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**Mert's Heart and Soul Offers Cooking Tips For The
Nation's Newest Holiday Favorite - Deep Fried Turkey**

Charlotte, NC - The Thanksgiving holiday is upon us once again and this can only mean one thing - it's turkey time! For the thousands of holiday chefs in the Carolinas who are looking to spice up their holiday fare, one option is the growing favorite known as "deep fried turkey." According to some, deep fried turkey originated in Louisiana and spread to the Carolinas before blazing a trail across the rest of the country.

James Bazzelle, owner of the Uptown Charlotte restaurant Mert's Heart and Soul, said that no matter the origin, adding the deep fried bird to the holiday menu is a treat that everyone will enjoy.

"What most people don't know is that in many ways, deep fried turkeys are easier to prepare and cook than the traditional oven-roasted turkey," said Bazzelle, who has cooked hundreds of deep fried turkeys during the holiday season since Mert's opened in 1998. "Deep fried turkey is also guaranteed to be moist and flavorful because the juice is locked in during the cooking process."

To make deep fried turkey the "Mert's" way, Bazzelle offers several key preparation and cooking tips, including:

- **Turkey Size:** One of the most important steps in the cooking process for deep fried turkey is selecting the right sized bird. Bazzelle recommends that turkey selection be determined by the number of guests expected to be served.
- **Seasoned to Perfection:** Deep fried turkey continues to grow in popularity because it can be prepared using a variety of seasoning blends. Deep fried turkeys are seasoned one of two ways: by injection or "rub." At Mert's, Bazzelle seasons his holiday birds with a rub-based blend of liquid smoke and the Latino seasoning Adobo. After seasoning, Bazzelle also recommends that the turkey be stored overnight to dry and absorb the seasoning blend.
- **Cookin' with Grease:** The actual cooking process for deep fried turkey should be approached with extreme caution to prevent bodily harm and/or fire hazards. If liquid remains in the cavity of the turkey following overnight storage, the bird must be patted dry prior to being placed in the cooking oil. Holiday chefs should also remember to cook the turkey away from the home. Other important tips to remember:
 - Deep fried turkey can be cooked in peanut or soy oil.
 - The turkey should be submerged "legs-up" in a fryer that is no more than one-half to one-fourth full with oil at a 325 degree temperature.
 - Although cooking times vary by the size of the bird, the cooking time is usually 10 minutes per turkey pound.

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- The flame on the deep fryer should be turned off prior to carefully removing the turkey to prevent grease spillage, which can result in starting a fire if the flame is left on.
- **Enjoy:** After the cooking process is complete, deep fried turkey can be carved and served with other family-favorites.

"The main thing that people should keep in mind when deep frying a turkey is that they have to prepare for the process," said Bazzelle. "They also have to remember to be safe, be creative, and have fun."

Carolinians that want the deep fried turkey experience without the preparation and clean-up are in luck. Mert's offers freshly prepared deep fried turkey for the Thanksgiving holiday. Orders can be made by contacting Mert's at 704.342.4222. All orders must be placed by November 21, 2006. Mert's mouth-watering sides, including its stuffing, collard greens, award-winning macaroni and cheese, and an array of deserts, can also be ordered with the deep fried turkeys. All orders will be ready for pick-up on Thanksgiving morning.

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Mert's Heart and Soul is one of the premier dining destinations in the Carolinas. The restaurant specializes in low country and Gullah favorites, including shrimp and grits, southern fried chicken and award-winning macaroni and cheese. Mert's is located in the heart of Uptown Charlotte at 214 North College Street. Mert's is open for lunch and dinner seven days a week. Brunch is served every Saturday and Sunday from 9AM - 3PM. For more information call 704.342.4222 or visit www.mertscharlotte.com.