Darden Restaurants Reports September Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., Oct 06, 2005 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc., (NYSE: DRI) today reported same.restaurant sales results for the five-week September fiscal month ended October 2, 2005. This period is the first month of Darden's fiscal 2006 second quarter.

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

Same.restaurant sales at Red Lobster increased 2% to 3% for fiscal September, which reflected a 1% to 2% increase in guest counts and a 1% increase in check average due to pricing. Last year, Red Lobster reported flat same.restaurant sales for September.

The Company estimates that fiscal September's two hurricanes adversely affected September same.restaurant sales at both Red Lobster and Olive Garden by approximately 0.5% and that the total sales impact to Darden was $3.5 to $4.0 million. The Company noted that the prior year's fiscal September sales were adversely affected by three hurricanes (Frances, Ivan and Jeanne).

There are currently three restaurants (one Olive Garden and two Red Lobsters) that are closed indefinitely because of Hurricane Katrina, and two Olive Garden restaurants that are closed temporarily because of Hurricane Rita. Decisions regarding rebuilding and reopening are pending clean-up and recovery efforts in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,380 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones, and Seasons 52 restaurants with annual sales of $5.3 billion.

Forward-looking statements in this news release 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 intense competition, changing economic or business conditions, the price and availability of food, ingredients and utilities, labor and insurance costs, increased advertising and marketing costs, higher-than-anticipated costs to open or close restaurants, litigation, unfavorable publicity, a lack of suitable locations, government regulations, a failure to achieve growth objectives, weather 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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