

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: NBC2 morning anchor Rachel Pierce will emcee Project Refuge. [images available upon request]

‘Ding’ Darling announces emcee, judges for Project Refuge

NBC2 morning co-anchor Rachel Pierce will emcee Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash at J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s “Twist Tie Optional Luncheon” on Tuesday, March 10 at The Sanctuary Clubhouse on Sanibel Island. The “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) is hosting the event, which is one highlight of the refuge’s 75th anniversary celebration this year.

An Emmy-nominated journalist, Pierce currently sits on the board of the Press Club of Southwest Florida. She has been working as a journalist for more than 16 years, five of those years at NBC2. Her other passion is art, which she studied in school and now also works at professionally.

The Project Refuge Committee has also announced its three judges for the competition between more than 25 designers, who are designing and creating fashions from recycled and repurposed materials that would otherwise end up in the landfills or polluting our land and waters. Judges include Merni Libonate, Loki Anthony, and Robin Tauck.

Captiva resident Libonate serves on the boards of the Captiva Civic Association and the Chapel By the Sea. Before retiring, she was an event coordinator specializing in the corporate sponsorships of professional sporting events such as Wimbledon, US Open golf and tennis, and the Super Bowl. Libonate also previously worked at NBC’s Today Show in New York City and represented philanthropists at the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, and Salzburg Festival.

Anthony, who grew up around Alva, Fla., has been expressing himself through art since he was four years old. By high school, his art evolved into fashion, and he began selling custom wearable art designs to classmates. Today, he operates his custom clothing line, Loki Designz, and has adopted the motto

“Love Is Key” for his work. With a focus on nature, many of his designs feature leaves, feathers, or owls to symbolize what draws him into the natural beauty and intrigue of life. His work garners attention from Naples to New York City.

Tauck is a philanthropist and travel business leader committed to creating positive social, cultural, and economic change and an advocate for the global travel industry’s positive economic impact and the potential of sustainable tourism. A U.S. commissioner to UNESCO, Tauck also serves on the advisory body to the U.S. State Department, the U.S. National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the World Travel & Tourism Council. Since 2014, she has chaired Global Impact at Tourism Cares.

Tickets to the Twist Tie Optional Luncheon and fashion show are currently on sale for \$100 each. The event begins at 11:30 on March 10. For tickets and more information, visit projectrefugeding.com.

“We are excited to debut this fun and creative event to celebrate the refuge’s 75th anniversary and raise awareness about recycling and the threat of trash to our wildlife, water quality, and health,” said Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director. “All profits will directly benefit the refuge’s education and water-quality research programs.”

Sponsors for Project Refuge include: **Champion Sponsor:** Anonymous; **Guardian Sponsor:** Lee County Solid Waste, Jim & Dulce Doss, Jim & Patty Sprankle; **Protector Sponsors:** Pfeiffer Realty Group, Bob & Kathy Weisemann; **Defender Sponsors:** Boomer Duvin & Family, Doug & Sherry Gentry, Mitchell’s Sand Castles, Sanibel Moorings.

Contact Dot Voorhees at 239-472-1100 ext. 239 for information about sponsoring the event. For more information about the refuge’s 75th anniversary year happenings, visit ding75.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 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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