

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption 20YR: Winners of the 20-year volunteer award included Dan and Judy Davis and Phil Scheiber, pictured with Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik (left) and Ranger Jeff Combs. Not pictured: Terry Baldwin, Bart Cuderman, and Georgia Nef.

Caption wMARILYN: Longtime volunteer Marilyn Kloosterman quipped about when she first found out Combs was taking over the volunteer coordinator position: “We thought he was going to be tough. He wasn’t too bad.”

Caption candybar: DDWS designed a special candy bar wrapper to honor Combs. All attendees received a chocolate bar.

Caption CROWD: Ranger Combs in the midst of his appreciative volunteer corps

Refuge, DDWS honor volunteers

“Ding” Darling Refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) celebrated their annual Volunteer Awards Luncheon on Feb. 9, 2018, at The Community House on Sanibel Island. The luncheon also honored Ranger Jeff Combs, volunteer coordinator, for his 20 years at the refuge.

Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik started out the luncheon with the announcement that the government shutdown, which had gone into effect at midnight that morning, had ended. The announcement elicited cheers from the crowd.

“With budget cuts and staff reduction, the only way we continue is we have what I call our three secret weapons,” Tritaik later addressed the volunteers, “you all, the ‘Ding’ Darling Wildlife Society, and Tarpon Bay Explorers.”

Refuge staff reports that in fiscal year 2016, 294 volunteers worked 40,658.5 hours at the refuge, representing a labor and benefits savings of more than \$1 million or almost 19.55 full-time employees.

DDWS executive director Birgie Miller stated the increasing need for volunteers in another way: “I just find it amazing that when [supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland] started here about 15 years ago, there were about 600,000 visitors each year and less land to manage with 22 staff members. Today we have 11 staff members for a million visitors and more land.”

DDWS formed in 1982 specifically to support a volunteer corps after the opening of the refuge’s first visitor center that year. More than 11,000 people visited in the first month after the center opened, overwhelming a staff unaccustomed to dealing with the inquisitive public.

“Volunteers stepped in then to fill in the gaps left by inadequate federal funding, and they continue to do so even more today as funding further declines,” said Miller.

Following the awards, Westland “got the party started” by surprising Combs with testimonials from longtime volunteers and staff, presentation of candy bars wrapped with pictures of the ranger then and now, and a framed tree with leaves signed by volunteers and staff.

Below is a list of volunteers who won awards for reaching hour and year achievement levels.

YEARS AWARDS

20 years: Terry Baldwin, Bart Cuderman, Dan Davis, Judy Davis, Georgia Nef, Phil Scheiber

10 years: Kathy Boyd, Claudia Burns, Robert Gilsdorf, Marcia Legru, Buck McDonald, Carol Strange

HOURS AWARDS

8,000 hours: Doris Hardy

7,500 hours: Doris Hardy

7,000 hours: Doris Hardy

5,500 hours: Ed Combs, Ann Wollschlager

5,000 hours: John Masuka

4,500 hours: Jack Wettstein, Patty Wettstein

4,000 hours: Latham Morris

3,500 hours: Miriam Hursey

3,000 hours: Ken Kopperl, Virginia Kopperl, Alan Parker, Linda Parker

2,500 hours: Ben Klaus, Mary Klaus, Ken Kopperl, Virginia Kopperl, Jim Scott

2,000 hours: Tom Mustachio, Phil Scheiber

1,500 hours: Alan Gast , France Paulsen, Martin Pokedoff, Greg Scherer, Elaine Swank

1,000 hours: Mike Baldwin, Jim Bennight, Janet Lucree, Ed Sessa, Sally Stranahan, Karl Werner

500 hours: Stan Bunsick, Jan Cohen, Marion Evans, Cecy FASTER , Michael Galloway, Bob Gonzer, Joan Gonzer, Mary Horney, Ron Horney, Barb Kennedy, Nancy Sebree, John Waszmer, Dawn Weatherstein, Frank Weatherstein, Jonathan Weatherstein, Jim Winn

250 hours: Susan Beittel, Randi Elassal, Lee Ann Emerson, Bob Gonzer, Joan Gonzer, Mary Horney, Ron Horney, Christine Makenzie, Paul McKenney, Sherri Newes, Patricia Rawert, Marvin Richards, Francie Slane, Dave Trout, Dawn Weatherstein, Frank Weatherstein, Jonathan Weatherstein, Pam Weiner, Rich Yanke

150 hour: Charles Baumann, Bob Brooks, John Coleman, Henry DeRonck, Vic Enns, Sandy Gage, Bob Gonzer, Joan Gonzer, Mary Horney, Ron Horney, Sam Huntington, Wendy Kindig, Herb Lawrence, Peter Meekin, Dan Moeder, Lee Ann O'toole, Mary Rice, Bernie Swartz, Dawn Weatherstein, Frank Weatherstein, Jonathan Weatherstein

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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