

Suwannee Democrat

Jennings native named Checkers' Franchisee of the Year

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Checkers Franchisees Rosanne and John Lewis earn the Franchisee of the Year award at the annual Checkers & Rally's conference with Brad Williams, Checkers Director of Franchise operations.

VALDOSTA, Ga. — Being an entrepreneur isn't always easy and everyone does it a little differently. Some open online stores, while others open brick-and-mortar storefronts.

Some go all in and invest their lives into a new venture, while others start a new business as something to do on the side. Regardless of the type, entrepreneurs help drive the local economy.

John Lewis, franchisee for the Valdosta Checkers and a Jennings native, recently earned the Franchisee of the Year award at the annual Checkers & Rally's conference.

Checkers separates the award into two categories based on size, Lewis said. The first category is for franchisees with one to five stores and the second is for franchisees with six or more stores.

The award asserts that Lewis and his team operate the best franchisee-owned Checkers in the nation in the one to five category. Lewis only owns the Valdosta Checkers.

To win the award, Lewis had to have the best metrics for the year and over time. The metrics are series of goals set by corporate for franchisees to meet.

"We were selected based on the way we run our business and how we have been running our business for the last 20 years," he said.

Lewis got his start in the food industry as a Blimpie franchisee 25 years ago. After about five years, someone came to him with the idea of purchasing the underperforming Checkers in Valdosta.

"I turned it down six or eight times," Lewis said.

After a while, Lewis took the offer seriously and ran the numbers on the business and decided if he applied his core principles, he should be able to make the business a success.

Lewis' core principles for running a successful business are to do the best job you can and do it consistently; have a good, clean atmosphere for people to work in; and only hire good people.

He said he developed the principles based on the Golden Rule: "Treat people the way you wanted to be treated, and people will do the same."

After buying the Checkers, Lewis led the franchise to an 80 percent increase.

In 2015, Lewis set his sights on earning national recognition when he started striving to meet the metrics set by corporate.

His desire to win a national award was cemented when he and his wife, Rosanne, attended a national conference in New Orleans.

At the conference, everyone at the table won an award except for him. So, on the way back from New Orleans, Lewis and his wife set a goal to win a national award.

"We decided to fix that," he said. "We wanted to prove we are the best of the best and here we are."

So, they adopted Checkers' metric goals, and for the last three years, he has been a part of the President's Club, a designation for the top performing franchises based on the metric system, Lewis said.

"My wife is my partner. She is my right-hand man. She is my liaison between Checkers," he said.

Lewis isn't done winning awards. This last year his general manager, Felice Dennard, earned the designation of being the number eight general manager in the nation.

Dennard has been with Lewis for a number of years and Lewis wants to make her the number one general manager.

Lewis recognizes that he could not have won the award alone.

He relies on his wife who is his business partner and life partner.

“I couldn’t do any of it without her,” he said.

And without Dennard and her crew, he knows the goal would have been impossible.

“This award is nice,” Lewis said. “We wanted it, but the key thing to all the things we do around here everyday is based around teamwork. We are constantly trying to improve our team. ... It’s not a goal for me, it’s a goal for we.”

Checkers, 2129 N. Ashley St., is open 10 a.m-1 a.m. Sunday through Thursday and 10 a.m.-3 a.m. Friday and Saturday. For more information, call 229-249-9044.