Senior Legal Counsel To Head Darden Government And Environmental Relations

ORLANDO, Fla., June 3 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- Darden Restaurants Inc. announced today the appointment of senior legal counsel to lead the company's Government and Environmental Relations Department.

George Williams, 59, who previously served in Darden's General Counsel's Office overseeing legal issues involving purchasing, information services, intellectual property, advertising and marketing, will assume his new responsibilities in Darden Corporate Relations effective immediately. His responsibilities will include government, environmental and diversity relations and community affairs. Williams will also oversee the Darden Restaurants Foundation.

"George brings almost 30 years of experience with Darden to a key position in the company," said Rick Walsh, Senior Vice President of Corporate Affairs. "Our government and environmental relations work helps our company speak clearly on critical public policy issues."

Williams joined the company in 1972. He attended the University of Georgia and the Walter F. George School of Law at Mercer University.

Darden was one of the first national restaurant companies to establish its own public affairs departments in the early 1980's, integrating government, environmental and community affairs into all of the company's business models.

The company also has a long tradition of supporting diversity in its restaurants and in the communities in which it operates. Fortune magazine has named Darden to its list of "The 50 Best Companies for Minorities" for three consecutive years, including 2001.

In its most recent fiscal year (ending May 31) the Darden Restaurants Foundation awarded $3.4 million in grants to non-profits involved in arts and culture, education, social services/nutrition and environmental/natural resources. Those contributions included a grant generating $1.2 million to the University of Florida's Warrington College of Business, establishing the first comprehensive diversity and business ethics program in Florida and the first such program in the nation endowed by a hospitality company.