American Consumer: 'I Hate To Wait!' Bahama Breeze Announces Call-Ahead Seating and Other Restaurant Lobby Improvements as Harris Poll Says Americans Want Shorter Restaurant Table-Waits

ORLANDO, Fla., Mar 8, 2004 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Americans hate waiting for a table at a restaurant, according to a Harris Interactive poll released today. In fact, almost half the respondents in the nationwide poll rated long lobby waits as the most stressful part of dining out and more than one in four said inaccurate wait time estimates by restaurant staff was a huge turnover.

As a result, Bahama Breeze, the nation's leading island-inspired casual dining company, announced one of the most comprehensive programs in the industry to provide guests more control over when and how they choose to wait for a table.

"Our island deck and lively bar area have always provided a great experience for guests who like listening to live music while enjoying a beverage and appetizers before being seated for dinner," said Laurie Burns, Bahama Breeze president. "Now, we're providing an alternative wait experience for guests who want to be seated as soon as possible.

"The Harris poll findings are clear," Burns said. "We need to give guests more control over the first stage of their dining experience, or they will be disappointed in their overall experience."

According to the Harris poll:

-- Three of every four Americans (75%) feel that waiting for a table is stressful.

-- In fact, almost half of the respondents (48%) said that a long wait for a table was the most stressful part of dining out.

-- Next most stressful: when a restaurant fails to quote guests an accurate wait time. Twenty-seven percent of respondents said an inaccurate time estimate was the worst dining-out annoyance.

Bahama Breeze's lobby-wait program addresses these needs. It includes a call-ahead service that lets guests put their name on a waiting list before they arrive at the restaurant, reducing the amount of time they wait for a table in the restaurant; a system to more accurately estimate table wait-time, helping the host better gauge when tables will be available; and more spacious waiting areas, with comfortable couches and chairs and island artwork.

"This research tells us we need to put guests in control of their wait by offering an experience that meets each guest's expectations," said Joel Aach, senior director of Strategic Research for Bahama Breeze's parent, Darden Restaurants, which also operates Red Lobster, Olive Garden and Smokey Bones restaurants. "We're putting the whole package together at Bahama Breeze, from a lively deck and bar area to a comfortable, quiet, laid-back lobby, to call- ahead seating. Bahama Breeze's innovative approach puts guests in control of their wait. We think it gives Bahama Breeze a competitive advantage."

Since opening, Bahama Breeze has enjoyed critical acclaim throughout the restaurant industry for its Caribbean-inspired food and drink. While guests don't always wait for a table at Bahama Breeze, there are times, especially on Fridays and Saturdays, when the wait can be an hour or more.

Call-ahead seating is available for lunch and dinner at all 37 Bahama Breeze locations. To find the Bahama Breeze location nearest you, visit www.bahamabreeze.com.

The Harris Interactive survey was conducted by telephone between December 4 and December 7, 2003, with a sample of 1,005 Americans ages 18 or older. To ensure a reliable and accurate representation of the total national adult population, completed interviews were weighted to known proportions for age, gender, geographic region, and race. The margin of error for the total sample is plus or minus 3.1 percent.

Harris Interactive (www.harrisinteractive.com) is a worldwide market research and consulting firm best known for The Harris Poll (R). Headquartered in Rochester, N.Y., Harris Interactive combines proprietary methodologies and technology with expertise in predictive, custom and strategic research.

Bahama Breeze restaurants are known nationwide for made-from-scratch food and beverages served in a relaxed island...
atmosphere. Bahama Breeze's menu features a range of popular American favorites to authentic Caribbean dishes. Bahama Breeze operates restaurants nationally with average restaurant sales among the top casual dining restaurants listed in Nation's Restaurant News' 2003 Top 100 restaurant rankings. Darden Restaurants (NYSE: DRI) is the nation's largest casual dining restaurant company. Darden owns and operates more than 1,300 restaurants with annual sales of $4.7 billion.

SOURCE Darden Restaurants, Inc.

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