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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Through a memorandum of understanding with Lee County Schools, teacher John Bailey will bolster the refuge's education mission.

'Ding' partners with school district for education staffing

In an unprecedented partnership with the Lee County School District, J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge and the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS) on Sanibel Island have negotiated the sharing of an environmental education resource teacher. Educator John Bailey began his role coordinating conservation education programs with the refuge earlier this month through the district's Curriculum & Instructional Innovation Department.

"We are super excited to have this resource in our toolbox to help with our heightened onsite and outreach education efforts this school year," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland, who helped engineer the partnership. "John has the background and energy that make him a perfect fit with the 'Ding' education team."

Since 2017, the refuge education team has been fortified through support from DDWS. That year, the nonprofit friends group hired a professional environmental educator to replace a position that was cut from the budget by the federal government. Bailey fills that position, now jointly funded by DDWS and

the school district. He will be driving busloads of district students to the refuge and will interpret their tours through Wildlife Drive.

“I’m excited about this partnership with ‘Ding’ Darling,” said Bailey, who transitioned to his new position from Trafalgar Middle School in Cape Coral, where he taught science. An honors graduate of Barry University in Miami, Bailey studied management with an emphasis on recreational tourism. He went on to pursue a master’s degree in educational leadership and has been a lifelong naturalist.

“I tend to drag my family to various spots around the world in search of natural points of interest,” he said. “I’m also an active scuba diver and involved with Sea Scouts and continue to enjoy researching and sharing adventures and my love of the coastal ecosystems with everyone I meet.”

“This is a shining example of what can be accomplished through community partnerships,” said DDWS Executive Director Birgie Miller. “Thanks to creative thinking on Toni’s part and a lot of brainstorming with refuge and school district staff, we see a brilliant solution to busing issues and the federal budget cuts that have threatened to cripple the refuge’s mission to educate and mold conservation stewards of the future.”

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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