

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: The Public Lands Alliance award recognized the refuge and DDWS for outstanding public engagement.

Caption: “Ding” Darling’s award-winning best restrooms walkway

‘Ding’ Darling receives national public lands award for restrooms

At a recent Public Lands Alliance (PLA) conference in Arlington, Va., “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge and J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge received a Public Lands Alliance Partnership Award for their joint effort in creating America’s Best Restroom, as awarded by Cintas Corporation in 2018.

DDWS office manager Joann Hinman was attending the conference and was surprised when the recipient of the award for Outstanding Public Engagement for Product or Display was announced.

“I had no idea we were even in the running for any awards, so what a pleasant surprise that was,” said Hinman. “I was proud to accept the award on behalf of the refuge and society.”

The PLA Partnership Awards celebrate the best in public lands partnerships -- recognizing individuals, organizations, publications, products, programs, and services that embody leading-edge achievements in the preservation of public lands and the enrichment of visitors. This year, the PLA received more than 60 submissions and presented a total of 16 awards, 10 honorable mentions and a Partners Choice Award.

“What an incredible idea,” wrote one of the competition’s judges. “Very catchy exhibit with excellent photos and illustrations. Interpretive info is ‘short but sweet’ to take best advantage of the opportunity in this closed environment. This organization has really reached out in innovative ways to reach the public.”

“To receive two national awards for our restroom exhibits reaffirms the validity of our original vision to take advantage of a ‘captured audience’ to begin the ‘Ding’ Darling education journey for visitors,” said

DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. “Even more rewarding is the hundreds of positive remarks and smiles we hear and see from visitors.”

Funded by a \$125,000 grant from the West Coast Inland Navigation District (WCIND) and contributions from private donors, Project Learning Lavatories has become a must-see for visitors and students arriving by bus, who are immediately beginning their refuge experience with their first stop at the restrooms. They feature educational imagery inside the restrooms and on the hallway leading to them. The outdoor wall and ceiling murals immerse 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.

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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