Darden Restaurants Reports July Same-Restaurant Sales Results

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Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the four-week July fiscal month ended July 27, 2003. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2004 first quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 4% to 5% for fiscal July, which reflected a 3% increase in guest counts and a 1% to 2% increase in check average. The check average increase was a result of a 2% to 3% increase in pricing and a 0% to 1% decrease from menu mix changes. Last year, Olive Garden had a 6% to 7% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal July.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were down approximately 6% for fiscal July, which reflected a 0% to 1% increase in check average and a 6% to 7% decrease in guest counts. The check average increase was a result of a 1% to 2% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% decrease from menu mix changes. Last year, Red Lobster had a 12% to 13% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal July.

The Company estimates that this year's shift of the Independence Day holiday from Thursday in 2002 to Friday in 2003 adversely affected July same-restaurant sales results at both Red Lobster and Olive Garden by approximately one percentage point.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,270 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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