Darden Restaurants Reports September Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., Oct 5, 2004 /PRNewswire via COMTEX/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the five-week September fiscal month ended October 3, 2004. This period is the first month of Darden's fiscal 2005 second quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 5% to 6% for fiscal September, which reflected a 3% to 4% increase in guest counts and an approximate 2% increase in check average that resulted primarily from pricing. Last year, Olive Garden had an increase of approximately 2% for same-restaurant sales in fiscal September.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were flat for fiscal September, which reflected a 0% to 1% decrease in guest counts and a 0% to 1% increase in check average that resulted primarily from menu mix changes. Same-restaurant sales increased 1% to 2% last September.

The Company estimates that fiscal September's three hurricanes (Frances, Ivan and Jeanne) adversely affected September same-restaurant sales at both Red Lobster and Olive Garden by approximately 1% and that the total sales impact to Darden was $7.0 to $7.5 million.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,300 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones, and Seasons 52 restaurants with annual sales of $5.0 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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