Darden Restaurants Reports Proposed Site Acquisitions

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 16 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI - news) today reported that its operating company has entered into an agreement to acquire nine Grady’s restaurant locations in Florida and Georgia from subsidiaries of Quality Dining, Inc. The Boards of Directors of both Darden and Quality Dining approved the agreement in December.

“This agreement fits our strategic plan very well,” said Joe Lee, Chairman & CEO. "These are premium sites in well-established trade areas and they allow us to quickly penetrate the Southeast with our Smokey Bones BBQ Sports Bar concept in a meaningful way. We’re very pleased with the agreement.”

The proposed acquisition consists of six owned and three leased sites. They are located in Plantation, Ft. Myers, Brandon, Boca Raton, and Miami, Florida, and Dunwoody, Duluth, Kennesaw, and Alpharetta, Georgia. Assuming the transaction closes as planned, Darden intends to convert eight of the nine locations to Smokey Bones BBQ Sports Bar restaurants and use the Miami site for a Red Lobster restaurant. The transaction is expected to be finalized in the spring of 2002.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., in Orlando, FL, owns and operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones BBQ Sports Bar restaurants. Forward-looking statements in this news release, if any, are made under the Safe Harbor provisions of the Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995. Certain important factors could cause results to differ materially from those anticipated by the forward-looking statements, including the impact of changing economic or business conditions, the impact of competition, the availability of favorable credit and trade terms, the impact of changes in the cost or availability of food and real estate, government regulation, construction costs, weather conditions and other factors discussed from time to time in reports filed by the company with the Securities and Exchange Commission.