Darden Restaurants Reports July Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., Aug 4, 2004 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the four-week July fiscal month ended August 1, 2004. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2005 first quarter.

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

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were down 4% to 5% for fiscal July, which reflected a 5% to 6% decrease in guest counts and a 1% increase in check average. The check average increase was a result of a 0% to 1% increase in pricing and a 0% to 1% increase from menu mix changes. Sales trends were softer during the final two weeks of the month. Last year, Red Lobster's popular "Endless Crab" promotion was offered in the last two weeks of July and ran through early September. Same-restaurant sales decreased 6% last July.

This July's sales results at Red Lobster and Olive Garden were favorably impacted by a shift in the Independence Day holiday. The holiday, which typically falls in fiscal July, was in fiscal June this year. Darden estimates that the shift favorably affected same-restaurant sales at both companies by approximately 2.5%.

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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