Darden Restaurants Reports December Same-Restaurant Sales Results

Darden Restaurants Reports December Same-Restaurant Sales Results PR Newswire January 3, 2002 4:28pm ORLANDO, Fla., Jan. 3 /PRNewswire/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales for the five-week December fiscal month ended December 30, 2001. This period is the first month of Darden's fiscal 2002 third quarter.

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% to 5% due to a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase from menu mix changes. Darden estimates that approximately 3 percentage points of Olive Garden's growth in same-restaurant guest counts reflected more favorable weather this fiscal December compared to the abnormally harsh weather experienced in fiscal December of last year. This year, Olive Garden advertised "Chicken Marsala" featuring Romana Neri, head chef at its Culinary Institute of Tuscany, from November 26 through December 16. During the comparable period last year, Olive Garden featured "Pork Filletino." In fiscal December of last year, Olive Garden had a 2% to 3% same-restaurant sales increase, driven by a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase in check average from menu mix changes, offset by a 2% decline in guest traffic.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 8% to 9% for the December fiscal month, propelled by a 7% increase in guest counts. Average check increased slightly as the result of a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and an offsetting 1% decline because of menu mix changes. Darden estimates that favorable weather also contributed approximately 3 percentage points to Red Lobster's same-restaurant guest count growth. This year, Red Lobster featured its "Pound of Crab for $10.99" from November 26 through December 30. During the same period last year, Red Lobster focused on brand-building advertising. In fiscal December of last year, Red Lobster had a 2% to 3% same-restaurant sales increase, which reflected a 2% to 3% increase in pricing, a 1% to 2% increase in average check due to menu mix changes and a 2% decline in guest counts.


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.

SOURCE Darden Restaurants, Inc.

-0- 01/03/2002

/CONTACT: Analysts, Matthew Stroud, +1-407-245-5550, or Media, Rick Walsh, +1-407-245-5366, both of Darden Restaurants, Inc./


(DRI)

CO: Darden Restaurants, Inc. ST: Florida IN: RST SU: SLS

BK-KW -- FLTH021 -- 5815 01/03/2002 16:29 EST http://www.prnewswire.com Copyright © 2002 PR Newswire