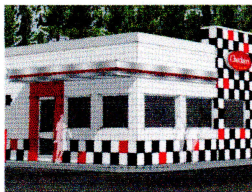


# Checkers burgers check in at Lee's stores

Jim Gaines, USA TODAY NETWORK - Tennessee 11:44 a.m. ET June 26, 2017



(Photo: Submitted - Wesley Lee, Lee's Food Mart)

Checkers, the fast burger chain with a '50s look, is coming to East Tennessee this summer as part of Lee's Food Mart.

"When we open, we will be the only Checkers in East Tennessee," said Wesley Lee, operating partner for the gas-and-convenience-store chain.

Construction has begun on the Checkers location, attached to the Lee's Food Mart at 3423 Winfield Dunn Parkway in Kodak, according to Hannah Kramer of PR firm No Limit Agency.

"We're currently demolishing the inside of previous Subway to convert it into a Checkers," Lee said. He's shooting for an opening date in August or September.

"Definitely before the fall," he said.

It will have a drive-through window and indoor seating. Two more of Lee's stations may get a Checkers soon afterward, including another in East Tennessee, Lee said.

"We're open to the possibility of opening a standalone restaurant as well. It all depends on how that first one goes," he said.

Based in Tampa, Florida, Checkers & Rally's Restaurants Inc. has about 840 locations. Currently, the nearest Checkers is in Cleveland, according to the company. Others are in Chattanooga, Nashville and Memphis. The only Knoxville location of sister restaurant Rally's closed several years ago.

"It's my understanding that the name is based on the state you operate in," Lee said.

To staff the new restaurant he expects to hire 20 to 30, not counting management.

"We intend to hire specifically in the Knoxville-Kodak area," Lee said. "Everything from the top-level management down to the cashiers."

Wesley Lee's father Terry is a banker, Ford dealer, and owner of 44 convenience stores. Lee's Food Mart is technically a subsidiary of Lee Oil Co., the distributor for the chain's gas pumps, Wesley Lee said. The Middlesboro, Kentucky-based company has about 33 stores in East Tennessee, with the rest in southern Kentucky and southwest Virginia.

The Lees liked Checkers' speed, price and product, Wesley Lee said.

"We really felt all three of those matched us as a corporation," he said.

The Kodak location was chosen to target budget vacationers heading for Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Lee said. While there are plenty of restaurants in those areas, the low price of Checkers – and convenience where customers may be shopping or gassing up anyway – should keep costs down for families saving money by vacationing locally, he said.

"It's expensive to go to Florida," Lee said.

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