

Aneesa Waheed, owner of Tara Kitchen (<https://www.tarakitchen.com/>), a Moroccan restaurant, says that creating an international conglomerate wasn't the plan when she opened a weekend food stand in Schenectady, NY in 2009. She said that she loved to cook but had no training or restaurant experience. In 2012, after three years of honing recipes, Aneesa was ready to open a brick-and-mortar restaurant in Schenectady; it was an instant hit. Aneesa and her husband continued to learn the restaurant business, developing processes and recipes that optimized production and quality and reduced the waste that dooms many restaurants. In the process, they realized they had created a formula for success that they could duplicate at additional locations. They opened a Tara Kitchen in Troy in 2017, one in Guilderland in 2020, and another Wildwood, NJ in 2021. In 2022, Aneesa opened her fifth Tara Kitchen restaurant, located in Manhattan's Tribeca neighborhood. With financing through Pursuit Lending and its veteran loan program, she overcame enormous challenges. Today, Aneesa employs about 50 people at its five Tara Kitchen locations.

For over a decade, Tara Kitchen has featured vibrant, deeply flavorful food that has earned it a devoted following in locations across the Capital Region and in Wildwood NJ. Chef Aneesa has fused comfort food from beyond North Africa and given them a Moroccan twist: favorites like cabbage rolls, shepherd's pie and fish cakes get a tasty makeover that only make customers love them more.

Since 2009, Aneesa has worked with advisors in three SBDC regional centers in New York, two of them in NYC and one in the Capital District. They have assisted her with rethinking her menu, strategic marketing and website enhancement, among other things. One of the suggestions from an SBDC advisor in 2023 was implementing a lunch buffet, which was enthusiastically received by customers and resulted in a 50% increase in business in the upstate restaurants. Aneesa continues to work with her SBDC advisors to develop new ways to attract customers.

Aneesa has come a long way since that first food stand in Schenectady, earning "40 Under 40" recognition, several awards, and features on several Food TV Network shows including Beat Bobby Flay, Kitchen Crash and Guy Fieri's Grocery Games. Now, she has her sights set on bringing Tara Kitchen to locations around the world. She just opened her first location in Hyderabad, India, and is considering lots of interesting opportunities such as cooking for cruise ships, schools, and charity causes.