



## **Bahama Breeze Promotes Award-Winning Food and Beverage Executive**

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#### **Darden Restaurants' Caribbean Concept Builds Leadership Team**

ORLANDO, Fla., June 20, 2000 - America's leading Caribbean restaurant concept -- known for providing dinner guests with a very enjoyable two-hour island vacation -- has promoted its top chef to senior vice president of culinary and beverage development.

Rick Crossland's promotion from vice president takes effect immediately and helps position the 25-year culinary veteran as a leading voice in the restaurant industry on contemporary Caribbean cuisine.

"This promotion recognizes Rick's leadership and commitment to culinary excellence," said Gary Heckel, president of the four-year-old restaurant company, which currently has 14 restaurants in operation and an additional five restaurants under construction.

"Rick's passion for delivering extraordinary food and one-of-a-kind handcrafted drinks ensures that guests at Bahama Breeze enjoy one of the greatest culinary crossroads in the world with all of the bold and unique flavors of the Caribbean."

Crossland, 47, will continue to lead the culinary and beverage development teams at Bahama Breeze to create memorable, eye-catching meals with palate-pleasing combinations of bold flavors, superior ingredients, originality, artful presentations, and remarkable taste.

He joined the restaurant concept in February 1995, one year before it opened to the public. His success in developing the concept's culinary and beverage menus have helped Bahama Breeze earn:

- An excellent rating from "Zagat Survey Dining Guide to America's Top Restaurants" for the last two years;
- "Nation's Restaurant News" Hot Concept Award in 1999;
- A silver medal in the American Culinary Federation's National Chef's Super Challenge in 1999;
- "Orlando Magazine's" Golden Palm Award for the last four years; and
- "The Orlando Sentinel's" Foodie Awards for best theme restaurant, best casual dining, best worth the wait in 1998 and 1999.

Crossland, who is a South Hadley, Mass. native, is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and the University of Massachusetts.

He previously served as vice president of research and development and technical services for TGI Friday's and its sister concepts -- Italianni's and the Front Row Sports Bar. Crossland also spent eight years overseeing the research and development group with Steak & Ale and Bennigan's. Additionally, for three years he was part of the start-up team of The China Rose, a 500-seat Chinese-themed casual dining restaurant in Arlington, Texas.

Crossland serves as a board member of the Caribbean Culinary Federation, a certified judge for culinary competitions throughout the islands, a member of the American Culinary Federation and an editorial advisor for "Cheers" magazine.

Bahama Breeze, which features Caribbean-style sugar plantation restaurants, is the leader in innovation and introduction of the Caribbean niche in the casual dining industry. Its restaurants appeal to the upper casual dining market characterized by young, relatively affluent, educated diners looking for a different dining occasion.

Its cuisine reflects the diverse influences of Dutch, French, Spanish, British, Indian, Chinese and African cultures, which helped settle the eastern and southern West Indies on the Caribbean sea.

Bahama Breeze is a wholly owned subsidiary of Darden Restaurants Inc. (NYSE: DRI) of Orlando, which is the largest casual dining company in the world. Darden also operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden, and Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar restaurants.