

# THE MORNING CALL

## Checkers drives into the Valley

**Allentown and Bethlehem burger joints debut in fast-food-friendly neighborhoods.**



Checkers on South Fourth Street in Allentown opened Feb. 12. It joins another location that opened on Easton Avenue in Bethlehem (former Arby's building) a few months ago. (February 24, 2014)

By Ryan Kneller

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French fry lovers rejoice! The Lehigh Valley's first Checkers have opened within months of each other, allowing customers to "feast on" in Allentown and Bethlehem.

The greasy-spoon section of Allentown's South Fourth Street got even greasier thanks to the fast-food chain's Feb. 12 opening.

The approximately one-mile stretch between Chapel and [Emmaus](#) avenues also includes fryer havens McDonald's, Popeyes, Pizza Hut, [KFC](#), Burger King, Wendy's and Dunkin' Donuts.

The bonanza of quick-serve establishments comes not by culinary coincidence but by clever corporate marketing.

In an August 2011 Morning Call article, my former colleague Devon Lash found reasons behind the smorgasbord. She cited market research prepared by real estate firm Colliers International for a then-hopeful Checkers franchisee, who was debating where best to locate the business.

The maps and charts showed that in the working-class neighborhoods of Mountainville and south Allentown, 100,000 people live within a 3-mile radius.

“It has ethnically diverse, densely populated people on a moderate income,” said Derek Zerfass, a vice president for brokerage and retail at Colliers.

Allentown's latest fast-food find at 1935 S. Fourth St. (next to [CVS](#)) follows the November debut of the Lehigh Valley's first Checkers at 2585 Easton Ave. (former Arby's) in Bethlehem. Among that restaurant's fast-food neighbors are McDonald's, Burger King, Wendy's, KFC and Long John Silver's.

Established in Mobile, Ala., in 1986, Checkers specializes in burgers, hot dogs, fries and milkshakes. The company merged with Rally's in 1999 and, together, they have more than 800 locations nationwide, including 17 other Checkers in Pennsylvania.

Franchisee Jay Pandya, who operates both Lehigh Valley locations, says the drive-thru restaurant chain is “a cut above the rest” thanks to its unique offerings, such as seasoned burgers and fries. Among his favorite menu items is the Big Buford, a double cheeseburger with all the fixins.

Checkers also distinguishes itself by its late hours. Both area locations are open until 1 a.m. Sunday through Wednesday and until 3 a.m. Thursday through Saturday.

Pandya, of [Bucks County](#), also operates several regional Pizza Huts and Dunkin' Donuts. He hopes to open two more Checkers in the Lehigh Valley — one in Easton and another in [Whitehall](#) Township.

The Allentown location features two drive-thrus and outdoor seating while the Bethlehem location features one drive-thru and indoor and outdoor seating. Info: [checkers.com](#).