

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Project #LearningLav in progress

Learning Lavatories unveiling Oct. 13 at ‘Ding’ Darling

The first of its kind among the 550-plus refuges in the National Refuge System, the new Learning Lavatories (#LearningLav) exhibit at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge debuts to the public on Friday, Oct. 13, at 9:30 a.m. Refreshments will follow in the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center.

Funded by a \$125,000 grant from the West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND) and contributions from private donors, Project #LearningLav has created educational imagery inside the center’s lavatories and on the outdoor wall leading to them. The outdoor mural immerses visitors in a virtual underwater experience, where they come eye-to-eye with 3-D manatees and look up to see an alligator and other 3-D wildlife sculptures swimming overhead.

Inside, the lavatories were renovated to green standards and continue the interpretive underwater motif, featuring a photo-tile mangroves mural and more wildlife sculptures. In coming weeks, stall doors will be wrapped with wildlife imagery. The refuge will also add educational teaser messages and an activity sheet to accompany the exhibit. They will be designed to entice visitors into the Visitor and Education Center to learn more.

“We had 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 facilitated 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.”

The #LearningLav project showcases the work of two artists. Local artist Andrew Corke fashioned a mother and baby manatee out of recycled bike tires, while North Carolina artist David Williams sculpted other creatures out of foam and fiberglass. Williams painted the lifelike sculptures and one-dimensional aspects of the murals.

“We are proud to say we now have the coolest bathrooms on the island and in the entire national wildlife refuge system,” said Miller. “We would like to thank the visionary and hard-working members of our project committees. Our Creative Team included Andrea Conners, MaryBeth Greenplate, Amy Herd, Marilyn Kloosterman, Emily Koval, Jen McSorley, Toni Ory, Monica Scroggin, Sheridan Snell, Christine Szymanczyk, and Ann-Marie Wildman. Thanks to the Implementation Team, who made it all happen: Carrie Alexander, Nate Caswell, Jeff Combs, Joann Hinman, Sierra Hoisington, Sarah Lathrop, Kathy McCabe, Birgie Miller, Paul Tritaik, Chelle Walton, and Toni Westland.

For more information, pictures, and videos about #LearningLav, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/project-bathroom.

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 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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