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DARDEN RESTAURANTS INC
Form 8-K
December 18, 2003

As filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission on December 18, 2003.

SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20549

FORM 8-K

CURRENT REPORT
Pursuant to Section 13 or 15(d) of the
Securities Exchange Act of 1934

Date of Report (Date of earliest event reported):
December 18, 2003

Darden Restaurants, Inc.
(Exact name of registrant as specified in its charter)

Florida	1-13666	59-3305930
(State or other jurisdiction of incorporation)	(Commission file number)	(IRS employer identification No.)

5900 Lake Ellenor Drive, Orlando, Florida 32809
(Address of principal executive offices)

Registrant's telephone number, including area code:
(407) 245-4000

Not Applicable
(Former name or former address, if changed since last report)

Item 5. Other Events.

On December 18, 2003, the Company issued a news release entitled "Darden Restaurants Reports Second Quarter Earnings Per Diluted Share of 18 Cents," a copy of which is being filed herewith as Exhibit 99.

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Item 7. Financial Statements and Exhibits.

(c) Exhibits.

Exhibit Number (by reference to Item 601 of Regulation S-K)	Description
99	Press Release dated December 18, 2003, entitled "Darden Restaurants Reports Second Quarter Earnings Per Diluted Share of 18 Cents."

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SIGNATURES

Pursuant to the requirements of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, the Registrant has duly caused this Report to be signed on its behalf by the undersigned hereunto duly authorized.

Dated: December 18, 2003

DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.

By: /s/ Paula J. Shives

Paula J. Shives
Senior Vice President
General Counsel and Secretary

INDEX TO EXHIBITS

Exhibit Number	Description of Exhibit
99	Press Release dated December 18, 2003, entitled "Darden Restaurants Reports Second Quarter Earnings Per Diluted Share of 18 Cents."

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EXHIBIT 99

DARDEN RESTAURANTS

Red Lobster (R) Olive Garden (R) Bahama Breeze (R) Smokey Bones (R)
www.darden.com

NEWS/INFORMATION
Corporate Relations
P.O. Box 593330
Orlando, FL 32859

Contacts:

(Analysts) Matthew Stroud (407) 245-6458
(Media) Jim DeSimone (407) 245-4567

FOR RELEASE
December 18, 2003
4:30 p.m. EST

DARDEN RESTAURANTS REPORTS SECOND QUARTER EARNINGS PER DILUTED SHARE OF 18 CENTS

ORLANDO, FL, December 18 - Darden Restaurants, Inc. today reported quarterly sales of \$1.14 billion for the second quarter ended November 23, 2003, and earnings per diluted share of 18 cents.

"Earnings per diluted share of 18 cents were at the upper end of our guidance for the quarter," said Joe Lee, Darden's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. "Once again, Olive Garden delivered outstanding financial performance with impressive same-restaurant sales growth and set second-quarter records for sales, operating profit, return on sales and return on capital. The quarter also featured the continued expansion of Smokey Bones, which opened an additional nine restaurants, and the completion of the planned introduction of lunch at Bahama Breeze, which is an important element of its business building plan. Red Lobster continued to face several challenges and has begun to take steps to stabilize and improve the business. We are confident that Red Lobster will regain momentum, helping Darden achieve the kind of strong financial performance we have enjoyed historically. The current range of estimates of diluted earnings per share for this fiscal year, which is \$1.31 to \$1.43, is relatively broad. Given the uncertainty of the timing of Red Lobster's recovery and other factors, we think that's appropriate."

Highlights for the quarter ended November 23, 2003, include the following:

- o Earnings after tax in the second quarter were \$31.3 million, or 18 cents per diluted share, on sales of \$1.14 billion. Last year, earnings after tax were \$37.5 million, or 21 cents per diluted share, on sales of \$1.07 billion.
- o Total sales of \$1.14 billion represent a 6.6% increase over prior year.
- o Olive Garden reported its 37th consecutive quarter of same-restaurant sales growth with a 4.3% increase.
- o The Company continued its share repurchase program, buying back 0.8 million shares of its common stock in the quarter.

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Operating Highlights

OLIVE GARDEN'S second quarter sales of \$518.5 million were 9.7% above prior year, driven by a same-restaurant sales increase of 4.3% and revenue from 25 net new restaurants in operation versus last year. This is the 37th consecutive quarter of comparable-restaurant sales growth for Olive Garden and builds on a 3.5% increase in the second quarter last year. The company's increased sales, combined with lower food and beverage expense and restaurant labor costs as a percent of sales, more than offset increased restaurant expenses and depreciation as a percent of sales, resulting in a record quarterly operating profit that also represents a strong double-digit increase over last year.

"This was a great quarter for Olive Garden," said Drew Madsen, President of Olive Garden. "Our financial results in the areas of sales, operating profit, return on sales and return on capital represent the best second quarter performance in the history of Olive Garden. We also reported another quarter of positive traffic growth due to our strong foundation of guest satisfaction and the success of our recently introduced stuffed chicken entrees. I want to thank our team at Olive Garden for their unrelenting focus on delighting our guests with a genuine Italian dining experience."

RED LOBSTER'S second quarter sales of \$545.1 million were 0.7% below prior year, driven by a same-restaurant sales decrease of 3.1% that was partially offset by revenue from 10 net new restaurants in operation versus last year. Red Lobster's total sales were lower than expected. Despite lower food and beverage expenses and restaurant labor costs as a percent of sales, Red Lobster experienced increased restaurant expenses, selling, general, and administrative expenses, and depreciation as a percent of sales. These factors led to a decline in operating profit versus last year.

"Although we are disappointed with our second quarter sales and operating profit," said Dick Rivera, President and Chief Operating Officer of Darden, "we know Red Lobster is America's favorite place for seafood and we're intent on rebuilding our financial performance. We are making progress enhancing the guest experience in our restaurants and are looking forward to enhancing our promotional messages as well. We recognize there is more work ahead of us and that it will take time to accomplish all of our goals. However, our crews are energized and focused, and we will continue to improve our marketing efforts, our hospitality and our menu offerings in order to regain our guest count and sales momentum."

BAHAMA BREEZE opened three restaurants during the second quarter bringing the total number in operation to 37 restaurants. One more opening is scheduled for this fiscal year. The company also completed the introduction of lunch to most of the system during the quarter. This effort is expected to help build their business and improve financial performance as they position themselves for long-term success.

SMOKEY BONES opened nine restaurants during the second quarter, bringing the year-to-date total to 14 openings. In addition, the company has opened three more restaurants since the end of the quarter. As a result, Smokey Bones now has 56 restaurants in operation. During this fiscal year, 25 to 30 restaurants are expected to open.

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Other Actions

Darden continued the buyback of its common stock, purchasing 0.8 million shares in the second quarter. Since December 1995, the Company has repurchased a total of 100.7 million shares under authorizations totaling 115.4 million shares.

November 2003 Same-Restaurant Sales Results

Darden reported same-restaurant sales for the four-week November fiscal month ended November 23, 2003. This period is the last month of Darden's fiscal 2004 second quarter.

Same-restaurant sales at Olive Garden were up 8% to 9% for fiscal November, 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% to 3% increase in pricing and a 0% to 1% decrease from menu mix changes. Last year, Olive Garden had an approximate 3% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal November.

Same-restaurant sales at Red Lobster were down 8% to 9% for fiscal November, which reflected a 10% to 11% decrease in guest counts and a 2% to 3% increase in check average. The check average increase was a result of a 1% to 2% increase in pricing and a 1% to 2% increase from menu mix changes. Last year, Red Lobster had a 10% to 11% increase in same-restaurant sales during fiscal November.

The Company estimates that this year's shift of Halloween from Thursday in 2002 to Friday in 2003 adversely affected November same-restaurant sales results at both Olive Garden and Red Lobster by approximately 0.6%.

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 \$4.7 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.

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DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.
NUMBER OF RESTAURANTS

11/23/03 -----		11/24/02 -----
649	Red Lobster USA	639
31	Red Lobster Canada	31
----- 680	----- Total Red Lobster	----- 670
526	Olive Garden USA	501
6	Olive Garden Canada	6
----- 532	----- Total Olive Garden	----- 507
37	Bahama Breeze	32
53	Smokey Bones BBQ	27
1	Seasons 52	0
----- 1,303	----- Total Restaurants	----- 1,236

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DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.
CONSOLIDATED STATEMENTS OF EARNINGS
(In Thousands, Except per Share Data)

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(Unaudited)

	13 Weeks Ended		11/23/2002
	11/23/2003	11/24/2002	
Sales	\$1,142,543	\$1,071,531	\$2,402,000
Costs and Expenses:			
Cost of sales:			
Food and beverage	346,200	330,954	742,000
Restaurant labor	375,614	353,774	767,000
Restaurant expenses	191,010	170,727	381,000
Total Cost of Sales (1)	912,824	855,455	1,892,000
Selling, general and administrative	120,320	103,197	233,000
Depreciation and amortization	52,048	45,930	103,000
Interest, net	10,725	10,729	21,000
Total Costs and Expenses	1,095,917	1,015,311	2,251,000
Earnings before Income Taxes	46,626	56,220	150,000
Income Taxes	-15,373	-18,742	-50,000
Net Earnings	\$31,253	\$37,478	\$99,000
Net Earnings per Share:			
Basic	\$0.19	\$0.22	\$0.22
Diluted	\$0.18	\$0.21	\$0.21
Average Number of Common Shares Outstanding:			
Basic	164,900	170,900	164,000
Diluted	171,000	178,700	170,000

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DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.
CONSOLIDATED BALANCE SHEETS
(In Thousands)
(Unaudited)

	11/23/2003	11/24/2002
ASSETS		
Current Assets:		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$27,806	\$27,806
Receivables	25,672	25,672
Inventories	256,997	256,997
Prepaid expenses and other current assets	24,736	24,736
Deferred income taxes	53,971	53,971
Total Current Assets	\$389,182	\$389,182
Land, Buildings and Equipment	2,239,571	2,239,571
Other Assets	183,897	183,897
Total Assets	\$2,812,650	\$2,812,650

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LIABILITIES AND STOCKHOLDERS' EQUITY

Current Liabilities:

Accounts payable	\$167,535	
Short-term debt	70,900	
Accrued payroll	83,155	
Accrued income taxes	50,843	
Other accrued taxes	34,761	
Unearned revenues	64,894	
Other current liabilities	222,455	
Total Current Liabilities	\$694,543	
Long-term Debt	655,066	
Deferred Income Taxes	160,980	
Other Liabilities	20,693	
Total Liabilities	\$1,531,282	\$1

Stockholders' Equity:

Common stock and surplus	\$1,559,909	\$1
Retained earnings	1,072,715	
Treasury stock	-1,295,038	-1
Accumulated other comprehensive income	-9,544	
Unearned compensation	-45,418	
Officer notes receivable	-1,256	
Total Stockholders' Equity	\$1,281,368	\$1
Total Liabilities and Stockholders' Equity	\$2,812,650	\$2

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DARDEN RESTAURANTS, INC.
 SECOND QUARTER FY 2004 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS
 (In Millions, Except per Share Data)
 (Unaudited)

	13 Weeks Ended		26 11/23/2003
	11/23/2003	11/24/2002	
Sales	\$1,142.5	\$1,071.5	\$2,4
Net Earnings	\$31.3	\$37.5	\$
Net Earnings per Share:			
Basic	\$0.19	\$0.22	\$
Diluted	\$0.18	\$0.21	\$
Average Number of Common Shares Outstanding:			
Basic	164.9	170.9	1
Diluted	171.0	178.7	1

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