Shaw's Southern Belle Gets Honor of a Lifetime From Darden Restaurants

Seafood Company Wins Darden’s Top Vendor Award

CHICAGO, May 22-- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest casual dining company, recognized an old friend and the company's longest-standing business partner on Monday.

Darden, which owns and operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar restaurants, awarded Shaw's Southern Belle Frozen Foods, Inc. its most valued honor. That is the William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award. The award is named after the founder of the Orlando-based restaurant company.

"Few companies, in any industry, have enjoyed a closer business relationship than our company and Shaw's," said Joe Lee, chief executive officer of Darden. "This award is really a lifetime achievement award, and I'm pleased to recognize and thank the Shaw family for helping serve our guests worldwide for 30 years."

Bill Darden opened the first Red Lobster restaurant in Lakeland, Florida, in 1968. The Shaw family -- which by then had already been in business as a seafood processor for 34 years -- presented crab cake samples to Darden the next year. Shaw's crab cakes debuted on the menu in 1971, and Shaw's has supplied Red Lobster restaurants in North America ever since.

"Our suppliers are critical to the success of Red Lobster and a vital part of our organization," said Dick Rivera, president of Red Lobster. "Our partnership with Shaw's is something we are serious about, celebrate, and constantly work on so that we can look back and say that we are proud of what we have done together."

During Darden's fiscal 2000 (which ends May 31), Shaw's custom kitchens were responsible for creating three test products: shrimp stuffing, lobster stuffing, and Conch Fritter batter. The Conch Fritter batter ended up making it onto Red Lobster's Tampa, Florida, menu for a major target market test, where Red Lobster is experimenting with more local preference entrees. In addition to new product development, Shaw's also delivered more than five million pounds of top-grade deviled-crab mix and crab fritters to Darden this year.

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 Shaw's from over 1,200 vendors that did business with the restaurant company during the year.

"Shaw's 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 many more years of friendship."

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

John R. Shaw, Sr. and "Mama" Shaw founded Shaw's Southern Belle in 1934. Today, the Shaw family still operates the business, supplying customized value-added products and developing seafood concepts and flavor profiles for its partners. Shaw's has operated in the same Jacksonville, Florida, location for 63 years, starting with the first crabmeat processing plant in Florida and growing to a modern custom kitchen.