

PRESS RELEASE

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Image available upon request

Island properties support groundbreaking ‘Ding’ Guest Contribution Program *Nationwide pilot program rolls out on Sanibel-Captiva*

Sanibel Island, FL (Jan. 10, 2010) – “Ding” Darling Refuge needs help: Its budget, when adjusted for inflation, falls well below 2004 levels; staff has been cut by a third; and needed repairs have been delayed.

Island accommodations are stepping up to the plate to provide that help. The following island properties and rental agencies have joined the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge’s (DDWS) new Guest Contribution Program (GCP), whereby guests have the option of contributing \$1 per night to support the Refuge:

- ◆ Cottages to Castles of Sanibel & Captiva
- ◆ Island Vacations of Sanibel & Captiva, Inc.
- ◆ Jensen’s on the Gulf
- ◆ Kona Kai Motel & Cottages
- ◆ Mitchell’s Sand Castles and Forty/Fifteen Resorts
- ◆ Parrot Nest
- ◆ Periwinkle Cottages of Sanibel
- ◆ Sandy Bend Condo
- ◆ Sanibel & Captiva Accommodations
- ◆ Shalimar Resort
- ◆ Tarpon Tale Inn

DDWS’ GCP is a pilot program for national wildlife refuge friends groups across the country. It is modeled after successful programs based in several national parks. The program’s 11 charter accommodations partners have paved the way for an island-wide effort.

“We are excited to be a ground-level partner for such a wonderful project,” said Fran Peters, Island Vacations of Sanibel & Captiva, Inc. “The refuge is an important part of Sanibel, and we’re sure our guests will feel positive about making a contribution.”

Accommodations participants, whose home pages are linked directly to visitors through the heavily visited DDWS (www.dingdarlingsociety.org) and refuge Web sites (www.fws.gov/dingdarling), have already begun reaping benefits from the unique partnership.

“The Parrot Nest can boast 100 percent guest participation in this worthy cause since we began this summer,” said Brenda Consentino, the inn’s general manager. “What I found most interesting is the fact that when travelers who are not familiar with ‘Ding’ Darling hear about the contribution program, they are motivated to check out the refuge for themselves.

“Many come back with stories of ospreys and eagles and, as one little girl from Germany told me, ‘we saw many pink birds with faces like a duck together in one tree, and when all together they look like cotton candy!’ My guess is that she was enamored by the roseate spoonbills.”

Federal budget cuts over the past five years have meant diminished staff and funding for “Ding” Darling, which brings more than 700,000 visitors to the islands each year. Programs such as this hope to strengthen weakening refuges and their wildlife habitat nationwide, according to refuge administration.

“We are excited about this new way to partner with local accommodations and extend the good-neighbor relationship we’ve enjoyed in the past with our ultra-supportive business community,” said DDWS President Jim Scott. “The community support is heartening. Businesses realize the great value of our refuge to their livelihood and are helping us in our mission to raise awareness of the refuge and preserve and protect its wildlife habitat.

“The refuge Web site alone receives more than 16,000 hits each month, so our partners do receive valuable added exposure through participating in the program,” said Wesley Fay, GCP coordinator. “In addition, they’ll be listed on signage within the refuge Education Center, which welcomes 250,000 visitors throughout the year.”

Judy Michie of Cottages to Castles of Sanibel & Captiva, sees the program as “a win-win for everybody.”

“It gives a bit of extra nationwide coverage to ‘Ding’ Darling because our visitors come from all over the U.S. and the world,” she said.

Dawn Ramsey, who was one of the first to enroll Tarpon Tale Inn in the program, explains her reasoning for jumping aboard: “It’s obvious to us how important the refuge is to our business. We’re happy to give back, and so are our guests.”

“I don’t know why anybody wouldn’t want to do it,” said Kathy Lewis with Periwinkle Cottages.

Other businesses interested in taking part in GCP should contact Wesley Fay at WesleyFaySanibel@aol.com or 239-246-4133.

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