Darden Restaurants Names Red's Market a 'Distinguished Vendor'

ORLANDO, Fla., May 25 -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest casual dining company, presented Red's Market with its top award for vendor excellence at this week's National Restaurant Association Show. This honor recognizes the fresh produce distributor for its quality, value, service and support.

Darden, which owns and operates more than 1,150 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar restaurants, presented Red's, the largest fresh produce distributor in Central Florida, with its William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award, named in honor of the company's founder.

"It's great having such a quality and service-oriented vendor right here in our own backyard," said Joe Lee, Darden Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. "Providing our guests with top-quality fresh foods is part of our strategy to achieve culinary and beverage excellence, and Red's Market is helping us do that."

Red's Market has become a key vendor/partner for Bamaha Breeze. Not only do they provide the growing Caribbean restaurant company with fresh fruits and vegetables, but they also help train new Bahama Breeze produce distributors on the company's exacting specifications and help source some of the unique fresh products the restaurants use in Caribbean cooking.

"At Bahama Breeze we have a 'kitchen forward' philosophy. Great food is the heart of our concept," said Bahama Breeze President Gary Heckel. "We use a lot of fresh ingredients in our recipes and with their intense focus on quality, Red's Market has helped us make sure our fresh produce is always of the highest quality."

The William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award salutes world-class vendors for outstanding quality, service, innovation and value. Darden's purchasing, marketing and culinary experts chose Red's Market from the more than 2,000 vendors the restaurant company did business with in fiscal 2001 (which ends May 31).

"Red's is a Central Florida institution, and one reason they've been around for 50 years is the consistent excellence of the products they supply," said Barry Moullet, senior vice president of Purchasing for Darden Restaurants. "They strive for 100 percent adherence to our specifications and product complaints are practically non-existent."

Dale "Red" Schluraff started Red's Market in 1948, selling fruits and vegetables from a tent on the side of a dirt road. Today the company is the leading fresh produce distributor in its region, with locations in Orlando, Tampa and Melbourne, Florida. It is a subsidiary of FreshPoint, Inc., the nation's largest fresh foodservice distributor.