

## PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Doc Ford's co-owner Marty Harrity (far left) and DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller (far right) award Team Tarpon Time members Ryan Clase, Eric Davis, captain Tanner Miller, and Stephanie Miller for first place.

### **'Ding' tarpon tournament breaks records**

The ninth annual "Ding" Darling & Doc Ford's Tarpon Tournament on May 14 netted \$180,000 from tournament sponsorships and donations to support conservation at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Earnings combined sponsor contributions from 2020 with this year's for a record-breaking contribution.

The "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society (DDWS) organizes the annual tournament with Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille of Sanibel Island, Fort Myers Beach, Captiva Island, and St. Petersburg as the title sponsor. The Silver King Awards ceremony took place at the Fort Myers Beach location.

The 2021 tournament paid out \$56,500 in prizes to five winning teams out of 55 registered teams. When the 2020 tournament was postponed until this year, the purse essentially doubled as teams received the opportunity for a guaranteed coveted spot on this year's roster by allowing their 2020 entry fee to roll over to 2021. By then also paying the 2021 fee, they fed into the largest payout in the history of the tournament.

Anglers photo-recorded 15 tarpon catches this year. The first-place prize of \$25,425 went to Team Tarpon Time, including captain Tanner Miller and team members Stephanie Miller, Eric Davis, and Ryan Clase. The team caught and released a total of four fish.

"Congratulations to Tanner, who now wears the coveted pink tarpon jacket," said Marty Harrity, co-owner of Doc Ford's, who introduced the jacket in 2017 as an added incentive for taking first place in the tournament. "It's kind of like the green Masters tournament jacket in golf. The winning captain gets the honor of wearing the pink tarpon jacket each year."

Second-place Team Fort Myers Marine, led by captain Bryan Waid, caught two fish and won \$14,125. In third place, captain Whitney Jones' Team Whitney's Bait & Tackle caught the first fish of the day and took home \$8,475. Fourth-place winners Team Jason & the Tarpon Knots, with captain Jason Smith, won \$5,650; fifth-place winners Team Chasin Poon, with captain Matt Mitchell, took home \$2,825.

The tournament also handed out awards for female angler to Stephanie Miller from Team Tarpon Time, senior angler to Gary Biltgen from Team Chasin Poon, and amateur team to Team Jason & the Tarpon Knots.

“Because all boat registration fees go into the awards purse, sponsorship partners are extremely important to this tournament,” said Birgie Miller, Executive Director of DDWS. “They make it possible to raise vital financial support for the conservation mission of DDWS and the Refuge.”

To date, the tarpon tournament has raised \$755,000 for refuge water research, wildlife research, and education. It has awarded \$261,724 to tournament winning teams during its nine-year history.

“We can't thank Doc Ford's enough for their incredible show of support these past nine years,” said Miller. “They've already committed for the 2022 tourney, which will take place May 13 to celebrate the tournament's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary.”

“We are so grateful for this fundraiser, because not only does it add much-needed dollars to the refuge budget, it also supports our conservation mission,” said “Ding” Darling supervisory refuge ranger Toni Westland. “Plus, it is an opportunity to remind anglers, both professional and amateur, about the importance of ethical and responsible fishing.”

For more information on the tournament and this year's winners, visit [www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org](http://www.dingdarlingtarpontourney.org).

Tournament sponsors for 2021 include: **Title Sponsor:** Doc Ford's Rum Bar & Grille; **Starting Position:** Raiser's Edge; **Champion Sponsors:** Make It Happen, Cast About Charters; **Premiere Sponsor:** Diversified Yacht Services; **Presenting Sponsors:** Captiva Divas, Custom Tees Now, Margie Furniss & Ed Kfoury, Organized Chaos; **Platinum Sponsors:** Captain Shawn Kelly Fishing Charters, Law Office of Christopher Hill, Let's Take it Outside, Mabry Brothers, Inc., RS Walsh Landscape & Design, Sanibel Captiva Community Bank, Suncoast Beverage, Trophy Case of Fort Myers; **Gold Sponsors:** Captiva Cruises, Congress Jewelers, Fort Myers Marine, Jensen's Twin Palm Cottages and Marina, JJ Taylor Companies LLC, Joseph M. Kelley Plumbing & Heating Inc., Law Office of Janet M. Strickland, Nautical

Mile Publications, On Island, Whitney's Bait & Tackle; **Silver Sponsors:** America's Cuisine, Anisa Stewart Jewelry, Bailey's General Store, The Beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel, Fort Myers Brewing Company, Gulf Star Marina, The Historic Bait Box, Island Sun, Peter & Barb Rogers, S & R Enterprises.

#### 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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 232 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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