

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: An overview shot and details of “Ding” Darling’s Learning Lavatories.

‘Ding’ Darling chosen as America’s Best Bathroom final contestant

The public restrooms at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge Visitor & Education Center on Sanibel Island are in the top 10 list of contestants in the 2018 America’s Best Bathroom® Contest. Contest host Cintas Corporation this week informed the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) that the refuge’s Learning Lavatories (#LearningLav) restrooms project ranks among the annual contest’s finalists.

Voting for the contest begins Monday, Aug. 6, on the contest’s website www.bestrestroom.com/us. The public is invited to vote all day every day through Sept. 14. There is no limit to the number of times a person can vote each day, according to the website’s contest rules.

Cintas’ judging criteria included cleanliness, visual appeal, innovation, functionality, and unique design elements.

“We clearly lead in every one of those categories – especially innovation and unique design,” said Toni Westland, supervisory refuge ranger and a driving force behind the artistic, educational restrooms project. “I guarantee, there’s no other restrooms like these in the world that are devoted to wildlife conservation and environmental awareness.”

Funded by a \$125,000 grant from the West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND) and contributions from private donors, Project #LearningLav debuted in October 2017. It features educational imagery inside the lavatories and on the outdoor wall leading to them. The outdoor wall and ceiling mural immerses visitors in a virtual underwater experience, where they come eye-to-eye with 3D manatees and look up to see an alligator and other wildlife sculptures swimming overhead.

Inside, the lavatories were renovated to green standards and continue the interpretive underwater

motif, featuring a photo-tile mangroves mural and more wildlife sculptures. Stall doors are wrapped with close-up photographs of refuge birds and identification information. Informative teaser messages were designed to entice visitors into the admission-free Visitor & Education Center to learn more.

The #LearningLav project showcases the work of two artists. Sanibel artist Andrew Corke fashioned a mother and baby manatee out of recycled bike tires, while North Carolina artist David Williams sculpted other creatures out of foam and fiberglass. Williams painted the lifelike sculptures and one-dimensional aspects of the murals.

“We like to say that the restrooms have turned a ‘nature call’ into a ‘nature enthrall,’” said Paul Tritaik, refuge wildlife manager.

Visit www.bestrestroom.com/us to vote in the best bathroom contest. Follow #DingBestBathroom to monitor refuge standings on social media. To learn more about the Learning Lavatories, log on to dingdarlingsociety.org/articles/project-bathroom.

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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