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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Maria Santiago (left) will serve as 2022 Community Connector for “Ding” Darling, thanks to a donation from John MacLennan (right).

Suzanne Dubuc Community Connector position funded for 2022 at ‘Ding’ Darling

Maria Santiago holds a position of high respect and trust in the Tice community of Fort Myers. Besides serving as the cultural studies teacher at the elementary school, the Puerto Rican native has developed working and personal relationships with the local churches, daycare and community centers, and surrounding businesses.

For John MacLennan, a J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge volunteer, Santiago’s energy and love of nature remind him of his late wife, Suzanne Dubuc, who was passionate about teaching kids, especially those in disadvantaged communities around the U.S.

“Like Suzanne, Maria is an educator and community connector,” said Toni Westland, supervisory refuge ranger, who leads ‘Ding’ Darling’s Urban Refuge outreach initiative. “She always has been there to help ‘Ding’ Darling with Tice Elementary this school year, when we were purchasing school supplies this fall, spending most of November at the school with the WoW mobile classroom, and pitching in on Thanksgiving dinner for 500 families, both students and staff.”

When MacLennan learned about the refuge's wish to support a part-time Community Connector position as a liaison between "Ding" Darling and Tice, he generously funded Santiago in that role for this school year. As a knowledgeable and active community member, Santiago will be facilitating the formation of a community action team to determine future projects the refuge and WoW team are planning to help Tice Elementary, a Title 1 school, in terms of conservation and community needs.

"Suzanne would embrace a person of such high energy and dedication to children as Maria Santiago obviously is," said MacLennan. "Her life was dedicated to providing the best in education for elementary students."

Dubuc taught in a rural South Carolina school as segregation was ending, served as principal of a multi-cultural Catholic school in Hawaii, provided teachers and parents in New England with hard-to-find teaching materials, and created an adult-oriented English skills program for Haitian workers in the Fort Myers area.

"We are excited to see Suzanne's passion for education continue with this important mission of urban outreach and inspiring future conservation stewards," said Birgie Miller, executive director of the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), which supports the program as the refuge's nonprofit arm. "Philanthropy makes the difference in what we can accomplish in this area, and it is an honor to have the memory of Suzanne Dubuc shared in this way."

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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