Darden Restaurants Named to Fortune's "100 Best Companies To Work For" List For Second Consecutive Year

Ranks as largest employer on list

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 19, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI), whose restaurant brands include Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse and more, announced today that it has been recognized for the second consecutive year by FORTUNE magazine as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For." Darden, ranked # 99, is the largest employer on the list and remains the only full-service restaurant company to ever appear on the list.

"Once again, we're honored to be included on the FORTUNE list," said Clarence Otis, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Darden. "In a service-oriented business like ours, often times the difference between a good guest experience and a great one is the discretionary effort of our employees. That's why we make a promise to every one of our employees that what you do, who you are, what you learn, and who you're with, matters.

"We're convinced that our commitment to maintaining a strong, people-focused culture is the single most important reason we've continued to enjoy the success we have."

FORTUNE recognized Darden for:

- Creating the second-most number of new jobs (5,137) among companies on the list.
- Being a diversity champion. The company ranks among the Top 20 companies on the list for diverse workforces; 42% of Darden employees are minorities.

"In addition to ensuring our guests have an exceptional experience in our restaurants and that we positively impact the communities we serve, we're equally focused on making Darden a special place to be," said Drew Madsen, President and Chief Operating Officer of Darden. "Our goal is to help every one of our 180,000 employees have the opportunity to fulfill their personal and professional dreams."

To pick the 100 Best Companies to Work For, FORTUNE partners with the Great Place to Work Institute to conduct the most extensive employee survey in corporate America; 280 firms participated in this year's survey. More than 246,000 employees at those companies responded to a survey created by the institute, a global research and consulting firm operating in 45 countries around the world. Two-thirds of a company's score is based on the results of the institute's Trust Index survey, which is sent to a random sample of employees from each company. The survey asks questions related to their attitudes about management's credibility, job satisfaction, and camaraderie. The other third is based on responses to the institute's Culture Audit, which includes detailed questions about pay and benefit programs and a series of open-ended questions about hiring practices, methods of internal communication, training, recognition programs, and diversity efforts. After evaluations are completed, if news about a company comes to light that may significantly damage employees' faith in management, we may exclude it from the list. Any company that is at least five years old and has more than 1,000 U.S. employees is eligible. For information on how to apply, visit www.greatplacetowork.com.

The full list and related stories appear in the Feb. 6, 2012 issue of FORTUNE.

About Darden Restaurants

Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest full-service restaurant company, owns and operates more than 1,900 restaurants that generate over $7.5 billion in annual sales. Headquartered in Orlando, and employing 180,000 people, Darden is recognized for a culture that rewards caring for and responding to people. In 2012, Darden was named to the FORTUNE "100 Best Companies to Work For" list for the second year in a row and is the only full-service restaurant company to ever appear on the list. Our restaurant brands — Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse, The Capital Grille, Bahama Breeze, Seasons 52 and Eddie V's — reflect the rich diversity of those who dine with us. Our brands are built on deep insights into what our guests want. For more information, please visit www.darden.com.

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