

John E. Carney Education Fund



John E. Carney was a name and a presence that will live on for ages on Sanibel Island. His widow, Fay Carney, helped to make sure of that by establishing the permanently endowed John E. Carney Education Fund to support the educational efforts at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

A true, loyal friend of the refuge, Carney began volunteering there in 1996, ultimately clocking more than 2,800 hours in 11 years. His service included serving on the board of directors for the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) from 2000 to 2003, during which time he commandeered the “Ding” Darling Days Amateur Nature Photography Contest, now in its 29th year. For many years, he taught photography classes at the refuge. A former educator himself, Carney played a major role in the planning and design of the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center’s interpretive exhibits when DDWS undertook a campaign to raise the money to build the center for refuge visitors in the late 1990s.

Carney also gained a reputation as the “hot dog guy” during the annual “Ding” Days, manning the grill each year with his own grilling equipment and chef’s apron he brought along. His energy and enthusiasm, even over that hot grill, was infectious. John loved this refuge, this island, and the community. His devotion and loyalty made him a cherished volunteer at the Refuge and beyond. Even after losing full use of his voice, Carney remained something of an island celebrity. He is known above all for starting the annual New Year’s Day tradition of the Polar Bear Plunge into the Gulf of Mexico off Sanibel Island. A longtime member of the Rotary Club of Sanibel-Captiva, he was forever serving his community – whether setting up luminary candles for the chamber’s annual holiday event or working art fairs. When John passed in 2020, his wife looked for a meaningful way to honor his legacy, one that fit with his generosity and love of the refuge.

Individuals, families, businesses, or foundations interested in making a gift to support the John E. Carney Education Fund can visit dingdarlingsociety.org and click the donate button.

To learn more about establishing your own permanent endowed fund, call 239-472-1100 ext. 4. Donors can establish an endowment with a gift of \$10,000 or more. Proceeds earned by the investment go towards supporting the Refuge mission.