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A GANNETT COMPANY

## Checkers father-and-son team expands quickly in Detroit

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*Checkers franchisee Paul Amell and his son, Jason Amell, who is head of franchise development for his father*

By [Brent Snavely](#)

Paul Amell has been a Checkers franchisee in 2007 and just opened his seventh location. Amell, 59, of Milford, has spent 22 years in the restaurant industry, but said he is having more success now than ever.

Before opening his first Checkers in Monroe, Amell operated fitness centers and then a burger franchise called Hot 'n Now. But Taco Bell, which owned it, wanted out of the burger business and Amell had to look for other opportunities.

Tampa Bay, Fla.-based Checkers has 35 locations in metro Detroit and 780 nationwide.

“Checkers is becoming a pretty vibrant brand. They are in a growth stage again,” Amell said. “They have a great research and development team and they have a great marketing [plan](#) that [helps](#) get the message out to the consumer.”

Now he is responsible for [restaurants in](#) Flint, Lapeer, Mt. Pleasant, Roseville and Detroit, each employing between 25 and 35 people.

By continually training them, Amell said he can both improve [customer service](#) and enable employees to take on more responsibility.

“We try to make our franchises a place where employees can work and grow and move up from employee to shift manager to assistant manager or general manager,” he said.

Five years ago his son, Jason, now 33, joined the restaurant business and together they opened the [store](#) at 17620 Grand River Ave. in August. An eighth location is planned for the city’s east side.

Amell said the key to successfully operating a Checkers restaurant is to treat the employees right because that carries over to customer service and, ultimately, repeat business.

Jennifer Durham, vice president of franchise development for Checkers, said the Amells have helped the company expand in southeast Michigan.

“I think Detroit stands out because we have some early franchisees that were early adopters to the new format,” Durham said.

Fourteen of Checkers’ 35 southeast Michigan locations have opened since 2010. Eight more are scheduled to open by the end of 2014, Durham said. Of the current locations, 11 are corporate-owned and 24 are franchisee-operated.

Durham said Checkers believes it can continue to expand in southeast Michigan because it still has fewer stores than competitors such as Burger King and McDonald’s. The company is looking for both additional locations and franchisees.

Nationwide, Checkers franchisees average about \$929,000 in annual sales. In Michigan, that average is closer to \$1 million, Durham said.

Durham suspects that restaurants perform above average in southeast Michigan because its business model is built on [value](#) pricing in a region hit hard by the recession. Checkers also is willing to locate in areas where the median income is lower than that of many competitors.

“We are often looking at sites that some competitors would not consider because they are more urban,” Durham said.

