



Checkers aims for Space Coast comeback

New operators add Merritt Island locale, looking to grow further

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Written by
Wayne T. Price
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Checkers Drive-In Restaurants, the Tampa-based burger chain that at one point had four locations in Brevard, is returning to the Space Coast with a new franchisee toting plans for substantial growth.

Michigan resident Alan Balen reopened the Merritt Island Checkers at 520 N. Courtenay Parkway — the 13th franchise in his company, IB Corp. — last week. That followed the August reopening of the Checkers at 4840 Babcock Road N.E. in Palm Bay.

Balen could add from five to 10 more Brevard locations, according to a news release, though he and his management team are not saying when and where just yet.

“We’d like to continue to grow in Brevard County,” said Linda Schultz, operating partner with IB Corp.

That growth plan could involve re-opening the two Checkers that are now closed in Melbourne and West Melbourne, converting other former fast-food operation sites that are now vacant or building new units, she said.

“I’m not out here just to open two stores,” Schultz said. “We’re looking for opportunities for growth.”

Checkers has added more than 25 new locations across Florida during the past year.

At one time, the 800-unit chain — it operates as Rally’s in the West and Midwest — had four sites in Brevard: in Melbourne, Merritt Island, Palm Bay and West Melbourne. By January 2010, all four had closed after the previous franchise owner filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection when talks to renegotiate a lease fell through.

Balen opted to grow the restaurant chain in Brevard after hiring Schultz and learning of her connections to the area. (Schultz's fiance is from Merritt Island.) Both Balen and Schultz saw growth potential in re-opening Checkers in Brevard and other Florida locations.

A typical Checkers Drive-In employs about 30 people.

Contact Price at 321-242-3658 or wprice@floridatoday.com.