

Former Burger King Honcho Joins BurgerFi



BurgerFi International, a Palm Beach, Fla.-based burger chain, has named Julio Ramirez as its new chief executive officer.

Ramirez has a strong franchise development background. He 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. subsidiary, including president of the Latin America/Mexico/Caribbean division, senior executive of franchise operations and development in North America, and executive vice president/chief operations officer.

In June, OPES, a publicly traded, Miami-based special-purpose acquisition company, acquired the 120-unit burger brand.

“There is a strong market and a captive audience for fast-casual experiences,” Ophir Sternberg, chairman & CEO of OPES Acquisition Corp. said in a statement. “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, Fla.

Ramirez led Burger King's field marketing across North America throughout the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s, he managed over 1,100 franchisees in North American operations and led several key working committees, including franchise relations, operations technology and restaurant finance.

Ramirez introduced the Burger King brand in over 10 countries throughout Latin America, effectively establishing the supply chain, selecting outstanding franchisees, and building a team that opened more restaurants than McDonald's (MCD) in 16 of 25 countries.

"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," said Ramirez. "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."