



BurgerFi taps former Burger King exec as CEO



BurgerFi International has named Julio Ramirez as CEO, according to a press release from Opes Acquisition Corp., the company acquiring the 150-unit burger chain based in Florida. Ramirez has nearly three decades of experience in the burger industry having previously served in several senior positions at Burger King Corporation, a Restaurant Brands International Inc.

subsiidiary, including president of the Latin America/Mexico/Caribbean division, senior executive of franchise operations and development in North America, and EVP and COO.

"BurgerFi has continued to lead the space with powerful leadership and Julio's expertise will allow us to continue to grow within the 'better burger' segment," Ophir Sternberg, chairman and CEO of Opes, said in the release. "There is a strong market and a captive audience for fast casual experiences. Development strategies and tactics will be key, and BurgerFi has a scalable model to grow exponentially into more locations through top institutional developers, unique growth vehicles like ghost kitchens and working with successful multi-brand operators."

Upon leaving Burger King in 2011, Ramirez founded JEM Global Inc., a company that specializes in assisting QSR and fast casual brands' with franchising and development efforts domestically and internationally. Ramirez consulted Dunkin' Brands on its Brazil entry strategy and Buffalo Wings & Rings on its Mexico development strategy. He set up four new franchise groups in Mexico and Colombia for "100 Montaditos," a Madrid-based Andalusian restaurant expanding into the Americas. He was also co-owner of Giardino Gourmet Salads, South Florida's premier fast-casual concept, helping to grow the brand in Miami, Fort Lauderdale and Naples, Florida.

Ramirez led Burger King's field marketing across North America throughout the mid-1990s as part of the chain's "Back to Basics" campaign, which attained positive comparable sales for several years. In the early 2000s, he managed over 1,100 franchisees in North

American operations and led several committees, including franchise relations, operations technology and restaurant finance, according to the release.



Ramirez introduced the Burger King brand in over 10 countries throughout Latin America, establishing the supply chain, selecting outstanding franchisees and building a team that opened more restaurants than McDonald's in 16 of 25 countries. In Brazil, for example, he developed a local team that assembled an effective supply source, signed 10 franchisees in a regional network, opened an office in Sao Paulo and successfully launched the brand with an impactful marketing campaign — all of which resulted in Burger King's first 60 Brazilian locations yielding annual sales substantially greater than the U.S. average. In Mexico, he built a team that surpassed both MCD's and KFC's unit development, opening over 400 restaurants throughout the country.

"Today's consumers demand an outstanding guest experience on each visit and BurgerFi not only delivers strong on its service but also owns the outstanding quality and 'better burger' segment," Ramirez said in the release. "BurgerFi has several unique brand differentiators with its premium natural ingredients, technology enhanced infrastructure and commitment to sustainability that has the potential to capture significant market share, both nationally and internationally, through a highly scalable model. I look forward to leading the team through its next chapter of expansion and the continued evolution of the brand."