

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Artist Andrew Corke (front) mounts his manatee “sculpture” with the assistance of Nick Masiello, Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik, and Lawrence Voytek (on ladder)

Manatee ‘sculpture’ launches project #LearningLav at ‘Ding’ Darling

Phase I of a new visual restroom interpretation began on May 9 at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge – the first of its kind in the 550-plus-refuge National Refuge System . The installation of a mother manatee, fashioned by local artist Andrew Corke entirely out of recycled bicycle tires, kicked off a project that is expected to complete by late summer.

Funded by a grant from the West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND), Project #LearningLav will create educational messaging inside the lavatories at the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center and on the outdoor wall leading to them. Simple teaser messages and visual artistic representations of mangroves, recycling, manatees, sea turtles, fish, and birds will entice visitors to go into the Visitor and Education Center to learn more.

“We have identified a major missed opportunity for educating visitors,” said Birgie Miller, executive director of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), which is facilitating the grant and project. “Whereas we see nearly a million visitors to the refuge each year, only about a quarter of those numbers enter the center. We were finding that many came to use the restrooms without ever stepping foot inside to see all of our wonderful educational exhibits.”

Eventually the outdoor underwater 3-D mural will depict a number of refuge water species. Corke, a Sanibel School graduate, is currently working on a baby manatee, also made from recycled tires.

“Visit often to see what surprises will be happening throughout the summer with #LearningLav,” said Miller.

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 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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