



Olive Garden's Pasta for Pennies Makes Cents for Cancer Research

Students kick off nationwide collection of spare change to benefit The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and aim to surpass 2008's record year

ORLANDO, Fla., Jan 26, 2009 /PRNewswire-FirstCall via COMTEX News Network/ -- Students across the country will soon kick off Olive Garden's 15th-annual Pasta for Pennies fundraising program benefiting The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) School & Youth campaign.

(Logo: <http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20050217/FLTH022LOGO>)

A collective effort by millions of students, parents, teachers and school administrators, Pasta for Pennies has raised more than \$42 million since its inception, funding research and services for leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma patients and their families. In 2008 alone, the grassroots campaign raised a record \$5.8 million in student contributions.

Students participate in Pasta for Pennies during a three-week period in the school year by donating their spare change, filling collection jars in their classrooms. Local Olive Garden restaurant teams reward the top fundraising class in each school with a pasta party.

"Each penny, nickel, dime and quarter collected through Pasta for Pennies advances our quest to find cures for blood cancers and make a meaningful difference in the lives of those who suffer from them," said LLS President and CEO John Walter. "Our partnership with Olive Garden has taken us far over the last 15 years and we look forward to the impact we can make together again this year."

Olive Garden also hosts kick-off lunches in its local restaurants for representatives of schools participating in the Pasta for Pennies program and provides marketing support and materials for 43 participating LLS chapters nationally.

"Year after year, I am inspired by the students who make Pasta for Pennies a success," said Dave Pickens, president of Olive Garden. "They are making a choice to have a positive impact on the lives of others and are becoming role models in the process."

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, headquartered in White Plains, N.Y., is the world's largest voluntary health organization dedicated to funding blood cancer research and providing education and patient services. The LLS mission: Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. Since its founding in 1949, LLS has invested more than \$600 million for research specifically targeting leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma. Last year alone, LLS made 6.3 million contacts with patients, caregivers and healthcare professionals through services provided at its home office and by its 68 chapters in the United States and Canada. For more information about LLS, visit www.LLS.org.

Olive Garden is the leading restaurant in the Italian dining segment with 670 restaurants, more than 80,000 employees and \$3.1 billion in annual sales. Olive Garden is a division of Darden Restaurants Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest full-service owned and operated restaurant company. For more information, visit Olive Garden's Web site at www.olivegarden.com.

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