Darden Restaurants Reports January Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., Feb 03, 2005 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) today reported same-restaurant sales results for the four-week January fiscal month that began January 3, 2005 and ended January 30, 2005. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2005 third quarter.

(Logo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20050203/FLTH026LOGO )

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up approximately 4% to 5% for fiscal January, which reflected an increase of approximately 3% in guest counts and a 1% to 2% increase in check average. The check average increase was due to a 0% to 1% decrease in menu mix changes and an approximate 2% increase in pricing. Last year, Olive Garden had an increase of 8% to 9% in same-restaurant sales during fiscal January.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster declined approximately 8% to 9% for fiscal January, which reflected a 9% to 10% decrease in guest counts and approximately 1% increase in check average. The check average increase was due mostly to pricing. Last year, same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster declined 2% to 3% during fiscal January.

January's sales results at both Olive Garden and Red Lobster were negatively affected by approximately 6.0 percentage points due to the combination of the shift of the New Year's week holiday to fiscal December and unfavorable weather this January compared to last year.

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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