

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption:

Logo attached

'Ding' Darling presents Doc Ford's with permanent tarpon trophy

To commemorate the first "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament in 2012, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) recently presented Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille with a 3.5-foot trophy cup to grace restaurant locations throughout the year.

At the trophy's base, plates list the names of winning teams and their members for the past five years. In 2012, Doc Ford's was the winning team.

"We presented it to Doc Ford's on the anniversary of that victory," said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. "We wanted a way that we could thank them year-round for the tremendous contribution Doc Ford's has made over the years to benefit wildlife, education, research, and other conservation projects, including water quality issues, at the nearly 8,000-acre 'Ding' Darling Refuge."

To date, the tournament has raised nearly \$250,000 solely through sponsorships and silent auctions, Miller added. One hundred percent of anglers' entry fees (\$500 per boat of up to four) is awarded to tournament winners.

"The tarpon tournament is very important to the 'Ding' Darling culture," said refuge supervisory ranger Toni Westland. "First, as a national wildlife refuge, it is our mission to educate sportsmen about responsible fishing practices, which this 'catch, care, and release tournament' strives to do. Secondly, it honors the refuge's history. The first documented tarpon catch on a rod-and-reel happened in our Tarpon Bay in 1885."

“We thank title sponsor Doc Ford’s and all of our wonderful sponsors for helping us bolster refuge programs and research to balance federal budget shortfalls these past years,” said Miller

For more information on the tournament, visit www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org. To learn about becoming a sponsor or donating an auction item to raise support for the overall conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, call Birgie Miller at [239-292-0566](tel:239-292-0566).

Tournament sponsors for 2017 include: **Title Sponsor:** Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille; **Premier Sponsors:** Diversified Yacht Services, Nimrod, Raiser’s Edge; **Presenting Sponsors:** Mark & Gretchen Banks; **Platinum Sponsors:** Bella Signs & Designs, Congress Jewelers, Florida Weekly, Mabry Brothers, Inc., Suncoast Beverage Sales; **Gold Sponsors:** Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto, Captiva Diva, Discovery Senior Living, Fort Myers Marine, The Historic Bait Box, Island Inn, Island Sand Paper, Island Sun, Jensen’s Marina, John Grey Painting, Law Office of Janet M. Strickland P.A., Lee County Sports Development, Media Source, Nautical Mile Magazine, On Island, Organized Chaos, Trophy Case of Fort Myers, VIP Realtors, Whitney’s Bait & Tackle, Don & Ann-Marie Wildman; **Silver Sponsors:** Anisa Jewelry Designs, Bailey’s General Store, Dex Imaging, Inc., Fort Myers Brewing Company, Gresham Family, Gulf Star Marina, Lighthouse Recovery Institute, Misty Wells’ “Let’s Take It Outside,” Must Do Visitor Guides & MustDo.com, Pair-a-Dice Produce, Sanibel-Captiva Community Bank, Sanibel Island Fishing Club, Semmer Electric/Bonita Bill’s Waterfront Café, Wilbur Smith Attorneys at Law.

ABOUT DDWS

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 dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at [239-292-0566](tel:239-292-0566) or ordirector@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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