

## **PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release.

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Caption: Doris Hardy received an award for 10,000 volunteer hours.

Caption: Refuge Manager Kevin Godsea and DDWS Nature Store Senior Assistant Carrie Harmon greet and thank drive-by volunteers.

### **Refuge honors volunteers with drive-through awards event**

Once again, this year, COVID-19 precautions meant a new way of appreciating volunteers for the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. In years past, staff presented awards at a luncheon gathering hosted by the refuge and “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS). Last year, the refuge introduced the idea of a drive-through event.

“Visitor Services Ranger Katy Hosokawa came up with a very creative solution,” said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. “We hosted a drive-through appreciation event on a Friday, when Wildlife Drive is closed to the public. It was so successful, we repeated it this year with our April No Foolin’ Volunteers Appreciation Drive-Through on Friday morning, April 1. We invited the volunteers to drive by 13 stations where they played games, observed wildlife, and received gifts, awards, and lots of cheering and the enthusiastic gratitude they deserve.”

Refuge and DDWS staff and interns attended the stations, along with guest organizations that will be participating in “Ding” Darling Day on April 24 at Lakes Park in Fort Myers. More than 90 volunteers participated with big smiles and compliments about the event.

“Of course, volunteer numbers were down this year due to COVID surges and because the Visitor & Education Center exhibits did not reopen until after annual statistics were tallied,” said Hosokawa. “But we are mighty proud of our volunteer numbers, regardless.”

She reported that in fiscal year 2020-2021, 361 volunteers worked 18,522 hours at the refuge, representing a labor and benefits savings of more than \$528,000. That amounts to the equivalent of more than nine full-time staffers.

DDWS formed in 1982 specifically to support a volunteer corps after the opening of the refuge's first visitor center that year. More than 11,000 people visited in the first month once the center opened, overwhelming a staff unaccustomed to dealing with the inquisitive public.

“Volunteers stepped in then to fill in the gaps left by inadequate federal funding, and they continue to do so today as the budget steadily declines,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller,

Below is a list of volunteers who won awards for reaching hour and year achievement levels.

### **YEARS AWARDS**

**20 years:** Denny Souers

**10 years:** Judy Barbieri, Carolyn Bergen, David Keen, Judy Perkins, Tom Ware, Jack Waszmer

### **HOURS AWARDS**

**10,000 hours:** Doris Hardy

**6,500 hours:** Patty Wettstein

**2,500 hours:** Randy Reed, Sandy Reed

**2,000 hours:** Janet Lucree

**1,500 hours:** Nancy Riley, Karl Werner

**1,000 hours:** Lyndon Borrer, Carl Greenbaum, Sandra Greenbaum, Cindy Seaman, Jack Waszmer

**500 hours:** Richard Jones, Sharon Jones

**250 hours:** Christine Columbus, Rose Flaherty, Rick Herbst, David Jeffries, Mary Meyer, Trish Sutherland, Randy Reed, Sandy Reed

**150 hours:** Christine Columbus, Rick Herbst, Robin Kirk, Delores Lobbato, Mary Meyer, Cristina Shaul, Matt Shaul, Donna Wilmot, Susie Wilson

### **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](http://dingdarlingsociety.org) or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or [director@dingdarlingsociety.org](mailto:director@dingdarlingsociety.org).

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