



SUMMER 2021

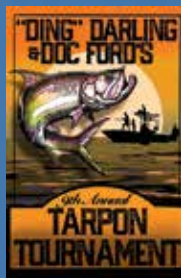
Society Pages

News from Friends of
the J.N. "Ding" Darling
National Wildlife Refuge

ABOUT THE SOCIETY

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, the non-profit Friends of the Refuge organization, supports the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge Complex through the generation of independent funds to undertake student education, internships, research projects, informational literature, advocacy, land acquisition and facility enhancements. Efforts may extend beyond the Complex's borders and involve partnerships with like-minded conservation organizations.

TARPON TOURNNEY BREAKS RECORDS



The ninth annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament on May 14 netted \$180,000 from tournament sponsorships and donations. Earnings combined sponsor contributions from 2020 with this year's for a record-breaking contribution to benefit Refuge conservation.

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) organizes the annual tournament with Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille of Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach, Captiva Island, and St. Petersburg as the title sponsor.

The 2021 tournament paid out \$56,500 in prizes to five winning teams out of 55 registered teams. When the 2020 tournament was postponed until this year, the purse essentially doubled as teams received

continued on page 3



DDWS President Sarah Ashton, Jim and Patty Sprankle, and John and Donna Schubert celebrate the new nature trail sign.

Lee Anne Tauck Tract Restoration; Jim Sprankle Nature Trail Dedicated

Having accomplished its preservation goal in 2019 at Wulfert Bayous, renamed for major donor Lee Anne Tauck, the Refuge and "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society enter its restoration phase. DDWS has funded consultants, scientists, and a professional federal grant writer to assist the Refuge in submitting and ultimately securing a \$5.3 million grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to begin work on restoring 16 acres of the tract's mangrove wetlands as a bird rookery.

The grant came from the NFWF Gulf Environmen-

tal Benefit Fund to restore bird populations affected by the catastrophic BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill in 2010. The rookery will protect impacted species such

as Roseate Spoonbills, White Ibises, Brown Pelicans, Wood Storks, and a number of egrets and herons.

To support planning for the first phase of restoration, DDWS is partnering with the Refuge and paying for half the salary of a staff biology technician to assist with surveys and other studies in the wetlands as "Ding" Darling puts the

continued on page 3

DID YOU KNOW?

The female Florida Bobcat produces a litter of one or two kittens after a gestation period of 50 to 60 days. The mating season runs from August to March when food is most plentiful. Babies are born in the early spring.

Volunteer Awards



Left, Charles and Lynda Dunham collect their 10-year awards from Refuge staff. Above, Ranger Katy Hosokawa designed this year's awards event and was on hand to greet volunteers with goodies.

Once again this year, coronavirus precautions meant a new way of appreciating Refuge volunteers. Traditionally, staff presents awards at a luncheon gathering hosted by the Refuge and DDWS. Last year, they made one-on-one presentations.

"This year, Ranger Katy Hosokawa came up with a very creative solution," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "We hosted a drive-through appreciation event on a Friday, when Wildlife Drive is closed to the public. We invited the volunteers to drive by 10 stations where they received gifts, awards, and lots of cheering and the enthusiastic gratitude they deserve."

Refuge and DDWS staff and interns attended the stations. Nearly 100 volunteers participated with big smiles and compliments about the event.

"Of course, volunteer numbers were down this year because the Visitor & Education Center was closed for many months, and we didn't want any volunteers risking their health and safety," said Katy. "But we are mighty proud of our volunteer numbers, regardless."

She reported that in fiscal year 2020, 327 volunteers worked 23,654 hours at the Refuge, representing a labor and benefits savings of more than \$640,000. (In fiscal year 2019, 311 volunteers worked 37,397 hours at the Refuge, representing a labor and benefits

savings of more than \$900,000.)

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 today as federal funding steadily declines," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie.

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

YEARS AWARDS

30 years: Carroll Branyon, Mary Jo Hobbs, Norm Honest

20 years: Jake Jacobson, Sue McIntyre, Kathy Mustachio, Tom Mustachio, Jeanne Tyrer

10 years: Pat Appino, Rudolph Chiti, Bonnie Dale, Charles Dunham, Lynda Dunham, Vic Enns, JoAnn Hilliard, William Lupfer, Dan Moeder, Jim Newes, Marvin Richards, Nancy Sebree, Sally Stranahan, Helen Taylor, Jack Wettstein, Patty Wettstein

HOURS AWARDS

9,500 hours: Doris Hardy

6,500 hours: Ed Combs, Jim Sprankle

6,000 hours: Jack Wettstein, Patty Wettstein

5,000 hours: John McCabe, Latham Morris

4,500 hours: Miriam Hursey

3,000 hours: Mike Baldwin

2,500 hours: Tom Edgar, Greg Scherer

2,000 hours: Jim Bennight

1,500 hours: Albert Douglas, Sally Stranahan

1,000 hours: JoAnn Hilliard

500 hours: Sarah Ashton, Katherine Britton, Bob

Brooks, Patricia Healey, Lola Songer, Rush Songer, David Trout

250 hours: Katie Baker, Donald Breiter, John Brothwell, John Coleman, Bud Dansby, Brenda Epperson, Randy Epperson, Jane Giervic, Sam Huntington, Richard Jones, Sharon Jones, Lola Songer, Rush Songer, Nancy Stilwell, Vince Thomalla

150 hours: Kathryn Brintnall, David Craun, Gary Eertmoed, Robin Fidler, Richard Jones, Sharon Jones, Kenneth Lloyd, Gary Miller, Lola Songer, Rush Songer, Trish Sutherland, Gina Wagg

ADVOCACY IN ACTION

Update: The Good and the Bad

by Jim Metzler, DDWS Advocacy Committee Co-Chair

Relative to the water-related issues that impact the Refuge, there are reasons for optimism and reasons for both pessimism and concern.

The reasons for optimism come from the recently completed Florida legislative session. The budget that

was passed includes \$522 million for Everglades restoration projects and \$400 million for the acquisition of conservation and recreation lands. The budget also provides \$500 million for grants to local communities for septic-to-sewer and wastewater infrastructure projects.

One reason for pessimism is that the Florida legislature failed to pass a bill to implement recommendations

from the Blue-Green Algae Task Force that would reduce the flow of excess nutrients into our waterbodies.

An area of critical concern, the project that the Army Corps is wrapping up will change the rules by which water is released out of Lake Okeechobee. The health of the Refuge depends on getting a minimum level of water in the dry season and a limit on how much water we receive in the wet season. The way the project currently stands, we may not achieve either goal. We are working with partners to influence the outcome of this project.

TAUCK/SPRANKLE

continued from page 1

project out to bid to engineering firms.

Refuge staff estimates the wetlands restoration will take several years, after which it will begin work on the tract's uplands habitat — home to Gopher Tortoises, Bobcats, and other species. Part of that phase-two restoration will include the design and development of a limited public-access trail, named the Jim Sprankle Nature Trail.

Longtime islanders and friends of Jim and Patty Sprankle, Donna and John Schubert decided it was time the Refuge and island showed proper gratitude for all that Sanibel bird sculptor Jim Sprankle has done to support local charities. They made it possible to name the trail in his honor. Staff and board members dedicated the Jim Sprankle Nature Trail in March.

"We don't yet know what that trail will look like, but we do know it's a fitting tribute to Jim Sprankle, who has done so much for conservation on Sanibel," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "A big thanks to the Schuberts, who rightly saw that Jim deserves a permanent, visible reminder of his contributions and want to encourage others also to support conservation and habitat protection for future generations. The Sprankle Trail will forever recognize a man who deeply loves the Refuge."

Jim has served as DDWS board president for many years, has volunteered since 1997, and has donated a number of sculptures and his famous Sprankle Feather Club pins for charity auction. In addition, a showcase full of his hand-carved duck decoys, each one of which sold for sponsorship dollars, and a whole flock of his bird sculptures decorate and educate at the Visitor & Education Center.

The trail sign stands roadside at the 68-acre tract that DDWS, the Refuge, and Lee County Conservation 20/20 worked together to acquire. The habitats serve as an important wildlife corridor between the Refuge and other established conservation lands and as a tool for improving local water quality. From the beginning of its acquisition campaign, "Ding" Darling envisioned restoring the property — which once had been city-approved for a luxury housing development — as wetland wildlife habitat.

"Without philanthropic support, protection of this property would have never happened, and we would be looking at 29 homes and increased habitat degradation," said DDWS President Sarah Ashton. "Island residents, visitors, community leaders, and elected county officials understand the importance of protecting what land is left on Sanibel, Captiva, and around the world, and this is a perfect example of working together, leveraging support, and protecting vital and important habitat for our wildlife and our water quality."

For more information on supporting the Refuge and conservation through DDWS, contact Birgie at 239-472-1100 ext. 232.



Above, Marty Harrity (far left), Doc Ford's co-owner, and Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director, present Team Tarpon Time with the winning purse. Right, Jack Delaney releases one of Team Fort Myers Marine's two catches.

TARPON TOURNEY

continued from page 1

the opportunity for a guaranteed coveted spot on this year's roster by allowing their 2020 entry fee to roll over to 2021. By then also paying the 2021 fee, they fed into the largest payout in the history of the tournament.

Anglers photo-recorded 15 tarpon catches this year. The first-place prize of \$25,425 went to Team Tarpon Time, including captain Tanner Miller and team members Stephanie Miller, Eric Davis, and Ryan Clase. The team caught and released a total of four fish.

"Congratulations to Tanner, who now wears the coveted pink tarpon jacket," said Marty Harrity, co-owner of Doc Ford's, who introduced the jacket in 2017 as an added incentive for taking first place in the tournament. "It's kind of like the green Masters tournament jacket in golf. The winning captain gets the honor of wearing the pink tarpon jacket each year."

Second place Team Fort Myers Marine, led by captain Bryan Waid, caught two fish and won \$14,125. In third place, captain Whitney Jones' Team Whitney's Bait & Tackle caught the first fish and took home \$8,475. Fourth-place winners Team Jason & the Tarpon Knots with captain Jason Smith won \$5,650; fifth-place winners Team Chasin Poon with captain Matt Mitchell took \$2,825.

The tournament also gave out awards for female angler to Stephanie Miller from Team Tarpon Time, senior angler to Gary Biltgen from Team

Chasin Poon, and amateur team to Team Jason & the Tarpon Knots.

"Because all boat registration fees go to the awards purse, sponsorship partners are extremely important to this tournament," said Birgie Miller, DDWS Executive Director. "They make it possible to raise vital financial support for the conservation mission of DDWS and the Refuge. (See insert for our list of sponsors.)"

To date, the tarpon tournament has raised \$755,000 for Refuge water research, wildlife research, and education. It has awarded \$261,724 to tournament winning teams during its nine-year history.

"We can't thank Doc Ford's enough for their incredible show of support these past eight years," said Birgie. "They've already committed for the 2022 tourney, which will take place May 13, to celebrate the tournament's 10th anniversary."

"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 "Ding" Darling 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 dingdarlingtarpontourney.org.



THE REFUGE ON CAMERA

Samantha Brown, *Southern Living*, and More

The Refuge had a busy season starring in print, broadcast, and social media shoots aired across the nation. Last November, TV travel celebrity Samantha Brown visited the Refuge as part of her season four *Samantha Brown's Places to Love* series for PBS Public Television. She spent the day with Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland and was deeply impressed with her and the Refuge. Visit Samantha's website, samantha-brown.com, to see her segment about Sanibel Island and Fort Myers.

Southern Living featured Sanibel Island on the cover of its April issue and sent a photographer to the Refuge for the article. WhatFuelsYouUSA.com recently interviewed staffers and volunteers for a project in partnership with the National Refuge Association. Also, the team for social media guru @accidentallywesanderson did a recent shoot.



Samantha Brown interviewed Ranger Toni on the Wildlife Education Boardwalk.

The Nature Store

3 ways to shop and support

We know most of you have been to our flagship store at the Refuge or shopped online at ShopDingDarling.com, but have you been to our new location on Periwinkle?



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Our locations feature works from artists such as
Clyde Butcher, Dale Chihuly, and Rachel Pierce.

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2021 Scholarships

In compliance with state pandemic guidelines, "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) this year awarded \$30,700 in conservation education scholarships remotely to 14 students from the surrounding five-county area. During its 15-year history, the DDWS Environmental Scholarship Program has awarded a total of \$199,500 to deserving students.

"The Society is committed to educating today's youth to become future conservation stewards," said DDWS Education Committee Chair Wendy Kindig. "We work with businesses, families, and individuals to provide annual scholarships to award to outstanding students pursuing degrees related to conservation, wildlife biology, environmental engineering, and science. A big thank you to our scholarship sponsors for their support."

Eleven donors sponsored the 14 scholarships this year. In lieu of the traditional physical awards ceremony, DDWS invited scholarship recipients to send a video to share with donors their school and career plans.

Scholarships included the Richard Bailey Scholarships (two scholarships), Mike and Terry Baldwin Scholarship, Dr. Andrew & Laura Dahlem Scholarship, Dr. H. Randall Deming Endowed Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies, "Ding" Darling Conservation Scholarship, Leslie & Hans Fleischer Scholarship, Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship, Win & Marilyn Kloosterman Memorial Scholarship, Barry & Francine Litofsky Scholarship, Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarship, and Jane Werner Endowed Environmental Scholarships (two scholarships).

DDWS will be awarding scholarships starting at \$1,000 each at the end of the 2021-2022 school year. High school seniors and college students living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties.

For an application for next year's scholarships and to read full descriptions of 2021 scholarship winners and donors, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/student-scholarships. Thank you to our donors and their families for helping our next generation of conservation stewards achieve their dreams of making a difference. To learn more about DDWS scholarships, call 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

SUMMER TOURS

Free summer programs are in full swing at the Refuge through August 7, continuing some favorites from the winter season such as Mindfulness Walk at Bailey Tract, Beach Walk, and Birding Tour of the Refuge. Watch ding-darling.eventbrite.com weekly for times and dates and to register for the events, which are each limited to 10 participants. Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce will hold Painting on the Patio sessions on the Visitor & Education Center balcony July 1 and August 15. Pre-registration is also required for her programs.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2020 & 2021 "DING" DARLING & DOC FORD'S TARPON TOURNAMENT SPONSORS

Thank you to our loyal sponsors who supported the
J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge through 2020 & 2021.



**\$180,000 raised to
support conservation efforts!**

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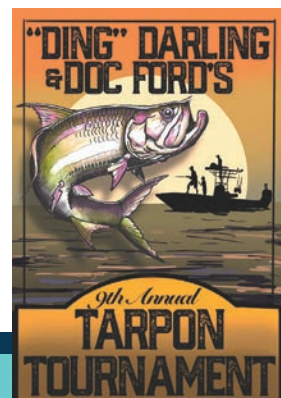
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www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.com



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- You can change your plans at any time.
- Help protect "Ding" Darling and its wildlife and inspire future generations to do the same.

HOW TO WORD IT:

I give, devise, and bequeath to The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society, Inc., a Florida non-profit corporation located on Sanibel Island, Florida [written amount or percentage of the estate or description of property] for [designate the purpose, if desired, or leave blank for gifts to be used to address the greatest need].



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[dingdarlingsociety.org/
articles/include-ding-in-
your-will](http://dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/include-ding-in-your-will)



Go Wild for Jeopardy-Ding

This year, in the spirit of creativity and accessibility, DDWS reinvented its ninth annual Go Wild for “Ding” fundraiser in an original virtual format. Go Wild for Jeopardy-Ding went live on March 31.

A playful rendition of everyone’s favorite, longtime TV game show, Jeopardy, Go Wild for Jeopardy-Ding brought host and Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce to the screen with three local celebrities to compete in categories about the Refuge, “Ding” the man, wildlife, and other related topics.

“The professionally recorded show was a blast for ticketed guests to enjoy,” said event organizer April Boehnen, DDWS Development Officer. “Participants organized outdoor watch parties to play along with family and friends.”

Jeopardy-Ding celebrity contestants included Downtown Diva, actress, and director Stephanie Davis; co-host of the “Nature Guys” podcast, Greg Torres; and co-owner of Bailey’s General Store and island per-

sonality, Richard Johnson.

DDWS has made the show available to continue viewing for ticketholders. New donors will receive a link to the show when they make a contribution. Any current DDWS member interested in seeing the show can contact April for the link at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

Along with a match challenge contribution the evening of the premiere, the event brought in nearly \$100,000 to support Refuge conservation education.

“Kudos to April and the team for inventing this clever way to engage our donors without compromising their safety,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “Although people raved about it, we are hoping to return to our more traditional format for Go Wild for ‘Ding’ in 2022.”

DDWS plans to produce a second Jeopardy-Ding show. Anyone interested in participating or becoming a sponsor, please call April at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.

SAVE THE DATE

Wild Daze Pilsner Rollout

Mark your calendars and watch our newsletters and social media for more information about the rollout of “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society’s exclusive Wild Daze Pilsner, tentatively scheduled for December 4 at Fort Myers Brewing Company in Fort Myers.

JJ Taylor Companies will distribute Wild Daze Pilsner throughout Southwest Florida to restaurants and bars, on tap and in cans. The DDWS team will be working hard to encourage all island restaurants to carry Wild Daze. The special brew will be available for a limited window of time — about six months.

“We have a lot to celebrate in 2021 and 2022, and Wild Daze Pilsner promises to add sparkle to the celebration,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “We thank Fort Myers Brewing for this spirited collaboration. Our goal is to expand ‘Ding’s’ appeal to a wider, young, multi-cultural audience in a fresh, new way.”

Anyone interested in serving on the Wild Daze Committee or looking for more information about distributing or purchasing the beer should contact DDWS Development Officer and project leader April Boehnen at 239-472-1100 ext. 4.



Latina artist Emily Alvarez, who grew up in Miami, designed the label for Wild Daze Pilsner.

Great American Outdoors Day & Colorblind Scope Unveiling

August 4 marks the first celebration of Great American Outdoors Day across federal lands. At “Ding” Darling Refuge, it also marks the unveiling of a spotting scope engineered specifically for colorblind viewers.

Among the 560 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System, “Ding” Darling will be the first to expand its accessibility initiatives to include a colorblind-friendly spotting scope. Specially manufactured by SeeCoast Manufacturing using EnChroma’s patented lens technology for color blindness, the scope will be mounted at the Wildlife Drive observation tower.

Besides the scope unveiling, the Refuge offers free admission to Wildlife Drive that day from 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., and the Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile classroom will be available to tour for free. Also, from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 2021 Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce will be



Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland peers through the new scope.

doing a pop-up plein-air painting demonstration along the Drive to illustrate the difference between colorblind and normal vision. Visitors will have the opportunity to watch her paint and meet the artist, whose year-long “residency” will culminate in an exhibition of her Refuge-inspired and other works starting October 1.

“We will have color-blind people on hand at the unveiling to try the scope for the first time and share their reactions,” said Toni, who led the project to get the scope in place. “This follows on the heels of numerous facilities and services — such as the observation tower’s accessible ramp, the Marilyn Kloosterman Lift for the Visitor & Education Center, and wheelchair accessibility on the Tarpon Bay Explorers tram tours — to make visitor services at the Refuge available to the greater public.”

MEMORIAL AND HONOR GIFTS

March 1, 2021 – May 31, 2021

Memorial gifts and gifts made in honor of special occasions are a wonderful way to pay tribute to family and friends who are important to us. Throughout the year, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society has received gifts in memory and in honor of loved ones. Thank you to everyone who supported the Refuge in this thoughtful and meaningful way.

We recently received gifts in **MEMORY** of the following:

Catherine F. Andrews	Win & Marilyn Kloosterman
Francis W. Anderson	Helen I. Kronmueller
Sandy Andrews	Sandra Langeland
Wyman Atkins	Joan Eakins Leffel
Frank Batronis	Joan Leffel
Shirley Boyles	Richard T. Lewis
Larry Brophy	Barry & Francine Litofsky
Betty & Don Bruce	John Macilwaine
Madelyn S. Bussinger	Gail Meier
Mrs. Miya Byers	Marilyn Munson
John E. Carney	Diane and Jenny Norfray
Maxine Combs	John Pelley
Carolyn Copeland	Dr. Louise Merrimon Perry
Rosalie Courter	Deborah Buhse Plonski
Robert B. Davison	Rags
Mary Susan Denk	Mike & Betty Riley
Michael Denick	Joanne Rowe
Mary Rose & Ernest Doka	Penelope Sandoff
Dozer	Florence & Harold Savage
Robert M. Elder	Stanley L. Smith
Elizabeth Gazda-Smith	Warren Stanton
Anita Geffinger	Trae
Margaret Godsea	Barbara Webb
Carolyn Goff	Anna Zimmerman
Dr. Melva Jo Hendrix	

We recently received gifts in **HONOR** of the following:

Jack & Priscilla Braun	Joel & Wandrea Lauchner
Peter Danford	Stanley Levine
Frank Fallert	Marc Mason
Phoenix Fossitt	Tom Mustachio
Leora Garrett	Michele Osborn
Mr. & Mrs. Bruce Kafer	Allan Sacks
Julianne Kirkpatrick	Sierra Hoisington



Once-a-Month Givers

Become a Once-a-Month Giver

Visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/once-a-month-giver to learn how to become a sustainable OMG donor to make sure your support for Refuge wildlife and conservation is continuous and easy.



Left, Joanne and Frank Hicks visited the Refuge often in their retirement years. Center, the Darling-Williams family keeps alive the “Ding” Darling legacy. Right, John Carney, among his other contributions to the Refuge, ran the “Ding” Darling Days Amateur Nature Photography Contest for many years.

Endowed Funds

An endowment is an investment in the mission of the conservation efforts of protecting land and wildlife at the Refuge. Your gift of \$10,000 or more can establish an endowment that will leave your legacy and make future sustainability possible. Investing in establishing an endowment demonstrates that you are dedicated to the long-term support of the Refuge.

In recent months, DDWS has welcomed three new permanently endowed funds that support educational programs at the Refuge:

The Frank and Joanne Hicks Memorial Fund has been established by the couple's family to honor Frank and Joanne's lifelong love of birds and the natural world.

The John E. Carney Education Fund honors the late educator and Sanibel Island resident who volunteered at the Refuge and served on the Board of Directors.

The Ann Darling & Lee Williams, Jr., Family Education Fund honors “Ann D” Williams — the granddaughter of Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, the Refuge's namesake — and the memory of Lee Williams, Ann D's late husband, who passed away in February 2020.

To read more about these and 12 other endowed funds, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/endowed-funds

Potential endowment donors can work with DDWS staff to restrict funds to their areas of interest or leave them as unrestricted. Income from the endowments can fund individual projects or ongoing education, internships, programming, research, or other specific needs. Read more about established endowed funds at dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/endowed-funds. To contribute to or establish an endowed fund, contact DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232.

‘Ding’ Darling Day Moves to Outreach Mode

The Refuge has two motives for deciding to move “Ding” Darling Day on October 10 to Lakes Regional Park in Fort Myers. Number one, it's in keeping with its Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, a national initiative to bring community connection into the refuge purview. The Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) project has led Refuge educators down that path to spreading the word about conservation beyond Refuge borders.

Secondly, with COVID-19 restrictions still lurking on the scene, event-planning on-site becomes a logistical, red-tape nightmare for an already overburdened staff.

“We look forward to reinventing ‘Ding’ Darling Day to make that connection actually out IN the community,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who chairs the event's committee. “We're still ironing out details, but expect an opportunity to tour the WoW mobile classroom and participate in tours and educational activities for the entire family. Watch dingdarlingdays.com for details as they unfold.



The Wildlife on Wheels (WoW) mobile outreach classroom will be at the center of the “Ding” Darling Day celebration at Lakes Park.

STAFF NEWS

New Office Manager

In March, Joy Robertson joined the DDWS staff as business office manager to oversee financial operational systems and processes and policies in support of the DDWS mission. She fills the position vacated by Joann Hinman, who has retired after five years of service.



Joy moved to the Fort Myers area in July 2020 from Florida's east coast, where she had worked as the assistant accountant at a healthcare linen service company in Pompano Beach. A native of Miami, Joy has worked in office managerial positions in Atlanta, Georgia, and Buffalo, New York.

She looks forward to her duties managing office operations and will also be helping the team with the annual lecture series and other programs and events.

"This will also give me an opportunity to learn more about the work of the Refuge and some exposure to other individuals and causes affiliated with 'Ding' Darling," said Joy, who earned her bachelor of science degree from Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton and master of science from the University of Maryland Global Campus in Adelphi.

"We warmly welcome Joy, who brings a strong background in business accounting, including more than seven years working with a nonprofit in Atlanta," said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. "A huge thanks to Joann Hinman, who was a real godsend when she came out of retirement to serve as our business office manager and help clean up and streamline our processes."

Biological Technician Promotion

Avery Renshaw has filled the newly created Refuge position of Biological Technician. She worked at "Ding" Darling from April 2019 to December 2020 as a Biology Intern, assisting Senior Refuge Biologist Jeremy Conrad with his mangrove-sea level rise doctorate project, which included field data collection and sample processing.

"In her new position, Avery is working with me on all things biological related," said Jeremy. "This includes research, surveys, restoration, water quality, and planning." Hers is a four-year term position. Due to lack of hiring funds in the Refuge budget, DDWS is partially supporting Avery's first-year salary.

"Thank you to the 'Ding' Darling Wildlife Society," said Avery. "They are helping to make it possible for me to pursue my dream career!"

Originally from Mount Airy, Maryland, Avery previously interned with Mote Marine Lab's Coral Reef Ecological Processes Program in the Florida Keys. She graduated in 2018 with a bachelor's degree in environmental science and studies, with a biology concentration, from Towson University in Towson, Maryland.

"Through my internship, Sanibel Island and its natural ecosystems have become important and significant places to me, so when this job opportunity arose, I had to apply," said Avery. "I wanted to continue contributing to the Refuge's mission to protect and preserve the island's wildlife and natural habitats. I'm especially looking forward to important restoration efforts at the newly acquired Refuge habitat."



Part-Time Store Assistant

The Nature Store recently hired Laura Denick to assist with its two storefronts and e-commerce operations part-time. She will float between the flagship store at the Refuge and the 2250 Periwinkle Way location two days a week.



Refuge Administrator

Lindsey Voegelé steps in as administrative payroll and travel technician for multiple Florida refuges. She arrived in April to make "Ding" Darling her home base for working with Crystal River NWR, Florida Keys NWR Complex, and Southwest Florida NWR Complex, which includes "Ding" Darling, Florida Panther, and Ten Thousand Islands refuges.

Lindsey comes to Southwest Florida from the Bureau of Land Management in Coos Bay, Oregon, where she worked as an administrative assistant. She graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 2010 and has worked for other land management agencies including the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service.



2021 Artist in Residence Rachel Pierce sketched out the new four-panel community mural for visitors to paint along on April 15.

Mural Migration

A changing of the guard happened in April with Artist-in-Residence murals at the Visitor & Education Center. For the inaugural Refuge Artist-in-Residence program in 2019, visiting artist Ed Anderson created a four-panel manatee mural with PACE Center for Girls - Lee County. Since then, it has lived in the same outdoor hallway with our America's Best Restroom award-winning facilities. Until April 12: The Refuge then delivered the mural to Tice Elementary, a Title 1 school in Fort Myers.

"The partnership began when Tice Elementary was the first school to host our Wildlife on Wheels mobile outreach classroom in February," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "Ed Anderson's manatee mural will now inspire students outside in their science classroom."

On April 15, this year's Artist in Resident, Rachel Pierce, worked on a new Refuge wildlife mural with visitors. Small, masked groups helped Rachel create a replacement four-panel community mural that will be on display until the end of her tenure through 2021. Watch for news of her artwork exhibition in the Visitor & Education Center October 1 through November 10, 2021.

TARPON BAY EXPLORERS SCHEDULE

(tarponbayexplorers.com; call ahead to 239-472-8900 to confirm schedule and make reservations)

Tram Tours of Wildlife Drive: July and Aug. Mon- Thurs 10am, 11am, 12:30pm, 1:30pm, and 3pm; Sat-Sun 10am, 12:30pm, and 3pm; Sept. Tues, Thurs, and Sat, 10am, 12:30pm, 3pm

Kayak Trail Tour: July and Aug. Mon-Fri 8:30am, 10am, 1pm, and 2:30pm; Sat-Sun 10am, 1pm; Sept. Daily 10am
Sunset Rookery Paddle: Mon, Wed, Fri and Sat or Sun. All 2 hours prior to sunset

Standup Paddleboard Tour: Tues, Thurs, Sat 9am

Nature and Sea Life Cruise: July and Aug. Daily 11am and 2pm; Sept. Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun 11am and 2pm

Evening Cruise: July and Aug. Daily; Sept. Mon, Wed, Fri, Sun. All 2 hours prior to sunset.

Rentals and fishing charters: Daily 8am-6pm



DID YOU KNOW?

Mangrove forests are believed to be one of the most effective ecosystems for taking carbon out of air and storing it in the soil, a process known as sequestration.



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FLORIDA JUNIOR DUCK STAMP WINNER

Every year, the Junior Duck Stamp (JDS) Contest judging for Florida takes place at "Ding" Darling. The program was born here, thanks to the creativity of art teacher Jaye Boswell at the elementary school next door, now known as The Sanibel School. Refuge staff runs the state's contest, which this year had 607 entries from nine schools plus homeschool students. The Best-of-Show entry from Florida went on to compete at the federal level.



Justine Smith, 17, took Best of Show for the state Junior Duck Stamp contest this year. A student at Land O' Lakes High School, she has been competing in the JDS competition for six years and previously placed first in her age category.