

The Ann Darling & Lee Williams, Jr., Family Education Fund



The Darling-Williams family honors the late Lee Williams (center left) and his wife Ann Darling Williams (center right) with a permanently endowed education fund. Among other family members pictured, the late Penny Darling Powel (front) center, was married to “Ding” Darling’s son, John, and was Ann Darling’s mother.

Continuing the Darling legacy at the Refuge, Leslie and Palmer Williams established the fund to honor Ann Darling “Ann D” Williams -- the granddaughter of Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling, the refuge’s namesake -- and the memory of Palmer’s brother, Lee -- Ann’s late husband, who passed away in February 2020.

Ann D grew up in Florida and graduated with a degree in nursing from Florida State University (FSU). She worked as a nurse in Mexico, where she was a student missionary; Clearwater, Fla.; Cincinnati, Ohio; and Tampa, Fla. She also taught nursing in Tallahassee, Fla. Born and raised in Tallahassee, Lee Williams graduated from FSU with a bachelor’s degree in

mathematics. He served two years in the U.S. Army stationed in Germany, then returned to FSU to attend graduate school and law school. During that time, he met Ann D at a study session. They were married June 1968, and celebrated 52 years of marriage before he passed. They had two children and four grandchildren together. Ann D often visited “Ding” Darling with her sister, Cynthia Darling Cohlmeier, and holds happy memories of enjoying the nature and wildlife that their grandfather was instrumental in preserving in 1945, when the refuge was created.

“Ding” Darling, a two-time Pulitzer winner as an influential editorial cartoonist in the early to mid-1900s, a staunch conservationist, and a vocal statesman, wintered on Sanibel and Captiva islands for more than 25 years. Islanders petitioned to change the name of the refuge, originally known as the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge, in Darling’s honor after his death in 1962. He is hailed with high regard in the annals of conservation history, among other greats such as Rachel Carson and John Muir.

Ann D and Lee Williams loved the outdoors, boating, fishing, and traveling – visiting Sanibel and the refuge regularly. In 2019, they took a family trip to “Ding” Darling with their children and grandchildren. “Everyone was so impressed with the refuge’s natural beauty, and the family remembers it as some of our happiest times together,” said Ann D. Due in part to those memories, Leslie and Palmer Williams, Lee’s brother and sister-in-law, thought it fitting to establish a permanently endowed fund in their honor.

Individuals, families, businesses, or foundations interested in making a gift to support The Ann Darling & Lee Williams, Jr., Family Education Fund can visit dingdarlingsociety.org and click the donate button.

To learn more about establishing your own permanent endowed fund, call 239-472-1100 ext. 4. Donors can establish an endowment with a gift of \$10,000 or more. Proceeds earned by the investment go towards supporting the Refuge mission.