

New BurgerFi CEO sets sights on international expansion

By Matthew Arrojas – Reporter, South Florida Business Journal



Julio Ramirez, CEO of North Palm Beach-based BurgerFi International.

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

Ramirez, who was appointed to 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,” Ramirez said. “All those experiences were exactly what needed 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 from the Covid-19 pandemic makes 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 added that there is still room to grow further in Miami-Dade County.

Meanwhile, the company continues to open locations in new markets outside of Florida. He said the first BurgerFi restaurant with a drive-through is slated to open later this year in Kentucky. But he has much bigger plans for the company going forward.

“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 Opes Acquisition Corp., a blank check company, for \$100 million. The deal has yet to close, but when it does BurgerFi will become a publicly traded company and trade under the stock ticker "BFI."