The Whiskey World Is Reeling, but This Company Has Bigger Trouble

A new report paints a grim financial picture of Uncle Nearest, a high-profile brand named for an enslaved distiller. But its founder disputes the findings.

By Clay Risen, The New York Times, Feb. 10, 2026

In August, a federal judge in Tennessee placed Uncle Nearest, a whiskey company that was once among America's fastest-growing liquor brands, into receivership after it defaulted on a series of loans totaling $108 million. At the time, the company, named in honor of a formerly enslaved man who distilled whiskey for Jack Daniel, was seen as just the latest casualty in an industry facing stiff headwinds — a perfect storm of overproduction, tariffs and changing consumer behavior. But in a report with the court filed last week, the receiver appointed to manage the company, Phillip Young, contended that Uncle Nearest was far more than just a victim of bad timing. Among other things, he found that all the company's records before 2024 had been deleted, that it owed an additional $50 million to vendors and other creditors, that it was struggling to make payroll and that it had not filed federal tax returns since 2018. Mr. Young painted a dire picture of the company's future, even under his control: He said that the only viable options were refinancing or a sale, but that he had been unable to find a bank or a purchaser willing to take on the company's estimated $158 million in debt. If he does not, he said Uncle Nearest may be foreclosed on within months.

It is a striking turn of events for a nine-year-old company that has been held up as an emblem for the rapid changes coursing through the American whiskey industry, once the bastion of white Southern men. Its founder and chief executive, Fawn Weaver, was an entrepreneur from California who within a year of starting the company was selling bottles in all 50 states. As a Black woman with a compelling story, she was able to attract a younger and more diverse audience than other whiskey brands, as well as hundreds of millions of dollars in investment capital. In 2023 she declared that the company was worth $1.1 billion, which would make it by far the most successful start-up whiskey company in a field crowded with competitors. That success story won Mrs. Weaver interviews on NPR and CNBC, as well as a guest spot on the latest season of "Shark Tank." Then, last August, a Kentucky-based lending cooperative, Farm Credit Mid-America, sued Uncle Nearest for repeatedly defaulting on a total of $108 million in loans, and asked the judge to place the company into receivership.

The receiver's report, filed on Feb. 3, tells a story of meteoric growth fueled by irresponsible debt accumulation and gross financial mismanagement. "When the receiver assumed control of the company, it was in financial shambles," Mr. Young wrote, asserting that it had been losing about $1 million a month. There had never been an independent audit, and Mr. Young said he could find no justification for Mrs. Weaver's 10-figure valuation. He also said he could not assemble a reliable list of investors, the amounts they had invested and when. He estimated the value of the company at about $100 million, roughly one-tenth of Mrs. Weaver's valuation from two years before, and significantly less than its estimated $158 million in debt. And Mr. Young said he had begun a forensic investigation of the company's finances, including "a number of very questionable transactions in 2024 and 2025 involving officers and directors of the company."

Several investors, some of whom had backed Uncle Nearest since its founding, have filed complaints with the Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, a private organization that oversees brokerages. No action has been taken by the organization. A group of about 20 investors say they are preparing to sue Uncle Nearest, Mrs. Weaver and the company's investment bank, First Dominion Capital, but have held back from legal action during the receivership for fear of further harming the company's value. Mrs. Weaver has not been shy in defending herself, both in court filings and on social media. In a legal filing last week in response to Mr. Young's report, she blamed the company's past problems wholly on its former chief financial officer, Mike Senzaki, but added that Mr. Young was driving Uncle Nearest further into the ground. She said the company was still worth about $500 million. Mr. Senzaki did not respond to messages seeking comment.

"Allowing the receivership to continue in the face of the massive decline in sales under the receiver's watch to date is simply a death sentence for the Uncle Nearest brand," Mrs. Weaver wrote in her response. She also complained that Mr. Young had stopped sharing confidential biweekly updates with her, which she said he is required to do. Mr. Young told the court he had stopped providing the reports because he suspected that Mrs. Weaver was improperly sharing them with the executive team at Uncle Nearest, then encouraging them to tweak their sales and budget numbers to make the company look healthier than it is. Mr. Young said that he "has become uncomfortable speaking directly" with Mrs. Weaver, and that he now communicates with her only through his lawyer. Although the judge in the case, Charles Atchley, has admonished Mrs. Weaver for commenting on the case on social media, she has continued to do so, positioning herself as a pioneer under attack by the establishment. "I also said I would be the first person to build, lead and own a spirit conglomerate that had not been founded by, led by, owned by a white male," she told her 305,000 followers on Instagram on Friday. "The moment I did that, I put a target on my back." At a hearing on Monday at a federal courthouse in Knoxville, Mrs. Weaver asked the judge to end the receivership and give her back control of the company — a move that Mr. Young has warned would bring the swift end of Uncle Nearest. "The company is insolvent," he wrote in his report, adding that without a new infusion of cash, "the company would be forced to cease operations within sixty days."

QVC may file for bankruptcy, according to a new report. Here's what to know.

Bloomberg reported that the West Chester-based home shopping pioneer was in talks with creditors. QVC Group had $6.6 billion in debt in September, according to its latest earnings report.

Erin McCarthy, Bloomberg, Feb. 11, 2026

The West Chester-based QVC Group is considering filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy as its financial troubles mount, according to Bloomberg. The TV shopping network has been negotiating the voluntary restructuring of billions in debt during confidential conversations with creditors, Bloomberg reported Tuesday, citing anonymous sources familiar with the matter. A final decision had not been made on whether the company would file, according to Bloomberg. As of midday Wednesday, a search for "QVC Group" in online court records did not show any bankruptcy filings. In September, QVC Group had $6.6 billion in debt and $1.8 billion in cash or cash equivalents, according to its latest earnings report. A QVC Group spokesperson did not return a request for comment from The Inquirer. On Tuesday, company representatives did not immediately respond to Bloomberg or the Philadelphia Business Journal. After Bloomberg's article published, QVC Group's stock price took a nosedive, losing about two-thirds of its value by the end of the trading day.

How QVC got into these financial straits

Based in West Chester for more than three decades, QVC pioneered home shopping. Before consumers could make purchases on laptops and smartphones, the network and its smaller counterpart HSN — which until recently was based in Florida — broadcast on live TV at all hours. Anchors sold a wide array of clothing, electronics, household goods, beauty products, and other wares. The news of a potential bankruptcy comes after a tumultuous few years. In early 2025, executives closed HSN's studio in St. Petersburg, Fla., and consolidated both networks on its West Chester campus, laying off hundreds of employees in the process. Around the same time, the parent company rebranded as QVC Group. Executives said they planned to focus more on livestreaming and social-media shopping to keep up with stiff competition from the likes of TikTok Shop. "Live social shopping is a natural evolution for us," David L. Rawlinson II, the company's president and CEO, said in a November 2024 statement. "Our customers are spending dramatically more time on social media, and that is increasingly where they are finding inspiration and shopping."

The strategy did not prove fruitful. By May, as President Donald Trump's tariffs took a toll, Rawlinson said the company was taking steps to cut costs and win back customers who were feeling down on the economy. That included an agreement with TikTok that the CEO said would create "the first 24/7 live shopping experience in the U.S." Then in August, a company spokesperson announced plans to hire about 250 employees by early 2026. It was not clear Wednesday whether those hires were ever made. Despite these changes, QVC's revenue and operating income have continued to decline, according to earnings reports, and the company has continued shedding customers. As of September, about 7 million people had shopped on the networks in the past year, down from 8.1 million in fiscal year 2023. QVC Group is set to release its fourth quarter 2025 earnings report later this month.

What Chapter 11 bankruptcy could mean for QVC

A Chapter 11 bankruptcy would not mean the end of QVC. Chapter 11 is different from Chapter 7, which involves the liquidation of assets. (Iron Hill Brewery closed all restaurants when it filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy this fall.) After filing for Chapter 11 protection, companies usually continue to operate, though they often decide to close locations or downsize in other ways amid the restructuring process. Saks Global, for instance, which filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy last month, announced Tuesday that its restructuring would involve the closure of its longstanding Bala Cynwyd store, as well as nine other Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus locations.