



Darden Restaurants Names Eight 'Distinguished Vendors'

CHICAGO, May 30 -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest casual dining company, presented its 2001 William B. Darden Distinguished Vendor award to eight key suppliers today. Darden owns and operates more than 1,150 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones BBQ & Sports Bar restaurants.

The 2001 Distinguished Vendors are: Chudnoff & Associates, Colavita USA, McCormick & Company, Nautical Furnishings, Northern Fishermen Cooperative, Red's Market, Rocca delle Macie, and Thai Union Seafood.

Darden's culinary, marketing, quality assurance, and purchasing experts chose these world-class vendors from the more than 2,000 suppliers Darden did business with in fiscal 2001 (which ends May 31) for going above and beyond in their support of Darden's restaurant companies and demonstrating a "strategic point of difference" in the areas of quality, service, innovation and value.

"Our mission is to be the best casual dining company, now and for generations," said Joe R. Lee, Darden Chairman and CEO. "We are committed to being 'brilliant with the basics' when it comes to day-to-day operating excellence in our restaurants, continuous leadership development throughout our company, service and hospitality that redefine casual dining, and ever-improving culinary and beverage expertise. Each of these 'Distinguished Vendors' has supported us in these efforts and contributed to our success."

Darden presented its vendor awards during the company's annual Vendor Meeting at the National Restaurant Association convention in Chicago. The award itself is named in honor of Bill Darden, the company's founder.

"These eight outstanding companies are true partner vendors," said Barry Moullet, senior vice president of Purchasing for Darden Restaurants. "They support our goals, work side-by-side with us to help us deliver extraordinary dining experiences to our guests and take as much pride in the growth and success of our brands as we do."

Some of the specific reasons the eight companies received 2001 Distinguished Vendor awards:

- Chudnoff & Associates provided real-time input to Darden culinary teams working on improvements and new additions to our menus, including successfully testing 34 new Olive Garden menu items and 27 new Red Lobster products.
- Colavita USA developed several new product introductions for the Olive Garden Menu, assisted in sourcing genuine Italian products for Olive Garden Culinary, and provided brand marketing support to Olive Garden for its Culinary Institute of Tuscany sweepstakes.
- McCormick & Company provided Outrageous support to Red Lobster and Smokey Bones Culinary Teams, and actively participated in Darden's Minority Vendor Development Initiatives.
- Nautical Furnishings is a dedicated partner to Red Lobster, stepped in when another vendor wasn't able to meet a deadline for providing a special bar-top for a new Red Lobster under construction, committing to do whatever was necessary to manufacture, ship and install the top on time.
- Northern Fishermen Co-op piloted "formula pricing" for Darden and continued its commitment to conservation and environmental sustainability of its rock lobster resource.
- Red's Market helped train new Bahama Breeze produce distributors on the company's exacting specifications and helped source some of the unique fresh products the restaurant uses in Caribbean cooking.
- In addition to providing Olive Garden with some of the finest imported Italian wines, Rocca delle Macie also helped the company establish its Culinary Institute of Tuscany near Siena, Italy, and continues to operate the institute to immerse Olive Garden culinary managers in Italian food, wine and culture.
- Thai Union Seafood became the first Darden vendor to partner with the company's Quality Assurance and Purchasing departments to establish measurable, in-line production process controls.

Darden Restaurants, with headquarters in Orlando, Florida, is the world's largest casual dining company, with 1,124

restaurants operating under the Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones brands, over 114,000 employees and annual sales of over \$3.4 billion.