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CHICAGO, May 22 -- Pleasing some of your diners all of the time is a culinary risk worth taking if you do business with the world's most successful casual dining company.

That is what Fort Worth, Texas-based Kettle Cooked Foods found out Monday when it won top vendor honors from Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI).

Darden, which owns and operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar restaurants, awarded Kettle Cooked the William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award, which is named after the founder of the Orlando-based restaurant company.

"Kettle Cooked supplies our company with a wide variety of superb soups, sauces and side dishes," said Darden Chief Executive Joe Lee. "But it was probably its Tropical Lobster Chowder that clinched its top vendor recognition this year."

Kettle Cooked helped create the chowder for Red Lobster's Lobsterfest 2000, which is an annual celebration of the peak lobster season and is held each spring throughout North America.

"When we tested Tropical Lobster Chowder we knew that this soup was outside our normal flavor profile for seafood soups and bisques," said Red Lobster president Dick Rivera about the chowder, which contains ingredients like chipotle chilies, lemongrass, coconut milk and cilantro. "We found, however, that when our guests liked the chowder, they really liked the chowder. We learned from this menu offering how to better serve niches within our universe of guests."

Kettle Cooked also supplies Darden with some of its traditional sauces and dips. The company is Red Lobster's "gold standard" vendor for Alfredo Sauce, supplying all of Red Lobster's needs. Moreover, it supplies 90 percent of Olive Garden's Spinach Artichoke Dip along with various other sauces, soups and dips.

"Kettle Cooked has done an outstanding job of focusing on the four key drivers in our supply chain, those being Quality, Service, Innovation, and Cost," said Barry Moullet, senior vice president of purchasing for Darden. "We look forward to a long relationship."

The William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award salutes world-class vendors for outstanding quality, service, innovation and value. Darden purchasing, marketing and culinary experts chose Kettle Cooked foods from over 1,200 vendors that did business with the restaurant company during fiscal 2000 (which ends May 31).

Darden operates more than 1,100 segment leading restaurants, employs over 116,000 people and enjoys annual sales of $3.5 billion.

Kettle Cooked Foods, Inc., an operating facility for KPR Foods, is a division of Foodbrands America, which is a wholly owned subsidiary of IBP, Inc. (NYSE: IBP). Kettle Cooked produces and packages custom foods for easy-to-use boil-in-bag preparation.