

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release
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Caption: Cydnie Golson
Caption: Vanessa Clarke
Caption: Fletcher De Meo

Refuge welcomes more summer staffing

Temporary staffers continue to arrive to help J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge with manpower shortages this summer. In the past couple of weeks, a summer intern and a STAR (Summer Teachers Assisting Refuges program) teacher, both funded by “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), plus a full-time resident volunteer have clocked in.

Intern Cydnie Golson will be helping with the summer education programming and DDWS duties. She is entering her senior year at St. Andrew's Episcopal School in Austin, Tex., and will be here until Aug. 5 while her family is staying on Sanibel Island.

“My family has always come to Sanibel for the summer,” Golson said. “We love the laid-back feel of the island as well as the teeming wildlife and lively beaches. I love that Sanibel is covered with nature preserves and is truly a place 'where wildlife comes first.' I also love how devoted all of those working with ‘Ding’ are. Getting to work alongside the volunteers, Society members, and Refuge staff has been a great experience.”

STAR teacher Vanessa Clarke will work at Lehigh Elementary School during the coming school year as a fourth-grade teacher of the Talented and Gifted Program. Previously she taught at Tanglewood Elementary in Fort Myers.

Clarke graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University in 2002 – among the school’s first graduation class - with a degree in elementary education. She assists with Indigo Trail tours, scavenger hunts, and conservation presentations during this summer’s Nature Explorers Day Camp, now in session.

“I am looking forward to working with kids while being outside and exploring this area,” said Clark. “I am also very excited to learn about Florida wildlife and bring back my experiences and knowledge to my classroom in the fall. This is a great job, and I can't believe I get paid to hike, kayak, beach walk, and play with kids!”

Fletcher De Meo comes to the refuge from Perth, Australia, to volunteer full-time for the summer. He assists both the day camp team and refuge maintenance crew. De Meo is currently working towards his master's degree in sustainability and climate policy at Curtin University in Perth and will graduate mid-2017.

“I love Wildlife Drive. I see something different every morning as I drive through to do my maintenance chores,” De Meo said. “It's amazing to see how the refuge is so ingrained in the community's identity; it's a fantastic example of how community refuges should operate.”

DDWS provides living stipends and other benefits for about a dozen interns each year plus one STAR teacher. The refuge supports interns and resident volunteers with free housing.

“Our temporary summer staff and interns bring youthful energy, enthusiasm, and creativity to the refuge family,” said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland. “At the same time, it gives these students and educators an opportunity to learn about the environment and refuge operations.”

For more information about the refuge's internship programs, please contact Westland at 239-472-1100 ext. 237.

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge's mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit www.dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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