

Checkers bringing its 'restaurant in a box' to Baltimore

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When drive-through burger joints Checkers and Rally's launch an expansion of up to 20 new locations in the metro area this fall, they will literally roll into town.

Checkers Drive-In Restaurants Inc., the Tampa-based chain that serves hamburgers, hot dogs, wings and fish is bringing its pre-fabricated restaurant to Baltimore and Towson in the next few months.

"They are built in a factory in Orlando and then shipped to the location in four components," said [Robert Bhagwandat](#), director of franchise development for Checkers and Rally's of the new development model dubbed "Model 4.0."

"It's kind of like a restaurant in a box."

The pre-fabbed fast food joint is the latest wrinkle in the ever-changing and competitive industry that is growing leaps and bounds, data from the trade publication Nation's Restaurant News shows.

Checkers and Rally's — both listed in the the top 200 restaurants in the U.S. — were part of a national growth pattern that topped 227,000 locations in 2017. That figure increased over the 2016 national total by 2,679 locations, according to the [National Restaurant Association](#).

There are 10 Checkers locations in the Baltimore area today. And in order to stay vital and nimble, the chain opted to go with the pre-fabbed model last year to shave up to 12 weeks off of the traditional development timeline.

The four working parts of Baltimore's first pre-fabbed Checkers will arrive next week at what is currently a vacant lot on Moravia Road near [Sinclair Lane](#). Crews will then arrive to put the pieces together and a grand opening will take place by the end of the summer.

Components for the next Checkers are expected to arrive in Towson at 910 Taylor Ave. later this year and open in October, Bhagwandat said. After that, the 925-square-foot

pre-fabbed restaurants are scheduled to arrive in Laurel and Gaithersburg. Other locations in Prince George's County and Baltimore County are still being negotiated.

Each pre-fabbed restaurant model costs about \$300,000 and includes all equipment. The restaurant components are assembled in Central Florida and inspected there, Bhagwandat said.

"The only inspections needed at the site is the health department and fire inspection," he said. "When the restaurant gets there, it's pretty much ready to rock and roll. You just hook it up to the power and go."

The trend is new, said Mollie K. O'Dell, vice president for communications at the National Restaurant Association based in Washington D.C.

"That's the first time I've heard of a restaurant doing that," she said on Thursday. She said the group's researchers found that some hotels have been built using factory built rooms.

Checkers and Rally's — the same restaurant with different names — serve food only through a drive through and walk-up model. There are a few tables set up underneath a canopy for eating onsite, but most of the business is mobile.

"That's where a lot of these restaurants are going these days," Bhagwandat said, of the trend. Each restaurant has about 26 employees.

That made creation of the Model 4.0 an easy alternative for the chain's future growth, Bhagwandat said. Overall, Checkers and Rally's have 872 locations in the U.S. today, a number expected to grow to 925 by the end of the year.

Locally, there are Checker's restaurants in Woodlawn, Catonsville, Towson, Randallstown, Dundalk, Glen Burnie and Linthicum, many owned by franchisees Phillip Martin and Keith Dorsey, Bhagwandat said.