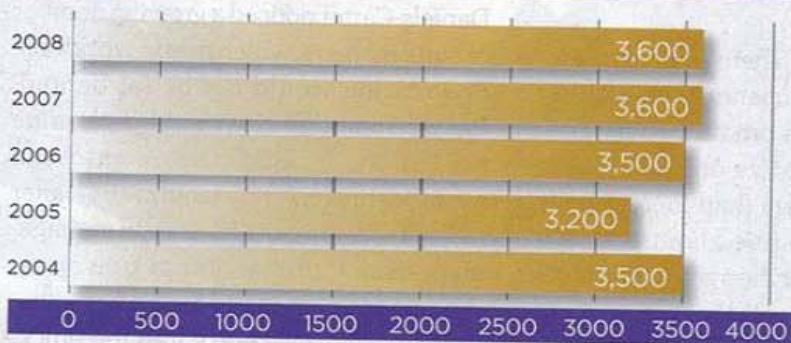


## Staff



SOURCE: B.E. RESEARCH

the franchise fee and other soft costs. "At the time it seemed like a lot of money. I saved as much as I could," she recalls. Revenues at the end of the first year of operation were close to \$1 million.

Daniels-Carter never let obstacles hamper her progress; she even sold personal assets to raise needed funds. "You have to face a plethora of things as a person in business, but you have to understand whether that's really who you are and what you're designed to do. If it is, then it just comes down to exercising your ability and will to make it happen. That's the kind of person I am."

Once you've decided that you're CEO material, Daniels-Carter recommends developing a thick skin because challenges are often waiting around the corner. One such challenge came to her in 2005 shortly after Hurricane Katrina, when oil and gas prices soared. Because V and J depends largely on natural gas to run equipment, the company's utility costs increased by \$100,000. Daniels-Carter cuts costs by running fewer fryers when demand is lower. She also starts up equipment at intervals to avoid creating a surge, since utility companies charge at the highest surge rate of energy.

## Striving for Excellence

Although quick-service restaurants attract customers by offering inexpensive meals, data from the NPD Group, a research firm that conducts studies about the restaurant industry, shows that it's excellent service that really keeps customers coming back. Daniels-Carter and her team have made excellence their focus. They've ramped up employee training programs at each restaurant so that customers will experience the best service possible.

"As far as training, we came up with a guest-service class," says John Draper, president of operations at V and J Holding. "In the class, employees learn how to handle conflicts with guests and

training more specific."

Daniels-Carter believes employee training and customer satisfaction go hand in hand. She makes sure customers come first and that her establishments make a good impression. "It's about the experience customers have. If they don't have a good experience, they won't come back."

Daniels-Carter is adamant about her staff's training and ability to uphold the company's standards of excellence. Her motto, You Are the Standard of Excellence, or YATSE, the acronym used within the company, is often quoted and used to motivate her workers. "That's been our motto for 25 years. It was just something I crafted based upon the standard that I wanted to set for employees to aspire to," says Daniels-Carter. "You represent your definition of excellence. We try to impress upon each individual that the organization has a standard, and that standard represents a level of excellence that we want to deliver every day. Either you can sit back and watch destiny pass you by, or you can walk with it."

The CEO stays grounded by engaging in local and international philanthropic projects. On the campus of her church, Holy Redeemer, she's opened a 150,000-square-foot community center that houses a Boys & Girls Club, adult learning center, senior center, and medical facility. And she's partnered with other Burger King franchisees, her church, and Save Africa's Children to open three orphanages in Kenya and Ghana for children whose parents have died of AIDS.

## International Intentions

Daniels-Carter plans to take V and J Holding international within the next five years. "We want to grow and expand our brands," says Draper. "Our plan in 2007 had us in the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Africa by 2009, but when the economy pulled back we had to delay those plans. We hope to expand in those areas in the near future."

Daniels-Carter offers this advice to budding CEOs: "Make sure it's what you want. Understand what your passion is and what you're good at. You have to decide whether you're the employer or the employee. You may not want to work 18-hour days or make all the necessary sacrifices. Owning your own business isn't for everyone. The right thing is what fits your personality, skill set, and God-given directive."

Those who want to succeed in the quick-service industry must also anticipate the needs of the restaurants they manage, especially during times of economic uncertainty, says Draper. "Internally, we had to make sure we ordered enough food, but not too much. We made a point of purchasing the products we used at the restaurants more efficiently. We also split cases of cleaning supplies among restaurants."

No matter the challenge, Daniels-Carter says she is determined to stay in the franchise game. "Nothing is ever going to knock me out unless I choose to leave. I'm never going to allow man to define who I am or where I should be. To me, that's a God thing."