

How these local franchise owners turned a restaurant around and scored 'Rookie of the Year'



In only the first year since taking over ownership of a Checkers & Rally's restaurant on Beach Blvd., Karen and Rich Weber have turned it completely around. Sales increased by 35 percent in the first year, and are up another 15 percent this year.

Now, the Jacksonville residents and business owners have been named Rookie of the Year for their franchise.

"We are very excited to be Rookie of the Year," Karen Weber said. "Of course our general manager Phillip Turngren is a big part of that. He was one of the employees that came in the transition and he stayed with us. We didn't really start from the ground up – we had help."

In the past, the Webers owned a donut shop in Flagler County. They joined Checkers in 2014, sold the donut shop in 2015, and took over a corporate store at 11361 Beach Blvd. in March of 2016.

They signed an agreement to develop three locations in Jacksonville in the next five years, with the second under construction at 7214 103rd St. and set to open in January 2018.

Weber said they were able to score the rookie award with the significant effort they poured into retraining their staff, updates to the kitchen equipment and expediting the speed of service.

“We lowered the speed of service from 470 seconds to now under 200 at lunch time,” she said., “This really brought in the hospital workers and other people who have limited time for lunch. And we trained our employees to shift to assist, nobody is in charge of only one thing.”

Weber said she thinks the sales jump is directly tied to lowering the restaurant's speed of service. Weber keeps a staff of 19, with four working each shift. When she and her husband took over the spot in 2016, there were only eight employees.

Checkers director of franchise development Robert Bhagwandat said that the company appreciated that the Webers would be hands-on operators of their restaurant.

“They had a high level of understanding of what it is to work with employees and motivate them to achieve the success you’re looking for,” he said. “And when they got in there, they turned it around like no one else could have. Our branding was strong but we were not connecting with a lot of customers. These folks took it to another stratosphere when they got their hands on it.”

Checkers has been working to update the Jacksonville market. There are six restaurants here now, and Checkers is looking to grow to 14-16 stores in the next five to seven years.

The Webers didn’t rely on the sign to sell, Bhagwandat said. They went out to churches, schools, asked for guests to give them another chance. Now, many of them are repeat customers.

“They absolutely nailed it,” he said.