

Former NFL Players Open Checkers & Rally's across Birmingham area

By

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Donnell Thompson and Ron Wooten, retired NFL players, are opening a chain of Checkers and Rally's across Alabama. (Ameera Steward, The Birmingham Times)

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Donnell Thompson and Ron Wooten, retired NFL players, are opening a chain of Checkers & Rally's across Alabama and doing more than giving residents a place to eat. They're also creating jobs.

Thompson believes the company will hire 35 to 45 people per store.

"So we'll probably put on 300 to 350 jobs [and with] general managers some of them are very good jobs...some of them will be as high as \$50,000 a year, some of our students will make \$8 to \$10 an hour, we think that these are jobs that are needed in this area," he said.

The Alabama cities include Birmingham, Jasper, Bessemer and Midfield, which recently had its re-grand opening, and Thompson is excited about the future.

"It was a great opportunity, we had a franchisee that was here in this market that basically didn't see what I see in it," he said. "I see the opportunity in our guest...where our stores are located, I think they're great locations and...everybody doesn't see the same thing....you have to see it before you see it...there's a little bit of the Holy Spirit in there as well so I've been very fortunate to see it."

Using the Game



Donnell Thompson and Ron Wooten, retired NFL players, are opening a chain of Checkers and Rally's across Alabama. (Ameera Steward, The Birmingham Times) During his 11 seasons with the Indianapolis Colts (1981-1991) Thompson said "I didn't see very many people that I knew that was having a lot of success after the game."

"The game somewhat, from my perspective, used them versus them using the game and I was determined not to let the game use me, but I use the game," Thompson said, setting him on a franchise journey.

He learned the business working in a metro Atlanta McDonalds during his football off season and was fortunate to save enough money during his playing days to purchase his first franchise. After retiring around in 1998, he purchased a McDonalds in Atlanta and "I been in the franchising business ever since," said Thompson, who has since had franchise deals with Choice Hotels, Zaxby's, as well as Denny's.

Six months ago he signed a franchise agreement with Checker's which has grown their brand at a very fast rate, said Thompson. "Their average volume has increased quite a bit over the last five to 10 years and their management team is outstanding at what they do. They keep it simple. They sell a real good hamburger, they sell great French fries, they sell great deserts, and great colas and they do that extremely well."

Thompson said he and Wooten, who played for the New England Patriots from 1981-1988, plan to open as many as seven to 10 Checkers & Rally's within the Birmingham area and grow the brand throughout the Southeast.

Changing the Environment

In addition to growing the restaurants, Thompson said he also plans to invest in schools across the area.

Checkers & Rally's plans to partner with the Midfield School System and its athletic teams and host different activities. For instance, Thompson said they will hold a hamburger eating contest to raise money for the athletic program.

"If the football players need money to do something then we'll be a part of that process, if the cheerleaders need money ... we'll be a part of that process, if the band needs money to be raised we'll be a part of that process," he said.

Thompson said he met Devon Frazier at the Midfield City Council meeting who is behind the popular book reading program, I See Me, Inc, for at-risk children.

One way he plans to help, he said, is by allowing any child who reads a book to go to Checkers & Rally's for a free ice cream cone.

"Anything that's going to promote growth in the area...if we can be a factor in our business and people buying food from us, and we [take] some of those proceeds and give back to organizations that can change the environment of our people, then that's what we'll do," said Thompson.

Birmingham Openings

Oct. 15 — 636 Lomb Ave. SW

Nov. 5 — 1420 31st Street SW

Nov. 26 — 4030 1st Ave North