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FOOD & DRINKS

Roaming Rooster Owner Has Dreams to Expand Franchise to Native Ethiopia

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Roaming Rooster co-owner Michael Habtemariam with a collection of fried chicken sandwiches. Photo Credit: Roaming Rooster





IN SUMMARY

Michael Habtemariam wants to pass the wealth down to his kids so they can do what they want to do. His dream is to build a Roaming Rooster in Ethiopia.

For Roaming Rooster co-owner Michael Habtemariam, owning a restaurant was a dream of his ever since he immigrated from Ethiopia. He, along with his brother Biniyam and his sister-in-law Hareg Mesfin started the restaurant because there wasn't a good fried chicken truck in Washington, D.C.

"We started experimenting in the kitchen in the house for over a year. Pretty much basically when family members come or family gatherings we have, we always used to make them fried chicken so they can tell us 'you're missing this, you're missing that.' We experimented it and came up with the great recipe," said Habtemariam. "Then we hit the road."

The name Roaming Rooster came from selling free-range fried chicken while roaming around D.C. It started off as a food truck in Washington D.C. in 2015. The food truck was available for lunch service at the Metro Center and it was a success from the beginning. By 2018, Roaming Rooster had four trucks in the nation's capital when Habtemariam and his family decided to open up their first brick and mortar shop.

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However, the fast-growing chicken sandwich shop in the D.C. metropolitan area didn't happen without some adversity.

"We faced a lot of problems in the beginning because we didn't have a good network. We came here, we didn't know anybody. So, to open up a food truck, we didn't even know where to buy a food truck at the beginning," he said. "We had to look for people, look online to buy our first truck and we didn't have a good support system as well."

Despite the challenges of being an Ethiopian immigrant owning a business, Habtemariam is grateful for his parents for instilling in him and his four siblings a hard work ethic and providing them opportunities to succeed.

Generational wealth, which are assets such as money, real estate, life insurance and family businesses that are passed down within a family from generation to generation, is important for [personal financial wellness](#).

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The Roaming Rooster co-owner wants to take that message of generational wealth and leave something for his kids and grow the business.

“As a first-generation immigrant, we want to pass the wealth to our kids. My brother and sister-in-law have two kids. I have three kids. Hopefully, one day they can grow Roaming Rooster to name brand and also if they have Roaming Rooster at least they can do what they actually love to do,” said Habtemariam. “The money is not going to be the issue.”

Roaming Rooster’s [biggest motivation](#) is not only to make the best fried chicken sandwiches, but to make people happy and provide great customer service.

“As an Ethiopian immigrant, when you eat food, that’s where you gather together. That’s where you share conversations. It’s not just about eating food; it’s love that is involved. Growing up with a single father with my four siblings, that’s where the dinner table or the lunch table, that’s a happy time and where we have most memories,” Habtemariam said. “We make it with love and that’s the most important thing for us.”

Their [menu](#) consists of sandwiches like The Buffalo, Honey Butter, The Club and Habtemariam’s favorite, OG Nashville. Customers can choose how spicy they want their fried chicken sandwiches to be from mild, medium, hot and extra hot.

Roaming Rooster won a [Rammy Award](#) as part of the Restaurant Association of Metropolitan Washington for “Hottest Chicken Shop” in September. For Habtemariam and his staff, it was validation of their hard work.

“We worked hard to get here and making it. Winning this award is a lot for us and we also love to thank the community,” he said “Because of the community, that’s why we are here and it’s an amazing feeling.”

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On Nov. 13, they opened up their first stop in Virginia at Tysons Corner as it’s more convenient for people who live in Northern Virginia.

“We have a lot of customers that used to come from Northern Virginia to all the way to Northeast location in D.C. Now, we’re closer for them and they’re able to come more often than they used to come to the Northeast location. Also, we have new customers that know us on social media.,” said Habtemariam. “They start coming and the community is really

appreciating us coming there and supporting us.”

Roaming Rooster’s plan is to open up in more locations across the country, but it wants to do it one store at a time to keep up the consistency of the food and the customer service.

But Habtemariam’s dream is to build a Roaming Rooster in Ethiopia. He says, “It would be amazing taking Roaming Rooster to the motherland.”



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