the nation is that program growth is not happening in general programs," said Provost Hecker. "The interest is in programs that develop niche strengths."

Specialties will be added as the evening MBA develops, but students are already showing interest in what it has to offer.

"We expect double-digit growth in enrollment year-to-year over the next five years," Weber said. "As we modify it, we expect enrollment to continue to increase." **M**