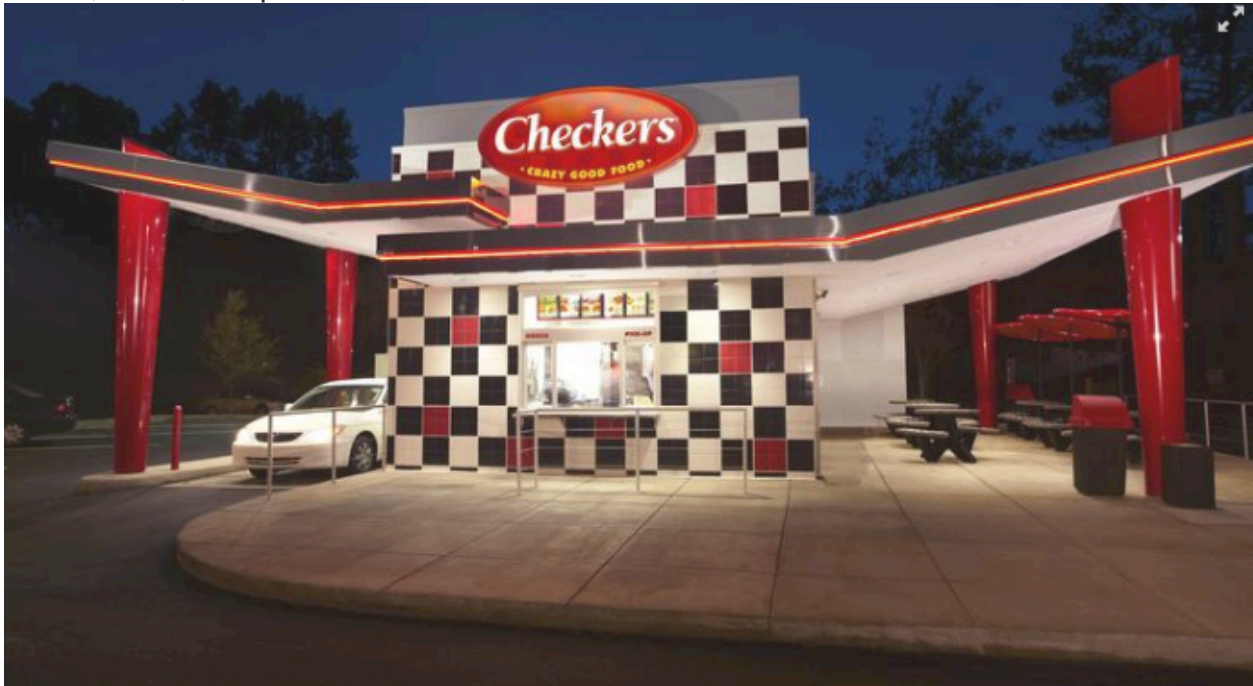


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Checkers exec dishes on restaurant chain's plans to break into Charlotte market

By [Jennifer Thomas](#) – Staff Writer, Charlotte Business Journal
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This drive-through burger concept expects to open its first location in Charlotte by the middle of next year.

Checkers has signed a franchisee for the market — a family group of restaurateurs — to bring the concept here, says [Robert Bhagwandat](#), director of franchise development for Checkers and Rally's Restaurants.

Rally's is a sister concept.

Bhagwandat declined to disclose further details about the franchisee, but says they've made multiple trips here to scout locations in recent weeks.

“Charlotte was one of the biggest areas we have that are untapped,” he says.

Checkers is targeting 20 sites here, with two to three restaurants expected to open each year.

“Of course, there’s more locations we could add to the map,” he says.

Total investment in each restaurant ranges from \$500,000 to \$800,000, largely driven by real estate costs. The franchise fee is \$30,000.

Once permits are pulled for a location, the construction period is roughly 12 weeks.

Multiple restaurants are key when entering a new market. It helps build brand awareness, driving energy and excitement, Bhagwandat says.

Checkers delivers made-to-order food with a menu built around its burgers and seasoned fries. Think double cheeseburgers or options like the Baconzilla, topped with four slices of bacon.

“Everything that goes out of our drive-through window is seasoned and really packed with flavor,” he says.

Not a burger fan? The menu offers chicken, hot dogs and fish. Extras include the Monsterella Stix — fried mozzarella — loaded fries topped with bacon and cheese or garlic Parmesan as well as chicken wings.

Those seeking something sweet will find the Kool-Aid slushie, smoothies and specials such as the apple pie loaded milkshake or funnel cake fries.

Bhagwandat says the average check comes in under \$7. The brand believes in delivering value to drive repeat visits, he adds.

“We’re very sensitive to pricing to make sure we have a place for everyone.”

The helps brand keeps costs in check with its drive-thru model. Another goal is to serve guests in 180 seconds or less.

“When you’re looking at the fast-food world most people are on the go,” he says.