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# Enterprise

## [ MAKING IT ] SIGNATURE DISH

**Aricka Westbrooks ships her legendary deep-fried turkey to customers by mail**

THE DAY BEFORE THANKSGIVING IN 2005, Aricka Westbrooks, 35, CEO of Jive Turkey, was sleeping on a wooden stool, leaning against the wall of her 1,500-square foot store in Brooklyn, New York. She and her staff were exhausted from frying turkeys 24 hours a day for four days straight.

When Westbrooks finally opened her eyes at 7 a.m., she noticed several faces peeking into her storefront window. She walked outside to discover a long line of customers—some from as far away as California. The early birds were lining up to buy Westbrooks' famous deep-fried turkey for their Thanksgiving dinners.

That day was a major turning point for Westbrooks' 3-year-old business and its signature dish—an entire turkey deep fried with a choice of 15 different flavors, starting at \$44.95. It was at that time she realized something as simple as fried turkey had the makings for a million-dollar venture.

Westbrooks, a native of Chicago, came up with the idea of fried turkeys after being frustrated when she couldn't find desirable takeout dinners. "I wanted to do something new and different for New York. The only thing we had locally was pizza, Chinese food, and fast food," says Westbrooks as she stands behind the counter serving customers on a Saturday morning dressed in a black apron bearing the slogan, "Grab, Gobble, Go."

She decided to lease a former grocery store, which had to be completely gutted. It took five long months of renovations and cost \$150,000, which came out of her personal savings and money from her family—to get the take-out store in working order. A small business loan from Banco Popular, combined with a loan from the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corp., a Brooklyn-based community development organization, helped fund startup costs.



The concept of frying a turkey in a vat of boiling oil is a decidedly Southern fare, virtually unknown to urban dwellers. But Jive Turkey's online service is helping to grow loyal customers from around the country. The company's 2005 revenues were \$300,000 and this year Westbrooks expects to gross \$500,000.

Serving a popular food item during the peak holiday season means Westbrooks has to hire 11 or 12 part-time cooks to join her and two other full-time cooks. The team works in eight-hour shifts around the clock for several days before and on the holiday. Jive Turkey also takes orders online and ships turkeys anywhere in the continental United States.

To prepare her turkeys for shipping, Westbrooks first puts them in an oven bag for reheating, then places them in an insulated foam cooler inside a leak-proof, corrugated shipping box. Reheating and carving instructions are included in the shipment. The orders are delivered overnight.

**WESTBROOKS PREPARES SAVORY TURKEYS FOR LOYAL CUSTOMERS AROUND THE COUNTRY.**



Once received, the turkeys can be refrigerated and stored up to four days before serving.

Westbrooks' biggest challenge is growing the business. So far, she says, the choices involve starting a wholesale manufacturing center, opening additional stores, or developing franchises. **-Ericka Blount**

**Jive Turkey; 441 Myrtle Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11205; [www.thejiveturkey.com](http://www.thejiveturkey.com); 718-797-1688**

