

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton

239-699-4754

[ChelleTrav@aol.com](mailto:ChelleTrav@aol.com)

Caption: First place winners, Team Costa with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters, received a check for \$13,185.

### **‘Ding’ tarpon tournament breaks records with \$120K**

The seventh annual “Ding” Darling & Doc Ford’s Tarpon Tournament on May 11, 2018, topped previous years’ fundraising efforts by netting \$120,000 from tournament sponsorships, donations, and silent auction proceeds to benefit the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

The tournament also broke the record for fish caught, set in the first year of the tournament. Anglers photo-recorded 49 tarpon catches this year, compared to as little as two and as many as 39 in the previous six years.

The 2018 tournament paid out \$29,300 in prizes to five winning teams out of the 55 registered teams. The first place prize of \$13,185 went to Team Costa with Caloosahatchee Cowboy Charters members -- including captain Josh Constantine, Chris Magnano, Kyle Potts, and Chris Mills -- for catching six fish total.

“It was a great day of fishing!” said Constantine, who pulled in three of the team’s fish.

“Catching a giant tarpon, that’s good every time.”

Four teams caught four tarpon each to take the remaining four cash prizes, ranked according to when they recorded their first tarpon catch of the day. Team Doc Ford’s pulled in the day’s second tarpon at 7:31 a.m., nabbing the second-place award of \$7,325. Team Mabry Electric won \$4,395 for third place; Team Barker Boatworks, \$2,930 for fourth place; and Team Captiva Cruises, \$1,465 for fifth place.

The tournament also gave out awards for female angler to Deb Powers from Team Fishin’ Divas, senior angler to Brian Bartholomew from Team Poondoggers, amateur team to Team On Island, and others who caught fish that day.

“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 \$450,000 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 seven years. They’ve already committed for the 2019 tourney, which will take place next May, the date to be determined by choice of the winning team.”

“We are so grateful for this fundraiser, because not only does it add much-needed dollars to the refuge budget, it also supports our conservation mission,” said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland. “Plus, it is an opportunity to remind anglers, both professional and amateur, about the importance of ethical and responsible fishing.”

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

Tournament sponsors for 2018 include: Tournament sponsors for 2018 include: **Title Sponsor:** Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille; **Champion Sponsor:** Nimrod, Raiser’s Edge; **Premier Sponsors:** Mark & Gretchen Banks, Diversified Yacht Services; **Presenting Sponsors:** Custom Tees, Gasparilla Vacations, Joseph M. Kelley Plumbing & Heating, Stockyard Bricks; **Platinum Sponsors:** Captiva Diva, Congress Jewelers, Mabry Brothers, Inc., Organized Chaos, Suncoast Beverage Sales; **Gold Sponsors:** Andrew Thompson Co., Fort Myers Marine, HighTower Advisors, The Historic Bait Box, Island Condo Maintenance, Island Sun/River Weekly, Jensen’s Marina, Law Office of Christopher G. Hill PC, Law Office of Janet M. Strickland PA, Media Source, Misty Wells’ “Let’s Take It Outside,” Nautical Mile Magazine, On Island, R.S. Walsh Landscaping, Shell Point Retirement Community; Trophy Case of Fort Myers, Whitney’s Bait & Tackle, Wilbur Smith Attorneys at Law; **Silver Sponsors:** Anisa Stewart Jewelry, Bailey’s

General Store, Florida Weekly, Fort Myers Brewing Company, Gresham Family, Gulf Star Marina, Island Inn, Island Sand Paper, Must Do Visitor Guides & MustDo.com, Peter & Barb Rogers, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Semmer Electric/Bonita Bill's Waterfront Cafe, Tarpon Bay Explorers.

#### 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).

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