Darden Restaurants Reports Strong January Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 29 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI - news) today reported same-restaurant sales for the four-week January fiscal month ended January 27, 2002. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2002 third quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 15% to 16% for the January fiscal month, propelled by an 11% to 12% increase in guest counts. Average check increased 4% as the result of a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase due to menu mix changes. This year, Red Lobster introduced its "All You Can Eat Shrimp" promotion on January 7 and it will run through February 10. Last year, Red Lobster featured "Pound of Crab" for $10.99 from January 15 through February 11, 2001. In fiscal January of last year, Red Lobster had an 8% to 9% same-restaurant sales increase, which reflected a 4% to 5% increase in guest counts, a 3% increase in pricing and a 1% increase in average check due to menu mix changes.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 11% to 12% for the month, driven by a 7% to 8% increase in guest counts. Average check increased 4% due to a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase from menu mix changes. Olive Garden began its "Tortelloni di Fizzano" promotion featuring Romana Neri, head chef at its Culinary Institute of Tuscany, on December 31. This promotion, which is priced at $8.95, will run through February 3. During the comparable period last year, Olive Garden featured "Chicken Scampi" which was also priced at $8.95. In fiscal January of last year, Olive Garden had an 8% to 9% same-restaurant sales increase, driven by a 4% to 5% increase in guest counts, a 3% increase in pricing and a 1% increase in check average from menu-mix changes.

Darden estimates that approximately 3.5 percentage points of Red Lobster and Olive Garden's growth in same-restaurant guest counts reflected favorable holiday shifts. New Year's Eve, which is a historically strong sales day, moved from December in fiscal year 2001 to January in fiscal year 2002 and Super Bowl Sunday, which is a historically slow sales day, moved from January in fiscal year 2001 to February in fiscal 2002.


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.