Potbelly signs deal with experienced franchisee, plans 7 more stores in Central Florida

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Tiffani Sherman September 3, 2026



Potbelly will open seven new franchise locations in Seminole County and three in Gainesville. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh, File)

A new franchisee is planning to expand the Potbelly brand into the North Orlando market and is looking for space.

“This is exciting. Everybody is excited to develop in this market,” said BD Patel, who along with his nephews, Bhavesh and Mihir Patel, signed a new franchise agreement for ten new locations

Potbelly started in Chicago in 1977 and now has more than 450 locations around the United States, serving mainly sandwiches, wraps, and shakes. It started as a family company literally built around a potbelly stove at an antique shop to feed customers there.

Franchising began in 2009, and the company went public in 2013. Convenience store and gas station retailer RaceTrac bought Potbelly last October with a long-term goal of expanding the company to 2,000 locations.

Currently, there are five locations operating in the Orlando area, including two in Davenport and three more in town: one at Colonial Plaza, another in Lee Vista, and a third in Winter Park.



Potbelly currently has five locations in the Orlando market, including this store in Winter Park, which opened in January 2026. (Staff photo)

Seven of the Patel family's locations will be in Seminole County, including in Altamonte Springs and Lake Mary. The other three are slated for Alachua County near Gainesville.

“We’re looking for diversified communities, like residential as well as the office areas where people join us at lunchtime and evening for the families,” Patel explained. “We’re looking for a perfect location where we can be successful, good real estate. The target is to get a successful start and keep growing.”

The Patels are currently working with real estate brokers and are in negotiations on a few places.

“We are looking right now for existing buildings or freestanding buildings wherever we can find the spots,” Patel told GrowthSpotter. “As soon as we find something, we will sign up the first location and work from there.”

The Patels are looking for existing buildings with about 1,800 to 2,000 square feet but are not closing the door to new construction.

“That option is open for us; if we find a good lot where we can build our own single freestanding building, we will definitely consider.”

A pickup window is a possibility.

“Online ordering is growing across America, so people like to order online and pick up at the window, so that’s the best option,” he said. “If the opportunity is available, we will definitely consider, but it is not necessary.”



The "Wreck" is one of the most popular menu items, which includes toasted sandwiches, soup, wraps, and shakes.(Courtesy of Potbelly)

Owning and operating franchises and other businesses are nothing new for the family.

“I’m a civil engineer, businessman, and multi-franchisee for various brands for over 30 plus years,” he said, adding he has had franchises with Dunkin’, Quiznos, Baskin Robbins, Mooyah Burgers, 7-Eleven, and others.

“My experience has covered a lot of different sides of the business, from multi-unit ownership operations as a franchise developer, serving on franchise advisory councils, distribution centers, working in community services in every brand.”

His nephews have experience with other businesses including convenience stores, hotels, and more. BD Patel explained he is not nervous about starting a new business venture with family members.

“Success is always a give and take,” he said. “Everybody has got their own role to play.”

BD is in charge of executive management, site selection, construction, and brand communication. Bhavesh will be director of operations, and Mihir will do the more day-to-day things like HR and accounting.

“We have a blend of experience and we can make a nice team.”

Most of BD Patel's businesses have been up north.

"I was looking and thinking, 'hey, I'm moving to Florida, so let me find something fit to myself for a perfect job," he said, adding he has always liked Potbelly as a customer.

BD Patel has already relocated to Ocala, and both nephews are in the process of moving from Cincinnati, which is where Bhavesh Patel frequented Potbelly as a student. BD Patel discovered Potbelly around 2011-12 while living in Michigan.

"Potbelly was next to one of my Dunkin' Donuts, so I used to take lunch there often," he said. "At those times, the brand was not franchising so there was no chance to be a franchisee. I asked them that time. [So] I waited and then they started franchising."

If you're wondering, BD Patel's go-to order is a vegetarian sandwich.

"When the mushrooms and cheese go through the oven, the taste changes. I love it," he said with a laugh.

Plans are to have the first of their location open by July and continue opening the others at a pace of every eight months or so.

"The schedule is for a ten-year plan, but we will finish in six years, I think," Patel said, adding there is so much potential in the area.

"Florida is a place where a lot of visitors come; business is growing here," he said, adding he had come to visit family in Florida for years before making the move himself. "The growth going on right now is unbelievable. A lot of opportunities here."

If things go well, Patel's children might also be a part of the team.

"We three are starting [things] and once we have more stores, we have more hands to join."

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