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Maryland Restaurateur Honored by Peers for Commitment and Contribution to Industry, Association and Community

Steve F. de Castro, Founder and CEO of Big Steaks Management to Receive Prestigious Schellhase Award at 'Stars of the Industry' Awards Gala on March 23 in Baltimore

(Columbia, Maryland) The Restaurant Association of Maryland announced that Steve F. de Castro would receive one of the most prestigious honors bestowed upon individual members of the restaurant and hospitality industry in Maryland next week at its annual 'Stars of the Industry Awards' Awards Gala. De Castro, founder and CEO of Big Steaks Management in Pikesville, operator of 12 restaurants, clubs and banquet facilities throughout Maryland, North Carolina and New Jersey will receive the Otto E. Schellhase Award at the Gala celebration on March 23, 2009.

"Steve de Castro is the embodiment of what it means to be successful in life and business. It is my pleasure to honor an industry peer for all he has done and continues to do for the Restaurant Association of Maryland, the hospitality industry, his employees and of course, the local communities in which he serves so well," said Jim Breuer, chairman of the Restaurant Association of Maryland and owner of Maggie's in Westminster, Md.

Established in 1992, the Schellhase Award is named in honor of the late Otto E. Schellhase, who served the Restaurant Association of Maryland in various capacities for more than 50 years. Not awarded annually, winners of the Schellhase Award are selected by the Restaurant Association of Maryland's Gala Awards Committee only when it identifies individuals of outstanding character, whose numerous contributions to the Association, its Education Foundation, the industry as a whole as well as their community clearly set them apart.

De Castro was born near Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and immigrated with his parents to the U.S. in the 1960s. At age 14, to help support this family, de Castro secured his first job as a dishwasher in a local restaurant in his adopted hometown, New Orleans, Louisiana. Over the next 10 years, de Castro learned the restaurant business from the bottom up, gaining valuable experience and an intricate knowledge of what it takes to make a restaurant successful.

After his first entry into restaurant ownership, de Castro went to work for famed New Orleans entrepreneur Ruth Fertel, founder of Ruth's Chris Steak House. Fertel provided de Castro with the ultimate challenge of turning around a floundering Ruth's Chris Steak House in Washington DC. He took over the ailing restaurant, infused it with his management philosophy, and within three years, the restaurant became the best location in the country, in both sales and profitability.

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de Castro's resurrection of the Ruth's Chris in DC was so successful that Fertel awarded him his own Ruth's Chris Steak House franchise in 1992. Today, de Castro's Big Steaks Management operates eight Ruth's Chris Steak House locations across Maryland, New Jersey, and North Carolina, with a ninth location opening in North Carolina in late summer 2009. In Maryland, the company also operates Babalu Grill, Blue Sea Grill, The Crystal Room, and Havana Club – Baltimore City's only indoor smoking venue.

A great believer in giving back to the communities in which he lives and works, de Castro has donated a tremendous amount of time, talent and treasure to a wide variety of charitable and non-profit organizations over the years. He has served as a Trustee of the Maryland Chapter of The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and on the Board of Directors of the Restaurant Association of Maryland where he was the driving force behind nearly a decade of successful Awards Gala events that celebrate the restaurant industry's brightest stars each year.

In 2000, de Castro donated a substantial sum of money to the Association for the construction of its state-of-the-art headquarters building in Columbia, Md., and to honor his contributions, today the building bears his name. For the past 11 years, de Castro has also hosted the Ruth's Chris Steak House Sizzling Celebrity Golf Classic in Baltimore, benefiting The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Maryland. Since its inception, de Castro's tournament has successfully raised over \$2.2 million for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and its effort to find a cure for blood-related cancers. Not to be overlooked, each year, de Castro and his company donate more than \$100,000 to charities across the country.

Otto Schellhase served on the Board of Directors for the Restaurant Association of Maryland for more than 40 years. During that time he served as chairman twice and as treasurer for more than 12 years. In 1956, Otto helped plan and execute the Association's first trade show, which has since grown into the Mid-Atlantic Food, Beverage and Lodging EXPO now held at Baltimore Convention Center.

Past recipients of the Schellhase award include: Steve Smith, MHI Hotels; Mary Ann Cricchio, Da Mimmo Finest Italian Cuisine; Kent Humphries, Sysco-Baltimore; Wayne Resnick, Martin's Caterers; John Brown, R.J. Bentley's; Eddie Dopkin, Classic Catering People, Miss Shirley's Café, S'ghetti Eddie's, Alonso's Restaurant; Lynn Martins, Seibel's Family Restaurant; John Knorr, Phillips Seafood and Paula Kreuzburg, Maryland Lottery.

The Annual Awards Gala is a black tie celebration that brings together 800 of hospitality's finest. Honored at the evening's event are the state's most remarkable members of the restaurant and foodservice companies who have been selected by their peers and the public for their many successes. Awards include Restaurateur of the Year; Chef of the Year; Maryland's Favorite Restaurant; Favorite Bar & Tavern, among others. Guests will enjoy an expansive cocktail reception featuring 12 Association member restaurants and vodka ice bar provided by 42 Below; live entertainment and auction, as well as an unparalleled fine dining experience prepared by exceptional industry chefs. The event is open to the media and the dining public is highly encouraged to join the restaurant industry for this celebratory evening. For additional information or to buy tickets for the event, please visit us on the web at www.marylandrestaurants.com.

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The Restaurant Association of Maryland (RAM) has remained relevant to restaurateurs for over 80 years by maintaining core principles born out of the first national financial crisis. In 1927 a small group of Baltimore area restaurateurs met to deal with the challenges facing the economy and the foodservice industry. Today, RAM is a 2,000 member strong statewide trade association operated for the purpose of promoting, protecting and improving the foodservice industry in the State of Maryland. Since the very beginning, the Association has been run by restaurateurs and suppliers working not only for the benefit of dues paying members, but also for the restaurant industry as a whole. For more information about the restaurant industry in Maryland please visit our website at www.marylandrestaurants.com.