

PRESS RELEASE

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Caption: [images available upon request]

‘Ding’ Darling awards scholarships for environmental studies

At a special after-hours gathering at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Sanibel Island, on June 11, 2019, “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) awarded \$21,700 in conservation education scholarships to 16 students from the surrounding five-county area. During its 13-year history, the DDWS Environmental Scholarship Program has awarded a total of \$126,400.

“The society is committed to educating today’s youth to become 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, environmental engineering, policy, and science. A big thank you to our scholarship sponsors for their support.”

Ten donors sponsored the 16 scholarships this year. Many of those scholarship recipients who were unable to attend the ceremony sent thank-you videos from the field – as far-flung as Florida’s East Coast and Switzerland -- that highlighted their education and career plans.

A new award this year from an anonymous donor, the **“Ding” Darling Conservation Scholarship** went to **Jake Joers**, a graduate from Barron Collier High in Naples now studying oceanic engineering at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) in Boca Raton.

Two **Richard Bailey Scholarships**, named in memory of a longtime refuge volunteer and donated by his family, went to **Alexandra Mackey**, a Cape Coral High graduate now attending graduate school at the University of Geneva in Switzerland studying innovation, human development, and sustainability; and **Adrian Dougherty**, a Fort Myers High graduate majoring in wildlife ecology and conservation at the University of Florida (UF) in Gainesville.

The **Mike and Terry Baldwin Scholarship**, named for DDWS' president and his wife, an emeritus board member, went to **Robert Marlin Smith**, a North Fort Myers High graduate studying marine/environmental science at Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) in Fort Myers.

Conor Dougherty, a Cape Coral High graduate heading to the University of Miami to study biology and environmental science, 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 **Mallory Poff**, who will begin studies in environmental engineering at Elon University in North Carolina, was awarded the **Dr. H. Randall Deming Endowed Scholarship for Conservation & Environmental Studies**. Deming's family established the scholarship in 2016 as a permanent endowed scholarship in his memory.

Two **Leslie & Hans Fleischner Scholarships** went to **Madison Hopkins**, a Lely High (Naples) graduate who intends to major in environmental studies at the Rollins College in Winter Park, Fla.; and Fort Myers High graduate **Gabriella Placido**, who will attend graduate school at the University of Rhode Island to study environmental science and management. The Fleischners are part-time Sanibel residents whose love of the island's environment moved them to sponsor the scholarships.

Taylor Sorrell, a graduate of Palmetto Ridge High (Naples) who now studies agricultural and biological engineering at Purdue University in Indiana, won the **Mary Elaine Jacobson Memorial Scholarship**, made possible by the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society.

Bishop Verot High graduate **Abigail Clinger**, who is headed to FAU to study environmental/marine science, received the **Barry and Francine Litofsky Scholarship**, in memory of two former refuge volunteers.

Tarpon Bay Explorers Scholarships sponsored five recipients: Florida Southwestern Collegiate High (Fort Myers) graduate **Elizabeth Swiersz**, who will study civil engineering at UF; **Kyle Walker**, also a graduate of Florida Southwestern Collegiate High, heading to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Fla., to study mechanical engineering; **Amy Oxtan**, a

Fort Myers High graduate studying natural resource conservation in grad school at UF; **Griffin Alexander**, a Naples High graduate studying marine affairs/ecosystem science policy at the University of Miami; and **Zoe Ortiz**, a recent Port Charlotte High graduate entering the University of Miami to study environmental science and policy. Tarpon Bay Explorers, “Ding” Darling’s recreation concession, started the original DDWS scholarship program in 2007.

The **Jane Werner Endowed Environmental Scholarship**, DDWS’ first permanent endowed scholarship established in 2011, went to recent Barron Collier High graduate **Morgan Humphrey**, who studies environmental and civil engineering at FGCU. The family of the late Jane Werner, who volunteered at the refuge for 25 years, set up the scholarship in her honor.

“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 be awarding scholarships starting at \$1,000 each at the end of the 2019-2020 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 2019 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 2019-2020 should contact Lynnae Messina at 239-472-1100 ext. 233.

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 profits.

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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