Darden Restaurants Reports July Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., July 30 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI - News) today reported positive same-restaurant sales for the four-week July fiscal month ended July 28, 2002. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2003 first quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 12% to 13% for July, and reflected a 5% to 6% increase in guest counts and a 7% increase in the check average. The check average growth came from a 2% increase in pricing and a 5% increase due to menu-mix changes. During July, Red Lobster featured its Festival of Crab, which began July 7 and will run through August 4. Red Lobster ran the same feature in the comparable period last year and experienced a 1% to 2% same-restaurant sales increase; reflecting a 2% to 3% increase in pricing, a 2% to 3% increase in check average because of menu-mix changes and a 3% decline in guest counts.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 6% to 7% for the month. The sales growth reflected a 1% to 2% increase in guest counts and a 5% to 6% increase in check average. The higher check average was attributable to a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 2% to 3% increase due to menu-mix changes. In fiscal July of this year, Olive Garden featured "Lobster Spaghetti," which began July 8 and will run through August 18th. In fiscal July of last year, Olive Garden featured "Chicken and Shrimp Limone" for two weeks and "Chicken con Broccoli" for one week. Last July, same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were flat. This reflected a 1% decline in guest counts and a 1% increase in check average due to a 1% to 2% increase in pricing slightly offset by a decrease from menu-mix changes.


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.