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Roy Rogers seeks to double in size

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The once-troubled Roy Rogers Restaurants chain is in the middle of a big turnaround as it works to double its portfolio within the next five years.

Created by Marriott in the 1960s as one of several in-house restaurants concepts, Roy Rogers quickly expanded from its home turf in northern Virginia. Known for a menu based upon burgers, roast beef and chicken—rather than just one, like many fast-food chains—it expanded to nearly 650 U.S. locations at its peak.

Peter Plamondon was one of the insiders who helped launch Roy Rogers for Marriott. He left the company in 1979 to become a franchisee of the brand he helped create. By the early 1990s, he had more than a dozen franchised locations, but the brand as a whole was in trouble.

Purchased by Hardee's in 1990 as part of a real estate play to move into the mid-Atlantic and Northeast states, it converted dozens of Roy Rogers over to its own banner. For a variety of reasons, the move was not a success and sales volumes tumbled.

"It failed miserably," said Jim Plamondon, who purchased his father's franchised locations in the early 2000s with brother, Pete Plamondon, Jr. Seeing gradual decline under the parent, but optimistic for its future prospects, the brothers purchased the entire, much smaller Roy Rogers chain in 2002.



They had plans to rejuvenate and re-franchise the brand, but had to shelve those plans during the recession. Now, with credit flowing again as the quick-serve restaurant space stays hot, they have begun re-growing Roy Rogers, which is about to open its 49th location in Winchester, Virginia.



"My brother and I were building restaurants even though we didn't have a parent that was caring much about it," Jim Plamondon said. "We wanted to control our own destiny, [and] didn't want another company like Hardee's coming in and screwing it up."

Going from zees to the zor, the Plamondon brothers added locations, renovated tired stores and re-wrote the company manuals, while noticing their most enthusiastic customers were willing to drive great distances to get their Roy Rogers fix.

"Our brand is one we think is ripe for expansion," Jim Plamondon said. "Our goal is to double our chain to 100 over the next five years or so, and that to us would be a great success."



With a brand that nearly perished, and based on a cowboy who passed away nearly 20 years ago, Plamondon acknowledges that awareness is a challenge for Roy Rogers. In response, the brothers have invested in regional advertising, including local radio spots and billboards.

Looking ahead, he said it's possible they could sell at some point, but that they are enjoying their current role and plan to continue adding four to six new locations per year.