

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption BRUSH: DDWS President Doris Hardy with award recipient Jim Sprankle and Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland

‘Ding’ Darling awards Sprankle its Brush of Excellence

At the “Ding” Darling Days finale on Conservation Art Day, Oct. 21, the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) presented island wildlife sculptor and former DDWS board president Jim Sprankle with its Brush of Excellence Award. The presentation took place in the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center auditorium.

In February 2015, Sam Koltinsky, filmmaker for *America’s Darling* documentary about the life of Jay Darling, presented DDWS and the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge with a framed and mounted paintbrush once used by artist and political cartoonist Darling – paint smudges, fingerprints, and all.

He made the presentation, also with awards to SCCF and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, at the historic fish house on Captiva Island that Darling used as a studio during visits to the island. Koltinski charged recipients with the responsibility to similarly honor individuals or organizations that have demonstrated high standards of conservation art and land stewardship. Sprankle, whose eagle sculpture once graced the White House, was the first to receive the “Ding” Darling Brush of Excellence Award.

“Jim has proven himself a true renaissance man with his talent and his generosity,” said Doris Hardy, DDWS president, who made the award presentation.

Sprankle spoke about the privilege of volunteering for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society all these years and thanked the refuge and DDWS for honoring him with the first award.

“His art is everywhere in this visitor center,” said supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland, who also spoke at the presentation. “And he doesn’t ever stop giving. I know ‘Ding’ Darling would greatly approve of giving Jim this award.”

Darling was a political cartoonist for the *Des Moines Register*. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for this work. The artist began visiting Sanibel and Captiva islands in the 1930s and is responsible for the creation of the wildlife refuge here. As the first head of the U.S. Biological Survey, the forerunner to today’s U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Darling created the Federal Duck Stamp Program and designed the first duck stamp.

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 or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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