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ORLANDO, FL - The Greater Los Angeles African American Chamber of Commerce (GLAAACC) recently presented Darden Restaurants with its Corporation of the Year Award for 2000, in recognition of the company's commitment and contributions to the African American community in Southern California. Darden, which owns and operates the Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones restaurant brands, is the world's largest casual dining restaurant company.

"We strongly believe in embracing, celebrating and fostering diversity both inside and outside our company," said Joe R. Lee, Darden's Chairman and CEO, "not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it's an imperative for any progressive, growing business, and this award shows we're on the right track. Our entire family of restaurants and more than 116,000 employees nationwide are extremely proud of this honor."

GLAAACC's Corporation of the Year Award is presented to the corporation that has contributed to the economic growth and development of the African American community. Recipients are representative of the ethics that have propelled the African American community forward: dedication, commitment and purposeful conviction.

Darden has supported the GLAAACC for years, sponsoring events, participating on boards and teaming up with local Red Lobster and Olive Garden restaurants for community fundraisers. The Chamber also noted the company's national commitment to diversity through its partnerships with the National Council of La Raza, NAACP, Urban League, National Conference for Community and Justice, and the United Negro College Fund, to name a few. Darden has also established relationships with the Hispanic, Asian and African American chambers of commerce, both nationally and locally throughout the country.

Darden Restaurants, with headquarters in Orlando, Florida, is the world's largest casual dining company, with 1,129 restaurants operating under the Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones brands, over 116,000 employees and annual sales of over \$3.5 billion.