

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release  
Contact: Chelle Koster Walton  
239-699-4754  
[ChelleTrav@aol.com](mailto:ChelleTrav@aol.com)

Caption

### **‘Ding’ tarpon tournament breaks records**

The sixth annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament on May 19, 2017, topped previous years’ fundraising efforts by netting \$80,000 from tournament sponsorships, donations, and silent auction proceeds to benefit the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

The tournament paid out a record \$37,650 in prizes this year to five winning teams. Because last year’s tournament only awarded two teams, the balance of that prize money rolled into a one hundred percent payout of anglers’ registration fees from this year.

“One hundred percent of the anglers’ registration fees goes to the awards purse,” said tournament organizer Birgie Miller, executive director of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS). “That’s why our sponsorship partners are so important to us. They pay the costs for putting on the tourney and contribute to the charity proceeds.”

DDWS organizes the annual tournament with Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille of Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach, and Captiva Island as the title sponsor. Tournament social events took place at the Fort Myers Beach location.

“To date, the tarpon tournament has raised nearly \$330,000 for refuge water research, wildlife research, and education,” said Miller. “We can’t thank Doc Ford’s enough for their incredible show of support these past five years. They’ve already committed for the 2018 tourney, which will take place May 11.”

For more information on the tournament and this year’s winners, visit [www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org](http://www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org).

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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

###