Darden Restaurants Reports January Same-Restaurant Sales Results

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Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the four-week January fiscal month ended January 26, 2003. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2003 third quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 3% to 4% for fiscal January, which reflected a 3% to 4% increase in check average and a 0% to 1% increase in guest counts. The check average increase was a result of an approximately 2% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase from menu mix changes. This fiscal January, Red Lobster had four weeks of national television advertising featuring "All You Can Eat Shrimp." During fiscal January last year, Red Lobster featured "All You Can Eat Shrimp" for three weeks with one week without any national television advertising. Last year, Red Lobster had a 15% to 18% increase in same-restaurant sales driven by an 11% to 12% increase in guest counts and a 4% increase in check average.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 1% to 2% for fiscal January, which reflected a 3% to 4% increase in check average and a 2% 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. This fiscal January, Olive Garden had one week without any national television advertising followed by three weeks of advertising featuring "Chicken Castellina for $8.95" and also promoted its signature "Soup, Salad, and Breadsticks" offering during the same time period. During fiscal January last year, Olive Garden advertised "Tortelloni di Fizzano for $8.95" on national television for four weeks along with three weeks of advertising "Soup, Salad, and Breadsticks." Last year, Olive Garden had an 11% to 12% increase in same-restaurant sales driven by a 7% to 8% increase in guest counts and a 4% increase in check average.

January's sales results at both Red Lobster and Olive Garden were adversely affected by approximately one percentage point as a result of more severe weather than last year across much of the nation.

"We are pleased to report these solid sales comparisons given the challenging environment we experienced in January," said Linda Dimopoulos, Chief Financial Officer of Darden Restaurants. "While Red Lobster and Olive Garden delivered impressive sales growth against difficult prior year comparisons, unanticipated costs related to insurance and workers' compensation expense have more than offset the earnings benefit we would normally expect to realize from the increased sales. We do not expect further unplanned costs related to these items this fiscal year."

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,200 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze and Smokey Bones restaurants.

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.

Red Lobster® Olive Garden® Bahama Breeze® Smokey Bones®

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