

Checkers eventually wants 200 locations in Chicago

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As Checkers continues its steady flow into the Chicago market, it is concocting big plans for its presence in the city.

The Tampa, Fla.-based fast-food chain operates 19 stores in the Chicago market and is on track to open at least **four more** locations before the calendar turns to 2016, said Jennifer Durham, vice president of franchise development. The chain has doubled its footprint in Chicago in the past two years and doesn't plan to stop until it reaches terminal capacity.

"When we've got the market completely built out, we'll have more than 200 restaurants," she said.

This can be measured in McDonald's locations, Durham said. Generally, there are three McDonald's for every Checkers in a market. There are more than 700 McDonald's in the Chicago area.

The chain plans to open five to 10 locations next year, with a focus on the South Side.

"Checkers has a big fan base in Chicago," said Aby Mohamed, a franchisee who just opened his second Checkers in Joliet. "You put the combination of the fan base already here and the value and quality of the food together, and that is a (winning) recipe."

Checkers offers burgers, fries and shakes, and focuses on drive-thru, from which it gets 85 percent of its business. The rest comes from walk-ups, as Checkers restaurants do not have dining rooms.

The company operates 810 restaurants in 30 states under the Checkers and Rally's names, with 20 to 25 more locations expected to open by year's end. Checkers entered the Chicago market in 1988, and the first franchised location opened in 2009.