

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release.

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Caption

‘Ding’ Darling awards scholarships for environmental studies

At a special after-hours gathering at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge on June 13, 2018, “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) awarded \$19,700 in conservation education scholarships to 15 students from the surrounding five-county area. During its 12-year history, the DDWS Environmental Scholarship Program has awarded a total of \$116,700.

“The society is committed to educating today’s youth as conservation stewards of the future,” said DDWS Education Chair Wendy Kindig. “We work with businesses and individuals to provide annual scholarships to award to outstanding students pursuing degrees related to conservation, wildlife biology, and the environment. A big thank you to our scholarship sponsors for helping us in our mission.”

Nine donors sponsored the 15 scholarships this year. Some sponsors were on hand at the ceremony to present checks to and congratulate the students who were able to attend.

DDWS awarded two **Richard Bailey Scholarships** named in memory of a longtime refuge volunteer and donated by his family. They went to **Taylor Hancock**, an Estero High graduate now studying environmental science at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers; and **Robert Smith**, a North Fort Myers High graduate who will be majoring in environmental studies at FGCU.

The **Mike and Terry Baldwin Scholarship**, named for DDWS’ president and his wife, an emeritus board member, went to **Katie Thorp**, a Fort Myers High graduate studying environmental engineering at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville.

Sarah Swiersz, a Southwest Florida Christian Academy (Fort Myers) graduate studying computational and physical science at the University of Central Florida (UCF) in Orlando, received the **Dr. Andrew and Laura Dahlem Scholarship**. The Dahlems live part-time on Sanibel Island and were honored with a named scholarship by family members.

Barron Collier High (Naples) graduate **Morgan Humphrey**, who now studies environmental engineering at FGCU, was awarded the **Dr. H. Randall Deming Endowed Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies**. Deming's family established the memorial in 2016 as a permanent endowed scholarship in his memory.

Two **Leslie & Hans Fleischner Scholarships** went to **Anthony Bonacolta**, a Bishop Verot High (Fort Myers) graduate who studies marine science and microbiology at the University of Miami (UM); and Cypress Lake High graduate **Dara Craig**, who studies wildlife ecology and conservation at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee. The Fleischners are part-time Sanibel residents whose love of the island's environment moved them to sponsor the scholarship.

Maegan Mikkelson, a recent graduate of North Fort Myers High who is headed to UCF to major in environmental studies, won the **Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship**, made possible by the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society.

Barron Collier High graduate **Kevin Macias**, studying biological sciences at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., received the **Francine Litofsky Scholarship**, in memory of a published nature photographer and active refuge volunteer. Her husband, Barry Litofsky, a Sanibel Island resident, presented the award.

Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarships sponsored five recipients: Seacrest Country Day School (Naples) graduate **Stella Souza**, who will study environmental science at the University of South Florida in Tampa; **Adrian Dougherty**, a graduate of Fort Myers High studying wildlife ecology and conservation at the UF; **Jack Joers**, a Barron Collier High graduate studying oceanic engineering at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton; **Danielle Winchel**, a recent Oasis High (Cape Coral) headed to UF to study environmental science; and **Haleigh Niles**, a recent Lemon Bay High (Englewood) graduate entering Washington University in St. Louis to study environmental earth science. Tarpon Bay Explorers started with the original DDWS scholarship program in 2007.

The **Jane Werner Endowed Environmental Scholarship**, DDWS' first permanent endowed scholarship established in 2011, went to recent Naples High graduate **Griffin Alexander**, who will be attending UM to study marine ecosystems, policy and law. DDWS emeritus board member and education committee member, Marilyn Kloosterman, spoke on behalf of her late friend Werner, who volunteered at the refuge for 25 years.

“These students become part of the greater ‘Ding’ Darling family,” said Kindig. “We welcome them back as scholarship applicants next year and as fellow conservation stewards in years to come.”

DDWS will again be awarding scholarships at the end of the 2018-2019 school year. High school seniors and college students living in Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, and Hendry counties and pursuing careers in biology, conservation, and environmental studies are eligible.

For an application and to read full descriptions of 2018 scholarship winners and donors, visit dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/student-scholarships.

Individuals and businesses interested in establishing a named scholarship of \$1,000 or more for 2018 should contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4, director@dingdarlingsociety.org; or Sarah Lathrop at 239-472-1100 ext. 4, sarah@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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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