

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: First place winners, Team Dorado Boatworks, received a check for \$13,410. Pictured here: DDWS staffers Lynnae Messina and Dot Voorhees, Doc Ford's Joe Harrity, team member Seth Hayes, team captain Eric Davis, team member Randall Marsh, DDWS staffer Sierra Hoisington, Refuge Ranger Monica Scroggin, and Doc Ford's co-owner Marty Harrity.

Caption: Catch of the day: The mighty tarpon were rolling and jumping robustly on tournament day. Credit: David McCleaf/Lee County Visitor & Convention Bureau

[images available upon request]

'Ding' tarpon tournament breaks records with \$125K raised, 88 fish caught

The eighth annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament on May 3, 2019, topped previous years' fundraising efforts by netting \$125,000 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 2018. Anglers photo-recorded 88 tarpon catches this year, compared to as few as two and as many as 49 in the previous seven years.

"That's a really impressive number of fish caught!" said Marty Harrity, co-owner of Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille. "We see that as a positive sign for the recovering health of our fishery."

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) organizes the annual tournament with Doc Ford's of Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach, and Captiva Island as the title sponsor. Tournament social events took place at the Fort Myers Beach location.

The 2019 tournament paid out \$29,800 in prizes to five winning teams out of the 55 registered teams. Unlike the majority of fishing tournaments around the country, this tourney has, from its inception, returned 100 percent of registration fees to the participants in prize winnings.

The first place prize of \$13,400 went to Team Dorado Boatworks -- including captain Eric Davis, with team members Seth Hayes and Randall Marsh -- for catching seven fish total.

Second place Team YAM, led by captain Dave Holzhauser, won \$7,450. In third place, captain Ozzie Lessinger's Team RS Walsh Landscaping took home \$4,470. Third-place winners Team Mabry Electric with captain Nick Fischer won \$2,980; fourth-place winners Team Windows Plus/Maastricht Engineering with captain Pete Maastricht took \$1,490.

The tournament also gave out awards for female angler to Sage Indendi from Team Doc Ford's, senior angler to John McCabe from Team Castabout Charters, and amateur team to Team Windows Plus/Maastricht Engineering.

"Because all registration fees go to the awards purse, sponsorship partners are very important to this tournament," said Birgie Miller, executive director of DDWS. "They pay the costs for putting on the tourney and contribute to the charity proceeds."

To date, the tarpon tournament has raised nearly \$575,000 for refuge water research, wildlife research, and conservation education. "We can't thank Doc Ford's enough for their incredible show of support these past eight years," said Miller. "They've already committed for the 2020 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.

Tournament sponsors for 2019 include: **Title Sponsor:** Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille; **Starting Position:** Nimrod; **Champion Sponsor:** Raiser's Edge; **Premier Sponsors:** Mark & Gretchen Banks, Diversified Yacht Services Inc.; **Presenting Sponsors:** Captiva Diva, Custom Tees Now, Joseph M. Kelley Plumbing & Heating, Stockyards Brick & Timber; **Platinum Sponsors:** J.J. Taylor Distributing Florida Inc., Law Office of Christopher G. Hill PC, Mabry Brothers Inc., "Let's Take It Outside," Organized Chaos, Suncoast Beverage Sales; **Gold Sponsors:** Congress

Jewelers, Fort Myers Marine, Gulf Star Marina, The Historic Bait Box, Jensen's Twin Palm Cottages & Marina, Law Office of Janet M. Strickland PA, Lee County Sports Development, Nautical Mile Magazine, On Island, R.S. Walsh Landscaping, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Whitney's Bait & Tackle; **Silver Sponsors:** 50% Off Framing, Anisa Stewart Jewelry, Bailey's General Store, Captiva Cruises, Florida Weekly, Bonita Bill's Waterfront Café, Fort Myers Brewing Company, Freedom Boat Club, Holiday Water Sports, Island Inn, Island Sand Paper, Island Sun & River Weekly News, Peter & Barbara Rogers, Semmer Electric, Tarpon Bay Explorers, Trophy Case of Fort Myers.

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 profits.

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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