

## **PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release

Contact: Chelle Koster Walton  
239-699-4754  
ChelleKWalton@gmail.com

Caption: Refuge STAR teacher Dee Mason helped with beach cleanup on World Sea Turtle Day June 17, her first day on the job.

### **‘Ding’ STAR teacher helps with environmental education**

Thanks to a grant from a private family foundation awarded to “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge has hired a Summer Teachers Assisting Refuges (STAR) teacher for two months to help with summer family programs, fine-tuning curriculum for the school year, collaborating on the educational programming for the planned WoW (Wildlife on Wheels) exhibit, and other environmental education activities.

This year’s STAR, Dee Mason, has been teaching fifth-grade math and science at Villas Elementary School in Fort Myers for 15 years. The Florida Gulf Coast University graduate has spent past summers as an educator guide with middle and high school students traveling to Europe as part of the People to People International program to promote peace and understanding among all nationalities.

“I am excited to be here to learn more about the plants and animals in our area and to also gain more knowledge to take back to the classroom to further help my students in their science understanding,” said Mason, who graduated in 2004 with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education.

She looks forward to learning more about the refuge and its valuable resources available to students and teachers, she added.

“We are really grateful for this grant that will allow Dee to fill in one of the employment gaps left by government budget cuts and hiring freezes for the summer,” said Conservation Educator Sara Hallas, who also once served as a refuge STAR teacher. “We welcome her experience and enthusiasm to the ‘Ding’ team.

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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566, 239-472-1100 ext. 4, or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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