Darden Restaurants Names Thai Union Seafood 'Distinguished Vendor'

ORLANDO, Fla., May 25 -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest casual dining company, presented Thai Union Seafood, one of Thailand's major seafood exporters, with its top award for vendor excellence this week at the National Restaurant Association Show. This honor recognizes Thai Union Seafood 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 Thai Union, based in Bangkok, Thailand, with its William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor Award, named in honor of the company's founder.

"Thai Union has become one of our most dependable suppliers of top-quality shrimp," said Joe Lee, Darden Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. "We work extremely well together to serve terrific food to our guests at a great value."

A major supplier of shrimp for Red Lobster and Olive Garden, Thai Union has become the model for other Darden suppliers to follow in making quality improvements. Last June Darden gave the company a Gold Award as the number one vendor in their quality and food safety program, and the seafood supplier was the first vendor to work with Darden's Quality Assurance and Purchasing departments to establish measurable in-line production process controls. They also recently received ISO 9002 quality certification.

"Thai Union is a true vendor/partner and they've done a fantastic job of delivering on the four key drivers in our supply chain: quality, service, innovation and cost," said Barry Moullet, senior vice president of Purchasing for Darden Restaurants. "Over the last six months we've bought more than $21 million in shrimp from the company -- that's more than 100 million shrimp processed by hand, one at a time, to our specific specifications, without a single product complaint from our restaurants."

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 Thai Union from the more than 2,000 vendors the restaurant company did business with in fiscal 2001 (which ends May 31).

Established in 1977, Thai Union is a major worldwide seafood exporter. The company has two modern processing plants in Samut Sakom Province, a major source of Thai seafood, and has 4,000 employees, including a corps of quality control technicians.