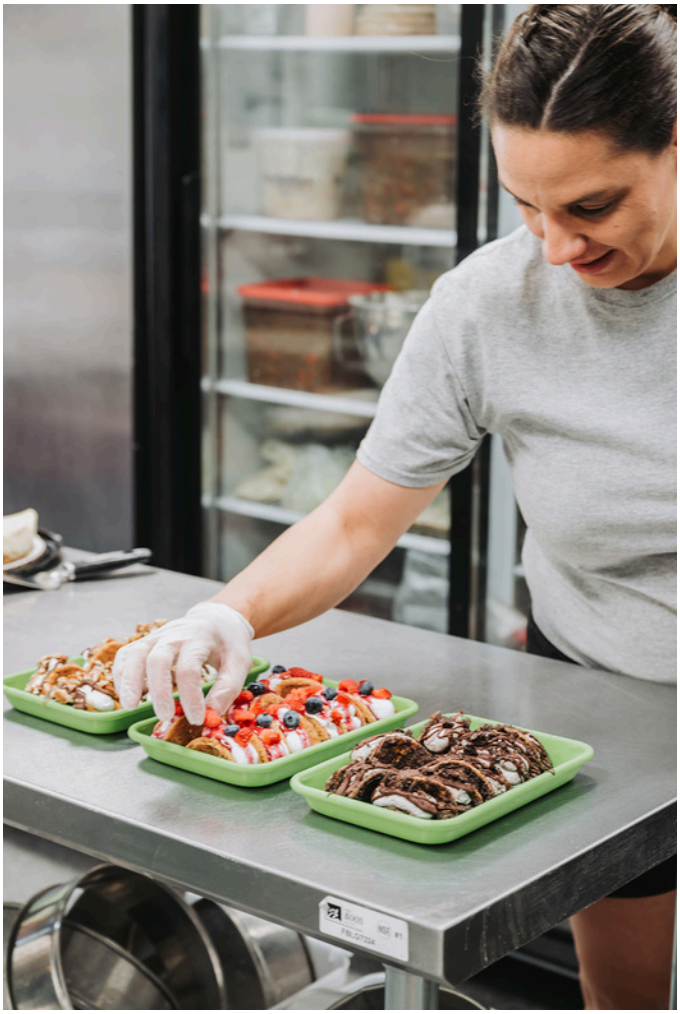
FIVETHUMBSUP

Jill Shultz, Owner



Photos by Julie M. Gile Photography
Written by Paige Udermann

"One year, I made a cheesecake for my oldest daughter's birthday, and people just loved it. They raved about it," Jill says. "Cheesecakes can be difficult at first and very intimidating, so it was something I fell in love with and wanted to master."

There is something special about a dessert made completely from scratch. Every bite feels like going into the warmth of a home filled with love and joy. At FiveThumbsUp, every cheesecake has this effect on visitors, along with the eternal gratitude of customers' taste buds. For Jill Shultz, owner and cheesecake extraordinaire, her journey began in her very own kitchen and grew with every bite of cheesecake she shared with friends, family, and the community.

> *"The hardest thing was that I spent many years just trying to find a kitchen to bake out of that was affordable."*

Jill believes baking isn't just a skill, but a way to connect with people and celebrate. It all started with baking for her family. When she became a stay-at-home mom, she found a true passion for making desserts.

When Jill and her family moved to Green Bay from Des Moines, Iowa, around 2015, she started bringing her cheesecakes to events at her husband's church, where he serves as a pastor. Word quickly spread.

"I had one girl come up to me and ask if I ever thought about selling cheesecakes because her family loves them and they ate them at every function," Jill says. "She wanted me to start making them for her, and that's kind of how the seed was planted."

From church functions to school events, Jill's cheesecakes began to win the hearts of the community. A growing demand encouraged her to launch a Facebook page, and she began filling orders for friends and family from her home kitchen.

Demand began scaling up, and around that same time, Jill's children were all school-aged, and she knew she wanted to go back to work.

"I needed to get a job, but I did not want to get into something I didn't like," Jill says. "I was in insurance for years, and it was just kind of boring, so I knew I wanted to do something I liked and something that was also based around my kids' schedules. When I got started with cheesecakes, I had it in my head that I wanted to start my own business."

For Jill, her path to starting a business wasn't easy.

"The hardest thing was that I spent many years just trying to find a kitchen to bake out of that was affordable," Jill says.

It took years for Jill to bring her dream to reality. That changed in 2023, when the Cannery Test Kitchen opened in the Broadway District of Green Bay—an incubator for local entrepreneurs. It provided Jill with the opportunity to have access to her first industrial kitchen.

"I initially started my Facebook page in 2016, and I didn't actually have a storefront for the first time until 2023," she says.

The Cannery Test Kitchen closed in mid-2024, but Jill still reaped the rewards of awareness and promotion. She was there for just six months, but it gave her the time she needed to network and find a more permanent space to house her business. She connected with the team at Irish Temper, who had an adjoining space they were looking to rent.

At first, Jill couldn't get a loan because she had only had her official business for such a short time. It was the community that came together to support and help crowdfund to keep Jill's dream alive.

"The Diverse Business Grant was also a big aid and helped us take this leap of faith," Jill says. "It was so exciting. I definitely couldn't do it on my own. When we were told about the grant, it made us feel more confident in purchasing things or even just saying yes to this location."

On Broadway, Inc. received a Diverse Business Assistance Grant from the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to support more than 30 emerging small businesses in Green Bay's Broadway District. The program focuses on helping women, minorities, and underserved entrepreneurs by offering affordable retail spaces, funding for renovations, mentorship, and resources to help them grow from home-based ventures into sustainable brick-and-mortar businesses.

Jill plans to use the grant to help with marketing and to spread the word about FiveThumbsUp. The support from On Broadway, Inc. has gone beyond financial help.

"On Broadway has been great ever since the day I started at the Cannery," she says. "They have been checking in on me and making sure things go well ever since. The support and the care from the staff of On Broadway are sincere, and you know you can trust them."

In December 2024, Jill officially opened her storefront, finally giving FiveThumbsUp a place to call home. It's a cozy spot where cheesecake lovers can drop in for a slice of something sweet or order something special for their next gathering. Jill also offers catering.

"I guess my passion is baking, but it's baking for other people," she says. "Seeing people's reactions when they taste the cheesecake or knowing they were satisfied." Jill and her husband also run an infant child loss nonprofit, raising money through their annual event—an event Jill supports with her baked goods.

Originally from Fond du Lac, Jill was thrilled to return to Wisconsin. Her family still resides there, and now, with roots planted firmly in Green Bay, she's back home in more ways than one.

When visitors walk into FiveThumbsUp, Jill hopes they feel welcomed, like they were treated kindly, and that they are leaving with something they will want to come back for. Every cheesecake carries a little piece of the community and her family that has believed in her product. That's important to me. Everything is homemade. There's a lot of passion in what I do."

FIVETHUMBSUP DESSERTS
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