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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption for carney: As an educator, John Carney had a keen interest in education at “Ding” Darling.

Caption for HOTDOGGERS: John Carney faithfully grilled hot dogs at “Ding” Darling Days each year.

Endowed education fund honors John E. Carney at ‘Ding’ Darling

John E. Carney was a name and a presence that will live on for ages on Sanibel Island. His widow, Fay Carney, is helping to make sure of that by establishing the permanently endowed John E. Carney Education Fund to support the educational efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island.

A true, loyal friend of the refuge, Carney began volunteering there in 1996, ultimately clocking more than 2,800 hours in 11 years. His service included serving on the board of directors for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) from 2000 to 2003, during which time he commandeered the “Ding” Darling Days Amateur Nature Photography Contest, now in its 29th year. For many years, he taught photography classes at the refuge.

A former educator himself, Carney played a major role in the planning and design of the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center’s interpretive exhibits when DDWS undertook a campaign to raise the money to build the center for refuge visitors in the late 1990s.

Carney also gained a reputation as the “hot dog guy” during the annual “Ding” Days, manning the grill each year with his own grilling equipment and chef’s apron he brought along.

“His energy and enthusiasm, even over that hot grill, was infectious,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “John loved this refuge, this island, and the community. He was an example of the kind of leader every community needs. His devotion and loyalty made him a cherished volunteer who we sorely miss.”

Even after losing full use of his voice, Carney remained something of an island celebrity. He is known above all for starting the annual New Year's Day tradition of the Polar Bear Plunge into the Gulf of Mexico off Sanibel Island.

A longtime member of the Rotary Club of Sanibel-Captiva, he was forever serving his community – whether setting up luminary candles for the chamber's annual holiday event or working art fairs.

When Carney passed in 2020, his wife looked for a meaningful way to honor his legacy, one that fit with his generosity and love of the refuge.

“A permanently endowed education fund will continue to keep his legacy alive for years and years to come by supporting conservation education programs at the refuge and inspiring our future stewards to embrace a community and value our natural spaces like John did,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller.

Refuge donors are able to establish named, permanently endowed funds for \$10,000 or more and work with DDWS staff to restrict them to their areas of interest or leave them as unrestricted. Income from the endowments can fund individual projects or ongoing education, intern, programming, research, or other specific needs.”

Friends of Carney can contribute to the John E. Carney Education Fund through the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society. To contribute to or establish an endowed fund, contact Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232.

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.