Kids Collect Coins to Support Cancer Research

Olive Garden kicks off 16th-annual Pasta for Pennies program benefiting The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

ORLANDO, Fla., Feb 02, 2010 /PRNewswire via COMTEX News Network/ -- Millions of students across the country soon will share more than their “two cents” as they collect spare change to benefit The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) School & Youth campaign during Olive Garden's 16th-annual Pasta for Pennies program. Last year, Olive Garden's Pasta for Pennies collected $5.3 million in local communities, bringing the total amount donated since the program's inception to more than $47 million.

(Logo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20091001/CL85245LOGO)

Students in first- through 12th-grade from more than 5,250 schools will participate in Pasta for Pennies by donating their pocket change to fill collection jars in their classrooms during a three-week period in the school year. Local Olive Garden restaurant teams proudly reward the top fundraising class in each participating school with a pasta party.

All of the money students collect through Olive Garden's Pasta for Pennies funds vital research initiatives and supports services for leukemia, lymphoma and myeloma patients and their families.

"Olive Garden's commitment to making a meaningful difference in the lives of others extends well beyond the walls of its restaurants," said LLS President and CEO John Walter. "LLS is grateful to Olive Garden and the many students, teachers and parents who take part in Pasta for Pennies year after year. Their hard work and generous donations are helping us to advance our goal of curing blood cancers."

Local Olive Garden restaurants will host kick-off lunches for representatives from schools participating in Pasta for Pennies. Olive Garden also provides marketing support and materials for 45 participating LLS chapters nationally.

"Our nation's young people can accomplish great things as evidenced by the students who pledge their time and spare change in support of our Pasta for Pennies program each year," said Dave Pickens, Olive Garden president. "We are proud of their dedication to our program and The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and look forward to another successful fundraising year."

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society(R) (LLS) is the world's largest voluntary health agency dedicated to blood cancer. The LLS mission: Cure leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and improve the quality of life of patients and their families. LLS funds lifesaving blood cancer research around the world and provides free information and support services. Founded in 1949 and headquartered in White Plains, NY, LLS has chapters throughout the United States and Canada. To learn more, visit www.LLS.org or contact the Information Resource Center at (800) 955-4572, Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET.

Olive Garden is the leading restaurant in the Italian dining segment with 702 restaurants, more than 87,000 employees and $3.3 billion in annual sales. Olive Garden is a division of Darden Restaurants Inc. (NYSE: DRI), the world's largest company-owned and operated full-service restaurant company. For more information, visit Olive Garden's Web site at OliveGarden.com.

SOURCE Darden Restaurants, Inc.: General

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