Darden Restaurants Reports April Same-Restaurant Sales Results

ORLANDO, Fla., May 5, 2005 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX/ -- Darden Restaurants, Inc. (NYSE: DRI) today reported U.S. same-restaurant sales results for the four-week April fiscal month ended May 1, 2005. This period is the second month of Darden's fiscal 2005 fourth quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 8% to 9% for fiscal April, which reflected a 6% to 7% increase in guest counts and a 2% to 3% increase in check average. The check average increase was a result of a 2% increase in pricing and a 0% to 1% increase from menu mix changes. Last year, Olive Garden had a 5% to 6% increase in same-restaurant sales.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were up 1% to 2% for fiscal April, which reflected a 0% to 1% increase in guest counts and a 1% increase in check average primarily due to pricing. Red Lobster's same-restaurant sales were negatively impacted by approximately 1.0 percentage point in April due to the shift in the Lenten season. Last year, Red Lobster had an 8% to 9% decrease in same-restaurant sales.

The Company continues to expect diluted net earnings per share growth for fiscal 2005 (a 52-week year) in the range of 31% to 33% compared to fiscal 2004 (a 53-week year) on a GAAP basis. On a non-GAAP basis, this equates to a 19% to 21% increase or $1.75 to $1.78 net earnings per diluted share. This compares to a restated $1.47 net earnings per diluted share in fiscal 2004, which excludes the asset impairment and restructuring charge ($23.1 million after tax or $0.14 per diluted share) in the fourth quarter of fiscal 2004.

Darden Restaurants, Inc., headquartered in Orlando, FL, owns and operates over 1,350 Red Lobster, Olive Garden, Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones, and Seasons 52 restaurants with annual sales of over $5.0 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 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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