Darden Restaurants Awards More Than $1.7 Million in Local Grants to Nearly 900 Nonprofit Organizations in North America

Inaugural Restaurant Community Grants Program underscores Darden's commitment to make a difference in the communities it serves

ORLANDO, Fla., April 30, 2012 /PRNewswire/ -- Today, the Darden Foundation, the charitable arm of Darden Restaurants Inc., announces it is awarding more than $1.7 million to nearly 900 nonprofit organizations in communities across the U.S. and Canada as part of its inaugural Darden Restaurants Community Grants Program. The local grants program is intended to help support nonprofit organizations in the hundreds of communities Darden and its restaurant brands serve. Every restaurant within the Darden family had the opportunity to help award a $1,000 grant to a nonprofit organization in its local community.

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"Each grant is more than a check — it is a defining opportunity for our restaurant teams to enhance their community and strengthen relationships with nonprofit organizations doing important work in every community we serve," said Drew Madsen, president and chief operating officer of Darden Restaurants, Inc. "Our restaurants are supporting groups like the Oregon Food Bank that is providing essential supplies to combat local hunger, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Dallas that mentors 500 students a week, and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation that is providing environmental education throughout New England."

Grants are being awarded to nonprofit projects that are aligned with Darden's three key focus areas:

- **Access to Postsecondary Education** — Positively impact the educational prospects of underserved youth in middle and high school, and provide access to the tools and information needed to pursue higher education.
- **Preservation of Natural Resources** — Restore and preserve water and land ecosystems, or teach members in the community about environmental sustainability and conservation.
- **Hunger** — Provide food and other nourishment to people whose food source might be compromised or who would go hungry otherwise; give access or help to deliver food to the underserved.

Many Darden restaurants, which include Red Lobster, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse, The Capital Grille, Bahama Breeze and Seasons 52, are collaborating and combining their grant dollars to make a deeper impact for local nonprofits. Restaurants in metropolitan areas such as Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago, Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles among others will collectively donate more than $465,000 in support of educational programs for underserved youth through local Boys & Girls Clubs.

"The Darden Restaurants Community Grant Program is an excellent example of a national initiative making a major local impact," said Jim Clark, president and CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of America. "More than 460 Darden restaurants awarded grants to local Boys & Girls Clubs across the country. These vital funds provide targeted education programs for the young people who need us most. When we work with socially conscious corporations like Darden Restaurants, it fosters greater community engagement while helping secure great futures for more of America's youth."

Following are examples of grants being awarded by the Darden Foundation across the country:

- **Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta** — To help address Atlanta's graduation rate, which is one of the lowest rates in the country, 24 restaurants in the area will award $24,000 to Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Atlanta. Several educational programs will be supported including College Bound; Power Hour; and Get Ready, Get Set, Learn.
- **Oregon Food Bank** — Sixteen Darden restaurants in Oregon and Washington are collaborating and combining their grant dollars to award $16,000 to the Oregon Food Bank, which distributes emergency food to more than 240,000 people a month and fights hunger's root causes in its communities.
- **Chesapeake Bay Foundation** — Five restaurants in Maryland are combining forces to fund the Chesapeake Bay Foundation with a $5,000 grant to engage more than 25,000 middle and high school students in award-winning environmental education programs in 2012.
- **Houston Food Bank** — Surrounding restaurants will award $16,000 to the Houston Food Bank's Backpack Buddy Club, which serves 281 schools in 11 counties. More than 6,500 children will receive food from the program each week.
- **Philabundance** — Seven Darden restaurants in the Philadelphia area will support Philabundance with a $7,000 grant for its Community Kitchen program, a job training program that provides students with hands-on instruction in food service skills, while preparing meals for people in need.
- **Missouri Restaurant Association Education Foundation** — Local restaurants will award $3,000 to the Missouri
Restaurant Association Education Foundation to support a ProStart culinary and hospitality program at a high school in Liberty, MO. The program teaches career skills and hosts state competitions to help students build self-esteem and discipline.

The Darden Restaurant Community Grants Program was built on the company's rich heritage of being of service to others — a concept that began 70 years ago with its founder, Bill Darden. Darden's service philosophy extends beyond the walls of its restaurants and into the communities the company serves. The Darden Foundation works to bring to life this spirit of service through its philanthropic support of local charitable organizations across communities in North America. Since 1995, the Darden Foundation has awarded more than $60 million in grants. Total giving in fiscal year 2012 amounted to $7.8 million, 20 percent of which is represented by the Restaurant Community Grants Program. For more information about the Darden Foundation, please visit http://www.darden.com/commitment/community.asp.

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.

The Darden Foundation

The Darden Restaurants, Inc. Foundation is the charitable arm of Darden Restaurants, Inc. The Foundation's mission is to maintain a spirit of volunteerism and philanthropy as defining characteristics of Darden Restaurants. Since 1995, the Darden Foundation has awarded more than $60 million in grants, with $7.8 million given in fiscal year 2012. The Darden Foundation carries out its mission by focusing philanthropic efforts and resources on the following program areas: Access to Postsecondary Education, Preservation of Natural Resources and Good Neighbor Grants.

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