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Rally's goes retro

Looking to boost sales, burger chain dolls up three Columbus-area locations



This Rally's design seems to be on its way out.

By [Denise Trowbridge](#)

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Three area Rally's hamburger restaurants are getting significant makeovers, a move the company says will boost sales and bring new, positive attention to the national chain.

The Rally's at 3260 E. Broad St. was renovated last month. The one at 700 Georgesville Rd. is nearly complete, and the restaurant at 2556 N. High St. will be renovated by late this month.

Each renovation takes about a month and costs \$70,000 to \$100,000. The restaurant stays open during construction, although some drive-through lanes might intermittently close to speed the work.

“These Columbus (Rally’s) restaurants had wonderful characteristics in terms of site, historical performance and potential upside,” said Jennifer Durham, vice president of franchise development for Checkers and Rally’s. “They’re locations we thought would benefit the most from the investment.”

The new look is “more retro, and incorporate(s) more of the style of the Checkers hamburger chain,” Durham said.

Rally’s and Checkers merged in 1999.

The two share a menu; only the names are different.

The changes include an exterior color-scheme update, from mostly small red field tile to mostly white, accented with a white, black and red checkerboard motif adorning the front.

The overhangs at the drive-through are more pronounced and are now stainless steel, with a thin red stripe and modern conical supports.

The redo includes new neon Rally’s signs and more-appealing landscaping. The new look was designed by the Columbus-based design firm Chute Gerdeman.

“The new design plays on the Rally’s heritage and is an improvement to its image and appeal,” Durham said.

The redesign doesn’t stop with the look. Rally’s is instituting extra training for employees and setting higher standards for service. “

The renovation is inside and out,” Durham said.

Ohio is a test market for the new design. The first revamped Rally’s made its debut in Toledo last October. Sales at that restaurant rose 35 percent in the first three months and are still up 17 percent overall, the company said.

“It’s a testament to the value of the changes we made,” Durham said.

Rally’s tested the new model in Cincinnati soon after, and now it has arrived in Columbus. If the newly remodeled stores continue to do well, the design will be rolled out nationwide.

The company plans to renovate a total of 50 company-owned Rally’s and then offer the option to franchisees.

The company has 777 restaurants nationwide. About 450 operate under the Checkers name, and the rest are Rally’s. More than half of the company’s locations are owned by franchisees.

In the midst of all the changes, the menu is staying the same, “but in order to create a buzz about what’s going on, each reopening will coincide with two weeks of special daily deals, to get people who haven’t tried us in awhile to come back,” Durham said.

The redesigned restaurants are part of a larger effort to freshen the company.

It has added new menu items in recent years, such as Cold Creations desserts — which include strawberry cheesecake and apple-pie-layered sundaes — as well as chicken wings, in a bid to offer more variety while sticking to the low prices that are a core part of the chain's draw.

So far, the changes appear to be working.

By July, the company had a 7 percent increase in same-store sales.

“We’re trying to give our customer more reasons to visit us,” CEO Rick Silva told *Nation’s Restaurant News*.
Why start in Ohio?

It’s a great market for burgers, Durham said. “We also see a lot of room to grow in Columbus and in Ohio. It’s a wonderful burger market, and Wendy’s is right in the backyard. We hope to break into the stronghold Wendy’s has on that market, and we want to be a big competitor as it relates to the big three (burger chains).”

Off the menu

- Cuzzins Yogurt opened its fourth location last week, at 8607 Columbus Pike in Lewis Center.
- Watershed Distillery has released a new spirit. Bourbon Barrel Gin is made by aging the company’s Four Peel Gin in 53-gallon bourbon barrels for nine to 12 months.

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