



Working for Darden Restaurants

Darden Restaurants, Inc., the multi-brand restaurant firm in Orlando, Florida, owns several casual dining restaurant chains - in particular, Olive Garden, LongHorn Steakhouse and Red Lobster. The last of these, Red Lobster, is where the Darden Restaurants got its start.

William Darden founded the Red Lobster Inns of America and opened his first Red Lobster in Lakeland, Florida, in 1968. He chose Lakeland because it was the innermost city in Florida, and he was curious to see how the concept of seafood would work in a non-coastal area. This first Red Lobster franchise was hailed by diners and critics alike, most prominently by Scott Indrisek, a restaurant journalist. Bill Darden was not a newcomer to the restaurant world however; he had opened his first restaurant in 1938, when he was 19 years old, a 25 seat luncheonette in Waycross, Georgia, called the Green Frog.

By 1970 the store had expanded to three locations in Florida, with two more under construction. Darden's company lacked the funds to continue expansion, so he sold it to General Mills, who upgraded the chain to a casual dining family fare format, placed Darden as the company president, and opened a corporate headquarters in Orlando, Florida.

In the mid to late 1980s, Red Lobster had grown to nearly 400 locations, and had firmly set itself as a casual dining seafood restaurant. By this time Darden had opened the first Olive Garden in 1982, in Orlando. By 1988-1989 when Red Lobster had 400 stores, Olive Garden had opened its 145th store. The Olive Garden branch became the largest Italian-themed full-service restaurant in the United States, helped by the opening of the Culinary Institute of Tuscany in Tuscany, Italy, which is a training facility for Olive Garden chefs to hone their Italian cuisine skills.

A few failed chains, such as York Steak House and China Coast, have been but speed bumps on the way, with York Steak House sputtering out in the 1980s and China Coast closing down in 1995. Recent chains, like Bahama Breeze, Smokey Bones, and Seasons 52, are doing well. Bahama Breeze, which features Caribbean Sea themed food, was created in 1996, while Smokey Bones, which features an Appalachian mountain-lodge setting was created in 1999, and sold in 2008 to Barbeque Integrated, Inc. In 2007 Darden purchased Rare Hospitality, which garnered them The Capital Grille and Longhorn Steakhouse.

Today, **Darden Restaurants** owns and operates over 1,700 restaurants throughout North America, employing some 180,000 people. 1,667 of those restaurants are in the United States, in 49 states (excepting Alaska), with 651 Red Lobsters, 647 Olive Gardens, 305 LongHorn Steakhouses, 32



The Capital Grilles, 23 Bahama Breezes, 7 Seasons 52s, and two specialty restaurants: emenway's Seafood Grille & Oyster Bar, and The Old Grist Mill Tavern.

Darden Restaurants spun off from General Mills in 1995, when its shares went on sale on the New York Stock Exchange. The current Chairman & CEO, Clarence Otis Jr. majored in Economics and Political Science at Williams College in Massachusetts, where he graduated magna cum laude in 1977, before graduating from Stanford University Law School in 1980. During Darden Restaurants' final stages of spinning away from General Mills in the mid 1990s, Otis was hired as treasurer, eventually climbing to Senior Vice President of Finance and then Chief Financial Officer. When CEO Joe Lee retired, Otis was the clear choice.

Ranking among America's largest 30 employers, Darden Restaurants offers employees not just jobs, but career opportunities. Each restaurant can create 100-150 jobs. Darden Restaurants hires 99% of their general managers from within their own staff ranks, and many of their company leaders, such as Dave Pickens, the president of Olive Garden, who started as a line cook at Red Lobster, come from those general managers. Darden Restaurants describes their restaurants as "a culture of nice built on a bedrock of discipline."

Darden Restaurants regularly utilizes the best available science in regards to good judgment and ethical behavior of food animal welfare. As new science and technology in the fields evolve, they embrace them and work with animal food chain suppliers to improve both farm and processing plant animal welfare. Darden has an Animal Welfare Working Group (AWWG) which has representatives from Darden's Community Affairs, Legal, and Government departments, as well as their Darden Supply Chain. The AWWG sets performance objectives to measure progress.