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Hospitality Roundup: New BurgerFi CEO Looks Beyond US for Expansion; Elisabetta's Ristorante, Bar and Pizzeria to Open Second Location

BurgerFi CEO Julio Ramirez has his sights on international expansion using connections made during his time at Burger King.

Ramirez, who was named CEO in October, spent 16 years as a senior executive at Miami-based Burger King, heading global operations and expanding franchising in Latin America.

"My expertise from my days at Burger King is growing the brand and expanding it into multiple countries," he said. "All those experiences are exactly what needs to happen now that I've moved to BurgerFi."

Some of his notable accomplishments at Burger King, he said, were growing the brand's restaurant count from 25 to nearly 400 in Mexico, and from no locations to 60 in Brazil in just a few years. Burger King has since expanded to over 1,000 restaurants in Brazil.

Ramirez said the Caribbean could be the next frontier for international growth. He added that he's already had discussions with a franchisee in Puerto Rico, while conversations for BurgerFi restaurants in the Dominican Republic are likely next.

Travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic make expansion outside the U.S. difficult, so U.S. growth remains a top priority, he said.

While the brand is well-established in Broward and Palm Beach counties, he said there is still room to grow in Miami-Dade County.

Meanwhile, the company continues to open locations in new markets outside of Florida. Ramirez said the first BurgerFi restaurant with a drive-thru is slated to open later this year in Kentucky.

But he has much bigger plans for the company.

"How big is up?" he asked. "The reality is that we believe that there's nothing stopping us from saying that in the next three to four years we can double, or potentially triple, our size."

Ramirez said he will continue to invest in ghost kitchens and licensing deals with colleges and organizations like the U.S. Air Force.

BurgerFi recently agreed to be purchased by Miami-based blank-check company Opes Acquisition Corp. for \$100 million. The deal has yet to close, but when it does, BurgerFi will go public and trade under the stock ticker "BFI."

Elisabetta's Ristorante, Bar and Pizzeria

The second Elisabetta's is slated to open at 185 Banyan Blvd. in West Palm Beach in January 2021. The sister restaurant to Big Time Restaurant Group's Italian concept Louie Bossi's will occupy 10,000 square feet, accommodate up to 300 patrons and include a 12-seat private dining room. Blue Tree Cafe

The Fort Lauderdale Community Redevelopment Agency approved a \$225,000 forgivable loan for ghost kitchen concept Blue Tree Cafe to open in the city's Sistrunk neighborhood. Founder Sharon Allen said she hopes to eventually convert the 681-square-foot commissary kitchen, at 612 N.W. Ninth Ave., into a dine-in restaurant.

Ol'Days Farm to Table

The Argentine coffee shop and restaurant opened its first U.S. location Nov. 13 at 3301 N.E. First Ave., in Miami's Midtown neighborhood. The concept debuted in Buenos Aires in 2014. Its menu features plant-based, vegetarian and vegan options, as well as specialty coffee.

BurgerFi

NDM Hospitality opened a BurgerFi franchise Nov. 12 at 1850 N.W. 117th Place in Miami. The fast-casual restaurant has 2,040 square feet of indoor space and 500 square feet of outdoor space. Total seating capacity is 104 patrons. This was the sixth BurgerFi restaurant that NDM has opened in South Florida.

Chick-fil-A

In partnership with Katz & Associates, Chick-fil-A plans to open seven franchise locations in South Florida over the next seven months. Four of those locations will open in Miami-Dade County, two in Palm Beach County and one in Broward County. Locations in Hialeah and Boca Raton are slated to open in December.

The Big Number: \$12 million

Annual access fee Miami-Dade County commissioners agreed to pay Miami-based Brightline to use the company's rails for a commuter train service between Aventura and downtown Miami. The access agreement extends 30 years, and the county also agreed to pay a one-time fee of \$50 million to Brightline and parent company Florida East Coast Industries.