Darden Restaurants Reports September Same-Restaurant Sales Results

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Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the five-week September fiscal month ended September 28, 2003. This period is the first month of Darden's fiscal 2004 second quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up approximately 2% for fiscal September, which reflected a 2% to 3% increase in check average and a 0% to 1% decline in guest counts. The check average increase was a result of a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 0% to 1% increase from menu mix changes. Last year, Olive Garden had a 5% to 6% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal September.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 1% to 2% for fiscal September, which reflected an 8% to 9% increase in check average and a 6% to 7% decline in guest counts. The check average increase was a result of an approximate 2% increase in pricing and a 6% to 7% increase from menu mix changes. Same-restaurant sales were strong for the first two weeks of the month (up 12% to 14%) due to the continuation of the "Endless Crab" feature. They were softer in the final three weeks of the month (down 4% to 7%) as the "Dozens of Shrimp" feature began. Last year, Red Lobster had a 0% to 1% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal September.

The Company estimates that the impact from Hurricane Isabel minimally affected September same-restaurant sales results by approximately 0.3% at both Red Lobster and Olive Garden.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,280 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones and Seasons 52 restaurants with annual sales of $4.7 billion.

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.

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