



www.dingdarlingsociety.org

**SUMMER 2015**

# Society Pages

News from Friends of the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

## ABOUT THE SOCIETY

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the nonprofit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports environmental education, services, and conservation at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex. Education and conservation efforts may extend beyond the complex's borders. We partner in these efforts where possible with like-minded conservation organizations.



Colorful critters carved from metal by Kevin Webb of Bradenton, Florida.

## UPCYCLE 2015 BIGGER & BETTER

More visitors, an extra day, a bigger silent auction, and art that keeps getting better every year: The second annual Upcycle! Art Fest trumped the inaugural event by all accounts. Expanded to two days this year — April 1 and 2, 2015, it attracted more than 20 artists and thousands of people.

Visitors of all ages tried their hand at recycled  
*continued on page 2*



## TARPON TOURNNEY IV 25 Catches!

Anglers in the fourth annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament chalked up 25 qualifying catches on May 9, 2015. Team Sportfisha.com came in first place as the first team to bring four tarpon to the boat before release. It won \$11,418.75.

Team Organized Chaos also boated four tarpon for a second-place purse of \$6,343.75. Team Doc Ford's took third place and \$4,806.25. In fourth place, Team Tween

Waters Marina won \$2,537.50. The team of UK journalists, Team Fishing & Chips, won \$1,268.75.

In all, the tournament awarded \$25,375 — 100% of the fees paid by 48 participating teams. It earned \$51,000 to support the Refuge from sponsorships, silent auction, and donations — including partial winnings donations from teams Organized Chaos and Fishing & Chips, plus an anonymous angler donation of \$2,500.



Team Tween Waters Marina reels in a whopper. For more images, visit the Photo Gallery at [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org).



Team Sportfisha.com took first place, winning \$11,418.75.



# TARPON TOURNEY IV



Marty Harrity, co-owner of Doc Ford's, tournament title sponsor, with Don Wildman, Tournament Chair for "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, at Friday's Captain's Dinner.

## THANKS TO OUR GENEROUS SPONSORS FOR THIS YEAR'S TOURNAMENT:

### Title Sponsor



### Presenting Sponsor



### Platinum Sponsors

Sanibel Bean, *Florida Weekly*, Sanibel Gear, Suncoast Beverage

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Anisa Jewelry, Andrew Thompson Co., Bella Signs & Designs, Captiva Diva, Congress Jewelers, Fort Myers Marine, Happy Foods, Jensen's Marina & Cottages, Holiday Inn Sanibel Island, Island Sun/River Weekly News, Law Office of Janet Strickland PA, Media Source, Raiser's Edge, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Sanibel Island Fishing Club, Whitney's Bait & Tackle

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Bailey's General Store, Bass Pro Shops, Dr. Glen Grisham, Island Sand Paper, Must Do Visitor Guides & MustDo.com, Sanibel Island Fishing Club, Semmer Electric, Vasanta Senerat, CPA, PA, Shoreline Lumber, Yolo Watersports



First-place winner Jay Lana creates rugged lamps out of recycled fixtures.

## UPCYCLE 2015

Continued from page 1

projects at the Make & Take stations, while everyone chatted with artists who had created art from old ties, wooden pallets, recycled steel, plumbing pipes, cookie tins, and even egg shells.

First place went to artist Jay Lana, second place to

Dale Weber, and third place to Michael Danley, all from Fort Myers.

The third annual Upcycle! Art Fest will move to Saturday, November 5, 2016. Stay tuned for details.

**THANK YOU TO OUR GENEROUS UPCYCLE SPONSORS:** Cip's Place, George & Wendy's Seafood Grille, Island Sun, Southwest Florida Fine Craft Guild, and Ann-Marie & Don Wildman.

## Summer Day Camp

The Refuge is currently conducting its first ever day camp program - four consecutive weeklong Nature Explorers Day Camp sessions that will end July 17, 2015. The camp program was made possible by a \$15,000 grant from an anonymous donor to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society. The donation covers the costs of lunch and transportation for day campers, scholarships, T-shirts, digital cameras, and other program materials. It also underwrites stipends for one education intern to assist with the program. A donation from the Gardner Families goes towards backpacks for the campers. Tarpon Bay Explorers assists with water-related activities. Participants come from the local area; students from Title-1 schools receive preference.

"The Refuge feels that our new Nature Explorers Day Camp fills an urgent need in our community," said Ranger

Becky Larkins, who will oversee the program as refuge education specialist. "Existing day camps fill quickly, so we felt we could provide an excellent alternative that gets kids out in nature. By targeting Title-1 schools, we hope to reach children who cannot otherwise afford summer camps."



Nature sketching is part of the Nature Explorers Camp curriculum.

## EARTH DAY AT THE REFUGE



Left: Earth Day visitors pledged their commitment to Mother Earth. Right: Bagzilla — dressed in one year's worth of plastic bags used by the typical consumer — joined in on crafts and other Earth Day festivities on April 18, 2015.







*Reddish egret feeding behavior. Photo courtesy Wayne Klie.*

## Reddish Egret Study

Last summer, the Avian Research and Conservation Institute (ARCI) in Gainesville, Florida, expanded its Reddish Egret tracking study in the Florida Keys to include two birds at “Ding” Darling. Recently the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has made contributions to expand the program at the Refuge.

The Reddish Egret (*Egretta rufescens*), known for its erratic “dancing” when it forages, is the rarest and least studied wading bird in the U.S., according to Dr. Kenneth Meyer, who leads the ARCI study. It is “a species of critical conservation concern, particularly in Florida, where the population is experiencing a continuous decline,” said Dr. Meyer in his research proposal to DDWS.

“In consultation with Dr. Meyer, we have determined we need to track more birds at the Refuge to obtain reliable, finely-scaled movement and habitat data that will inform our management decisions and conservation planning for this priority species,” said Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik.

“We are grateful to the Wildlife Society for agreeing to help fund three more birds to be fitted with GPS-equipped satellite transmitters plus a study on the species’ prey base and how water quality is affecting it,” he



*A researcher fits one of the “Ding” study birds with a transmitter. Photo courtesy ARCI.*

added. The Sanibel Captiva Audubon Society and International Osprey Foundation are also contributing to the addition of the three birds. We are excited to have a total of five Reddish Egrets being tracked at the Refuge.”

“The annual Trailgate Party that DDWS held in February raised nearly \$85,000 for overall conservation support for the Refuge, and \$26,500 will be designated for this important research on an amazing bird,” said DDWS Board President Doris Hardy. “Similarly, in past years, funds from Trailgate and the Refuge have supported a research project to learn more about a different understudied Refuge bird, the Mangrove Cuckoo.”



*One of the Refuge’s reddish egrets with tag and tracking device. Photo courtesy of Jim Bennight*

## Your Support Dollars at Work

Besides the Reddish Egret study, your support for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has helped and continues helping to fund the following recent, current, and upcoming research projects at the Refuge:

- Three-year Mangrove Cuckoo tagging and tracking study
- 2014-2015 Sanibel Island water quality testing in partnership with SCCF and the City
- Snowy Plovers study
- Sanibel Rice Rat study
- Island bats intern research project
- Coyote monitoring in partnership with SCCF and the City
- Cane Toads trapping in partnership with SCCF and the City

## APPbassadors Help Visitors Discover Ding

To help visitors get connected to the Refuge through the new Discover Ding game and social media app, Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland has engaged six families — kids and an adult relative — to volunteer time to rove Wildlife Drive and assist other families.

“They’re called Youth APPbassadors,” said Toni, who also trains the students. “The program engages Sanibel School students in the Refuge at a young age. I give them an ‘Appy’ shirt to wear, a goodie bag, and make sure they’re ready to use the app. Their goal is to teach visitors how to download and use it. When they’re not finding someone to use the app, they post content pictures and field tips on the app to share with others.”

The students earn community service hours for their work. To find out more about the app — the first of its kind in the nation, please visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/jn\\_ding\\_darling](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/jn_ding_darling).



*Education Intern Davis Horton with APPbassador Johnny Jensen, a fifth grader at The Sanibel School, and his mother Gina Jensen.*



Scan this code to download iPhone version.



Scan this code to download Android version.

## FOLLOW AND LIKE US

DDWS is currently active on three social media platforms. Please “LIKE” us on **Facebook** by searching “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. (You can also “LIKE” the Refuge by searching for its “Official” page.)

**Instagram** users can find us at @dingdarlingwildlifesociety. On **Twitter**, our handle is @DingDarlingWS.





## STAFF NEWS

### Becky Goes to Alaska

Ranger Becky Larkins, the Refuge education specialist, has been invited for a special Alaska refuges detail this summer from August 2 to September 7. Her mission: to aid two refuges — Alaska Peninsula and Becharof NWRs outside of Bristol Bay — with their visitor services program and learn new tools to apply at “Ding” Darling.

“I will be conducting their Science Week for sixth to eighth grade students, a special program hosted by the school and the refuge — like our day camp,” she said. “Hopefully I will get to see some cool birds, bears, wolves, and much more!”



### Jeremy Moves Up

Refuge Biologist Jeremy Conrad recently got promoted to the lead biologist position, which was vacated several years ago by Tara Wertz. The federal government had placed a freeze on Refuge hiring, so Refuge administration was not able until now to promote Jeremy.

“Jeremy will continue to perform the duties he has been performing as he transitions into a bigger leadership role in the Biology program and we fill other vacancies, including his former position,” said Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik.



### Welcome New Refuge Staff

Kenneth Petrie joined Refuge staff on April 6, 2015, as administrative support assistant, a shared position with Florida Panther and Loxahatchee NWRs. He will be based at “Ding” Darling. A native of Watertown, New York, Ken transferred to the Refuge from the Corp of Engineers in Clewiston, Florida, where he worked as a records technician. He retired from the U.S. Air Force in May 2001 with 22.5 years of service.



“During my career with the Air Force, I worked in the administrative, heavy equipment, and aircraft maintenance field,” Ken said. “I am happy to become a member of the Fish and Wildlife Service. All of the employees, interns, and volunteers have been a great help. They have welcomed me with great attitudes and big smiles.”

### Filling in the Gaps

Eleven years ago, Refuge staff included 22 workers. Today, despite an increase in land to manage and visitors to accommodate, only 12 workers staff the Refuge. With the help of your donations, DDWS is able to help fill the gaps with intern and volunteer support.

### New Nature Store Assistant

Jim Sturch of Sanibel Island recently joined DDWS staff as weekend shift manager of the Refuge Nature Store in the free Visitor & Education Center.

Jim is in charge of customer sales and service, inventory, and volunteer management for Saturday and Sunday store hours.

“My background is in retail managing and auditing,” he said. “Prior to that, I spent 17 years in the banking industry with businesses in commercial lending and international imports.”

DDWS operates the Nature Store to benefit education and other projects at the Refuge.



Jen LoDico



Dana Sousa



Davis Horton



Elise Waite

agement with potential employers. Originally from Buffalo, NY, she studies at State University of New York at Cobleskill.

“We are happy to support the Refuge and DDWS internship programs because they inject such youthful life into the Refuge team,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “We have an energetic group this summer that we see becoming committed lifelong to conservation and environmental stewardship.”



Kaylee Brant

### Summer Internships

Recent months have brought about shifts in intern stints and new work force. Education intern Jen LoDico has extended her six-month internship for another six months. Former Visitor Services intern Dana Sousa has moved into a six-month biology internship. And last summer’s DDWS intern Davis Horton returns to assist with summer day camp as an education intern.

Elise Waite, an environmental studies major at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Ill., has joined forces with DDWS for the summer. Kaylee Brant joins the Refuge team through the Student Conservation Association (SCA), which connects students studying wildlife man-

### Toni Writes about Customer Service

For the May/June U.S. Fish & Wildlife’s publication *Refuge Update*, Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland penned an article about customer service. To read the article, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1DPPkEh> and scroll to page 11. (Toni also appears in a photograph on page 4 of the publication.)



## Summer Programs Underway

Bi-weekly family nature films, weekly walks, and nature crafts highlight the free summer programming offered at the Refuge through August 9, 2015, made possible by the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society.

Films for the family are showing on every other Sunday in the Visitor & Education Center. Visit [dingdarlingsociety.org/summer-films](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/summer-films) for a list of remaining showings. Other programs include Family Beach

Walks, Indigo Trail Walks, and Reading in the Refuge craft activities. For a full schedule with descriptions, please visit [dingdarlingsociety.org/summer-programming](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/summer-programming).

*Free guided Indigo Trail hikes every Thursday at 10 a.m. look for signs of wildlife.*



# Student Scholarships

At a special after-hours gathering at the Refuge on June 11, 2015, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society awarded \$14,000 in conservation education scholarships to 12 students from the surrounding five-county area. The awards total was the highest ever in the eight-year history of DDWS' Environmental Scholarship Program.

"The Society is committed to educating today's youth as conservation stewards of the future," said DDWS Education Chair Wendy Kindig. "To that end, we work with various businesses and individuals to provide annual scholarships to outstanding students engaged in the study of conservation, wildlife biology, and the environment. A big thank you to our scholarship sponsors for helping us in our mission."

Eight donors sponsored the 12 scholarships this year. They include:

- Richard Bailey Scholarship
- Mike & Terry Baldwin Scholarship
- Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem Scholarship
- Margaret Mc Laughlin & Robert Lathrop Scholarship

- Francine Litofsky Scholarship
- Mary Lou Schadt Scholarships (two)
- Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarships (five)
- Jane Werner Environmental Scholarship

To become a named scholarship donor for \$500 or more, please contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

"These students become part of the great 'Ding' Darling family," said Wendy. "We welcome them back as scholarship applicants next year and as fellow conservation stewards in years to come."

DDWS will again be awarding scholarships at the end of the 2015-2016 school year. High school seniors and college students living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties and pursuing careers in biology and environmental studies are eligible.

For an application, please visit [dingdarlingsociety.org/student-scholarships](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/student-scholarships). To read full descriptions of 2015 "Ding" scholarship winners, visit [www.dingdarlingsociety.org/scholarship-winners](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org/scholarship-winners).



Scholarship sponsor and Education Committee member Wendy Schnapp (left) and Education Ranger Becky Larkins (right) with scholarship recipients who attended the presentation.

## Leave a Legacy and Support 'Ding' Darling in Your Estate Plans

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) is proud to be mentioned in many of our departed benefactors' Last Wills and Testaments and as beneficiaries of retirement and other estate plans. It's quite simple to do.

You may name DDWS in your will as follows: "I, [name], of [city, state, ZIP] give, devise, and bequeath to the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, Inc., a Florida non-profit corporation located on Sanibel Island, Florida" [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for [designate the purpose, if desired, or leave blank for gifts to be used to address the greatest need]."

The IRS has granted DDWS tax-exempt status and any gift to our organization is tax-deductible and will help offset inheritance taxes your family or friends might otherwise be obligated to pay. For more information, visit our Web site at [www.dingdarlingsociety.org/bequest](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org/bequest).

## Upcoming Events

Mark your calendars, and join us! Visit [www.dingdarlingsociety.org](http://www.dingdarlingsociety.org) for details.

**Nature Explorers Day Camp** – Through July 17, 2015

**Free Summer Biweekly Family Film Series** – Through August 2, 2015

**Free Summer Programs** – Through August 9, 2015

**"Ding" Darling Days** – October 18-24, 2015

**Happy Hour Holiday Shopping** - December 3, 2015

**Friday Winter Lecture Series** - January 8-April 15, 2016

**Biweekly Winter Film Series** - January 13-April 6, 2016

**Fourth Annual Trailgate Party: Reddish Egrets** – February 23, 2016

**Federal Junior Duck Stamp Judging at the Refuge/Earth Day** – April 22, 2016

**Fifth Annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament** – May 6-7, 2016

**Third Annual Upcycle! Art Fest** – November 5, 2016

## MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

MARCH 1, 2015 – MAY 31, 2015

Memorial gifts and gifts made in honor of special occasions are a wonderful way to pay tribute to family and friends who are important to us. Throughout the year, the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society has received gifts in memory and in honor of loved ones. Thank you to everyone who supported the Refuge in this thoughtful and meaningful way.

We recently received gifts in **MEMORY** of the following:

John and Kathy Allen  
Erhart Becker  
Phyllis Boehning  
David B. Butts  
John Ellis  
Mr. Epstein  
Arthur and Constance Goodman  
George Graham  
Janet Hauguel  
Dr. Melva Jo Hendix  
Susie Knight  
John William Lavis

Francine Litofsky  
Theresa Louwers  
Linda Mays  
Richard McCabe  
Martha Mlakar  
Bea Reppa  
John F. Schadt  
Dr. and Mrs. Thomas Walker  
Lisbeth Rugen Walker  
Bill Wollschlager  
Anna Zimmerman

We received gifts in **HONOR** of:

Sarah Ashton  
Andrew and Laura Dahlem  
Dr. Andy Dahlem  
Hans and Leslie Fleischner  
Mariel and Porter Goss  
Susan Hecht  
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Joel and Wandreg Lauchner  
Birgie Miller  
Bev Postmus  
Wendy Rex  
Dick and Sheridan Snell  
Jim Sprankle  
Patricia Zapf



# Web Photo Gallery

Get a virtual tour of the Refuge, see the animals captured on our motion-sensitive trail cameras, follow the Reddish Egret tracking study, or relive the fun and action at the fourth annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament. You will find it all in the pages of our Web Photo Gallery at [dingdarlingsociety.org/gallery](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/gallery). We are constantly updating the gallery by adding new albums and rotating images on existing pages such as the Birds, Scenery, and Mammals & Reptiles albums.

Got pictures you would like to contribute? Email [sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org) for specs.

*The Refuge Tour Album takes you to the Wildlife Education Boardwalk, around Wildlife Drive, and inside the Visitor & Education Center.*



DDWS representatives Sarah Lathrop, Chelle Walton, and Birgie Miller attended the ceremony with Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland to celebrate the award.

## Chrysalis Award

J. N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge received the Chrysalis Award for Eco-Innovation from the Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB) and Greater Fort Myers Chamber of Commerce on April 16 in a special ceremony at the Harborside Event Center in Fort Myers.

“The nomination was based on our new, innovative Discover Ding game app, which we debuted last fall — the first of its kind in the nation,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who accepted the award. “The Refuge was announced as the winner with a special video made in our honor. It was so exciting!”

The sixth annual Celebration of Business & Tourism Awards Luncheon and Trade Show paid homage to the

value of tourism as a major economic engine in the county.

Chrysalis Award nominees in seven categories were judged on innovation in their respective category, how they have distinguished themselves in the community, the results of their efforts to promote the destination, their contributions to business and tourism partnerships for the overall benefit of the county, and their work to foster growth and sustainability.

“Thanks to all who made this award possible,” said Toni. “It’s a long list, starting with our anonymous nominator, plus Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society, and our wonderful partners at the VCB.”

## Student Transportation Grant



Students visiting the Refuge recently gave a shout-out to LAT Foundation, which provides grant monies annually to fund special bus transportation from district schools. Thanks to the generous grant, 23 schools — many of them Title-1 schools — visited the Refuge in the 2014-2015 school year. That equates into 67 bus trips and more than 4,000 students who experienced “Ding” Darling. Many of them had never been to the Refuge previously. The grant brings children who otherwise would not have the opportunity or resources to learn about the environment in such an immersive manner.



## National Trails Day

On Saturday, June 6, the Refuge celebrated National Trails Day — and the kick-off of our summer programs — with indoor and outdoor activities at the Refuge. Participants who completed the Animal Olympics challenge on Indigo Trail were entered into a prize drawing.



## WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT



Here we showcase the best shots of wildlife taken at the Refuge recently by photographers, volunteers, staff, and others. These bobcat and Yellow-crowned Night Heron captures come from the motion-sensing infrared camera the Refuge has set up on Indigo Trails. Note the times and dates on the pictures. If you have a wildlife picture to share, please contact Sarah Lathrop at [sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org).



Mason Theurer took Best of Show in the Florida competition. The 13-year-old at Celebration School will appear at Conservation Art Day during "Ding" Darling Days in October.

## Junior Duck Stamp Judging

The Refuge once again hosted the Florida Junior Duck Stamp competition on March 26, declaring Mason Theurer, age 13 from Celebration School, Best of Show for his blue-winged teal drake. The nationwide Junior Duck Stamp program was first started next door at what was then Sanibel Elementary School by art teacher Jaye Boswell. The Refuge will be hosting next year's Federal Junior Duck Stamp Competition on April 22, 2016, so stay tuned for news about that event.



Deputy Refuge Manager Joyce Palmer, artist Jim Sprankle, and "mother of the Junior Duck Stamp program" Jaye Boswell were among the competition's judges.

## 'Ding' Days: Save the Date

Mark your calendars for this year's "Ding" Darling Days at the Refuge the week of October 18-24, 2015.

**Family Fun Day** kicks off the week with free activities on Sunday, October 18. It features all-free Refuge tours, live wildlife presentations, archery clinics, hot dogs, a touch tank and butterfly house, and kids' nature crafts.



Heather Henson's Ibx Puppetry troupe returns again with even more Florida creatures.

Heather Henson's Ibx Puppetry will return with performances featuring life-sized endangered animal puppets, in the tradition of her father, muppeteer Jim Henson.

**Conservation Art Day** winds up the celebration on Saturday, October 24, with visits from Federal Duck Stamp and Junior Duck Stamp winners and nature art workshops.

Free and discounted birding, biking, kayaking, paddleboarding, sea life boating, and interpretive presentations will fill the week between the two events.

The 26th annual "Ding" Days celebrates the birthday of the Refuge's namesake, father of the Federal Duck Stamp program and Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, Jay N. "Ding" Darling.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), and Tarpon Bay Explorers cosponsor "Ding" Darling Days with generous support from the local community and businesses.

Visit [www.dingdarlingdays.com](http://www.dingdarlingdays.com) for updates on events, information on sponsoring "Ding" Days, or to sign up for e-mail update bulletins. Contact Wendy Schnapp at 239-470-1877 or [EcoErler@aol.com](mailto:EcoErler@aol.com) to become a sponsor.





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## High School Photo Contest



Matthew Boutelle from Fort Myers High School won first place in the second annual "Ding" Darling-Theodore Cross High School Photography Contest with his image "Sideliners." Sponsored by the Theodore Cross Family Charitable Foundation, the competition invites high school students from a five-county area to compete for prizes. "The composition of the fish photo is beautifully organized with just the right balance of light and shadow, action and stillness to create a mood, a narrative," said Arne Svenson, a renowned professional New York photographer who helped judge the contest.

