

Wilkesboro to Lose Lobster; Olive Garden to Stay

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Wilkesboro's Olive Garden-Red Lobster combo is about to lose the Lobster side, that as plans were announced last week to close six Red Lobster and Olive Garden restaurants owned by Darden Restaurants Inc. The company announced the move as it continues with a spinoff or sale of its Red Lobster brand, according to Nations Restaurant News. Four remaining dual-branded units—including the restaurant in Wilkesboro—will be converted to standalone Olive Gardens, according to Rich Jeffers, director of communications for Darden. The three others are in Florida and Georgia. The Orlando, Fla.-based Darden, which also owns LongHorn Steakhouse and other casual-dining brands, closed two dual-branded units this past weekend in Thomasville, Ga., and Beaufort, S.C. The article says those units—including Wilkesboro—will be remodeled with a single entrance, taking out the separate entrances for each brand, and the dining rooms will be converted to the Olive Garden décor. The closure of the combined units comes amid Darden's planned spinoff of Red Lobster, announced in December, and continued pressure from activist investors for the casual-dining company to take further steps such as separating Olive Garden and spinning off its owned properties into a real estate investment trust. As of Feb. 24, Darden owned 836 Olive Garden restaurants and 706 Red Lobster units in the United States and Canada. Darden also owns 453 LongHorn locations as well as The Capital Grille, Yard House, Bahama Breeze, Seasons 52 and Eddie V's casual-dining brands, according to NRN.