

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Tournament title sponsor Marty Harrity from Doc Ford's with Don Wildman, who passed away recently.

Logo attached

### **'Ding' Darling dedicates sixth annual tarpon tournament to Don Wildman**

"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) dedicates its sixth annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament on Friday, May 19, 2017, to the memory of Don Wildman, former DDWS emeritus board member and tournament committee chair.

Wildman joined the DDWS board in 2010, but his connection with J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge dates back many years as he became involved with promoting the careers of the three Hautman brothers, multiple winners in the Federal Duck Stamp Contest over the years. He collected their original duck stamp and other works, which he often lent to the refuge for exhibitions. In 2016, we was elected as a DDWS emeritus board member.

"Don was passionate about conservation and art," said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. "He was also an avid fisherman – from salmon fishing in British Columbia to tarpon fishing in Belize. His role in our annual tarpon tourney was invaluable and always enthusiastic, and that is why we want to honor him in this way."

The "Ding" Darling-Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament pays homage to the refuge's tarpon legacy: The first recorded tarpon caught on a rod-and-reel happened in Tarpon Bay in 1885. Proceeds from the "catch, care, and release" tournament benefit wildlife and conservation education at the refuge on Sanibel Island.

"The refuge system has a long tradition of mindful fishing, and this event keeps in stride with the refuge's mission and Don's own vision to educate about ethical sportsmanship and resource

conservation,” said Miller. “We will sorely miss his presence at this year’s event.”

For more information on the tournament, visit [www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org](http://www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org). To learn about becoming a sponsor or donating an auction item to raise support for the overall conservation efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, call Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566.

Tournament sponsors for 2017 include: **Title Sponsor:** Doc Ford’s Rum Bar & Grille; **Premier Sponsors:** Diversified Yacht Services, Nimrod, Raiser’s Edge; **Presenting Sponsors:** Mark & Gretchen Banks; **Platinum Sponsors:** Bella Signs & Designs, Congress Jewelers, Florida Weekly, Mabry Brothers, Inc., Suncoast Beverage Sales; **Gold Sponsors:** Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto, Captiva Diva, Fort Myers Marine, The Historic Bait Box, Island Inn, Island Sun, Jensen’s Marina, John Grey Painting, Law Office of Janet Strickland PA, Lee County Sports Development, Media Source, Nautical Mile Magazine, On Island, Organized Chaos, Trophy Case of Fort Myers, VIP Realtors, Whitney’s Bait & Tackle, Don & Ann-Marie Wildman; **Silver Sponsors:** Anisa Jewelry Designs, Bailey’s General Store, Dex Imaging, Inc., Fort Myers Brewing Company, Gresham Family, Gulf Star Marina, Lighthouse Recovery Institute, Misty Wells’ “Let’s Take It Outside,” Must Do Visitor Guides & MustDo.com, Sanibel-Captiva Community Bank, Sanibel Gear, Semmer Electric/Bonita Bill’s Waterfront Café, Wilbur Smith Attorneys at Law.

#### 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 proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit [dingdarlingsociety.org](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-292-0566 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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