Olive Garden President: "The American Flag Is Always Welcome."

ORLANDO, Fla., Oct. 14, 2011 /PRNewswire/ --

Statement from John Caron, president of Olive Garden:

"To our friends and neighbors who may be concerned about whether or not guests can bring the American flag into Olive Garden, I want to assure you the American flag is always welcome in any of our restaurants. Anyone who wishes to bring the flag into our restaurants may certainly do so. I want to express my most heartfelt apology to anyone who has been offended by our mistake. The misunderstanding was purely a case of our corporate office giving incorrect information to one of our restaurants. We greatly regret that mistake and as a company we take responsibility for it. We are proud of our American roots and proud of our employees who are veterans and reservists, as well as all of our employees who serve their communities where they live and work. Olive Garden has nothing but the utmost respect and admiration for the American flag and everything it symbolizes."

About Darden

Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest full-service restaurant company, owns and operates more than 1,900 restaurants that generate more than $7.5 billion in annual sales. Headquartered in Orlando, and employing approximately 180,000 people, Darden is recognized for a culture that rewards caring for and responding to people. In 2011, Darden became the first full-service restaurant company ever to be named to the FORTUNE "100 Best Companies to Work For" list. Our restaurant brands — Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse, The Capital Grille, Bahama Breeze and Seasons 52 — 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.

Forward-looking statements in this news release regarding our ability to close the transaction, the impact of the transaction on our sales and earnings growth, new restaurant growth and all other statements that are not historical facts, including without limitation statements concerning our future economic performance, plans or objectives, are made under the Safe Harbor provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Any forward-looking statements speak only as of the date on which such statements are made, and we undertake no obligation to update such statements to reflect events or circumstances arising after such date. We wish to caution investors not to place undue reliance on any such forward-looking statements. By their nature, forward-looking statements involve risks and uncertainties that could cause actual results to materially differ from those anticipated in the statements. The most significant of these uncertainties are described in Darden's Form 10-K, Form 10-Q and Form 8-K reports (including all amendments to those reports). These risks and uncertainties include the successful completion of the proposed transaction in a timely manner, the ability to successfully integrate the new operations into our business following completion of the proposed transaction, food safety and food-borne illness concerns, litigation, unfavorable publicity, federal, state and local regulation of our business including health care reform, labor and insurance costs, technology failures, failure to execute a business continuity plan following a disaster, health concerns including virus outbreaks, the intensely competitive nature of the restaurant industry, factors impacting our ability to drive sales growth, the impact of the indebtedness we incurred in the RARE acquisition, our plans to expand our newer brands like Bahama Breeze and Seasons 52, a lack of suitable new restaurant locations, higher-than-anticipated costs to open, close or remodel restaurants, increased advertising and marketing costs, a failure to develop and recruit effective leaders, the price and availability of key food products and utilities, shortages or interruptions in the delivery of food and other products, volatility in the market value of derivatives, general macroeconomic factors including unemployment and interest rates, severe weather conditions, disruptions in the financial markets, risks of doing business with franchisees and vendors in foreign markets, failure to protect our service marks or other intellectual property, a possible impairment in the carrying value of our goodwill or other intangible assets, a failure of our internal controls over financial reporting, or changes in accounting standards, and other factors and uncertainties discussed from time to time in reports filed by Darden with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

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