ORLANDO, Fla.--June 29, 2000--The food and wines of Italy come alive on Olive Garden's new website at tuscany.olivegarden.com. From fine wines and great food to the awe-inspiring scenery and rich culture of Italy, the website provides a creative culinary experience.

The kick off of the website coincides with Olive Garden's new menu introduction. Drawing from the heart of Italy, the new menu items were inspired by the new Olive Garden Riserva di Fizzano restaurant, located in a restored eleventh century village in Tuscany, near Florence, Italy. The new Olive Garden Riserva di Fizzano restaurant and the Culinary Institute of Tuscany were established in cooperation with the Zingarelli's, an Italian family that owns and operates the Rocca delle Macie winery, one of Italy's leading producers of Tuscan wines.

Olive Garden is one of the largest restaurant importers of Italian wines in the world so it's no surprise that wine takes center stage on the new website, starting with a virtual Olive Garden wine list accompanied by photos of each wine label. Accompanying the photos are descriptive tasting notes. Within the general categories of sparkling, white, blush and red are descriptions that will identify a white as "light to medium-bodied," or a red as "light-bodied, from sweet to semi-sweet." Olive Garden's wine list has grown from 19 to 33 selections and includes well-known California wines from Robert Mondavi, Kendall-Jackson and Berringer, plus Italian wines from Bertani, Cavit, Cecchi, and Rocca delle Macie. Also featured on the wine list is Olive Garden's signature Principato wines, imported from Trentino, Italy.

To learn more about each wine, browsers can click on a map detailing where the wines originated and even access an audio file for the correct pronunciation of those names. Confused by which wine to order with which food? tuscany.olivegarden.com offers general wine and food pairing suggestions, matching selections from Olive Garden's wine list with signature items from the menu.

"This website conveys what guests discover when they visit the Olive Garden," said Drew Madsen, executive vice president of marketing for Olive Garden. "Whether you are a browser on our website or a guest in our family of local restaurants, we are bringing you a genuine Italian dining experience."

A click of the mouse transforms the computer screen into a 360-degree tour of the spectacular grounds of Riserva di Fizzano, home of Olive Garden Riserva di Fizzano and the Culinary Institute of Tuscany, where Olive Garden culinary team members from restaurants across North America participate in a formal training program to learn firsthand about traditional Italian cooking, wines and culture. Streaming video allows browsers to view the ribbon cutting ceremony that officially opened Olive Garden Riserva di Fizzano and the Culinary Institute of Tuscany.

The cuisine of the region is highlighted through virtual recipes developed at the Culinary Institute of Tuscany. Would-be chefs can follow along with Olive Garden's Executive Culinary Chef Paolo Lafata as he creates each recipe on screen. To find out what's cooking at Olive Garden, six of the new menu items are featured on the website along with enticing descriptions of each dish.

Olive Garden is the leading restaurant in the Italian dining segment with more than 50,000 employees and $1.5 billion in annual sales. Olive Garden is a division of Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE:DRI), the world's largest casual dining company.

For more information about Olive Garden, the new menu, recipes, and food and wine pairings, visit Olive Garden's new website at tuscany.olivegarden.com.