

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Visitors can now purchase chilled, enviro-friendly Just Water in the Refuge Nature Store.

‘Ding’ Darling leads island in Just Water movement

Move over bottled water! There’s a new drink in town, and it’s helping to save the earth and its creatures.

Seven years ago, J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge led the island movement to “kick the bottle.” In 2011, DDWS made the economically unsound decision to stop selling bottled water in its “Ding” Darling Nature Store.

The decision cost the store thousands in annual revenues. Instead, the store began selling reusable Kick the Bottle containers at cost. The refuge installed a filtered water refill station for filling the containers, and Tarpon Bay Explorers, the refuge’s recreation concessionaire, followed suit.

“It wasn’t a perfect solution, but it was the best one available at the time,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller, who oversaw the switch. “The reusable bottles were still made of plastic, which uses unsustainable and earth-unfriendly petroleum to produce. Plus, they were flimsy and difficult to clean.”

Earlier this year, Miller and her staff discovered Just Water, a start-up business by an eco-conscious group that includes actor Will Smith. Its container consists of 82 percent renewable resources -- primarily paperboard sourced from forests where new trees replace those harvested.

The cap and shoulder components are derived from sugarcane, a renewable resource. The materials represent a 47 to 74 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emission compared to PET plastic bottles. The sturdy container stands up to repeated use, and its wide mouth makes it easy to clean.

“Already we’ve received calls from various island businesses and organizations interested in carrying Just Water,” said Miller. Among those making the change have been The Sanctuary Health & Wellness Center, CROW, Captiva Cruises, Cast About Charters, and Adventures in Paradise.

For the “Ding” Darling store, which sells chilled Just Water for \$2 a bottle, the reward also comes in sales proceeds to benefit refuge research and education programs. In sales, the Just Water has proven 2.5 times more popular than the previous green Kick the Bottles.

“Again, it’s not a perfect product, but again, we are at the cutting edge of responsible merchandising,” said Miller. “Plastic is taking over our world with toxic effect on wildlife and humans alike. We are always looking for ways to improve our carbon footprint and are proud to lead by example.”

Thanks to DDWS’ efforts, the refuge has, through the years, eliminated plastic shopping bags in the store and has transitioned to compostable plates, cups, and flatware for event use. Plastic straws have been eliminated.

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 or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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