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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Sara Basehart created her “Shady Lady” ensemble from discarded cellular window blinds.

Caption: Single-use plastic shopping bags from Target went into the creation of Constance Walker’s “It’s in the Bag.”

Two special exhibitions showcase ‘Best of the Best of Project Refuge’ upcycled fashions; refuge schedules future shows

“Ding” Darling’s Project Refuge: A Couture Fashion Show Using Trash debuted in 2019 to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife and raise awareness for recycling. It spawned an encore 2022 fashion show to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the “Ding” Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), which hosted both events. Now, two separate exhibitions showcasing the “best of the best” of the two runway shows will open to the general public.

The new Tribby Arts Center at Shell Point Retirement Community will open its “Castoffs to Couture: Selections from Project Refuge of the ‘Ding’ Darling Wildlife Society” to the public May 7 through June 25. The arts center, previously closed to the public during COVID-19 precautions, will present 14 stunning fashions, each one fabricated with a minimum of 75 percent reclaimed or recycled, non-perishable materials, such as used bags, soda-pop tabs, packing foam, paint chips, old towels, and face masks.

Castoffs to Couture provides an opportunity for all those in the Fort Myers and Sanibel region to marvel at the innovative Project Refuge creations. Shell Point Resident Curator Marge Lee calls Castoffs to Couture a “must see” exhibition that will surprise and amaze but also educate.

“This exhibition is quirky and fun,” says Lee, “but the underlying message it conveys — that it is critical to reuse and recycle to save the environment — is serious.”

“We are delighted to partner with Tribby Arts Center in presenting this exhibition to share this amazingly creative wearable art and its important underlying message,” say Birgie Miller, DDWS executive director.

Highlights of the creative works to be on display include “Spoonful of Lovin’,” a dress made with hundreds of plastic spoons collected from the trash at a frozen yogurt restaurant; and Shady Lady, made entirely from discarded cellular blinds. Sara Basehart of Taos, NM, made both ensembles.

Other bests include “Rosie,” a dress that resembles a roseate spoonbill, made from packing materials by Kym Mason of Sanibel; and “It’s in the Bag,” a showstopper fashion created by Constance Walker of Naples, Fla., using plastic shopping bags from Target. Junior division creations will also be on display upstairs at Tribby, where the exhibition REIMAGINED by Shell Point Artists runs concurrently. The latter displays items of apparel or accessories that Shell Point residents — many retired or still-working professional artists – have transformed from discarded or found items.

“Castoffs to Couture” is open free-of-charge to the public from 10 a.m. until 3 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. “REIMAGINED by Shell Point Artists” is open seven days a week during regular hours of Tribby Arts Center. For more information call 239-415-5667 or 239-225-2916.

Following its exhibition at Shell Point, the “Best of the Best of Project Refuge” comes home for display at the “Ding” Darling Visitor & Education Center July 5 through Aug. 30 daily 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The refuge, too, celebrates the end of pandemic restrictions with the reopening of admission-free art exhibitions in its auditorium galleries.

May 1 through June 30, the Photography of Jim Bennight is on display, including numerous pieces of his exquisite nature photography. Bennight got started in photography during his university days as a stringer for the United Press International syndicated news agency. After several years as a fulltime newspaper photographer, he opened a studio for portraits and weddings.



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Along the way, Bennight earned numerous state and regional awards for both his newspaper and studio work. He later discovered a passion for nature photography and, as a “Ding” Darling volunteer, spends much of his time capturing birds and other wildlife. This time of year, you will usually find him at the Wildlife Education Boardwalk shooting stunning images of nesting birds and their subsequent chicks.

Forthcoming refuge art exhibitions include a 2022-23 Artist-in-Residence Jacqui Roche Exhibition in September and October, Niki Butcher Art Exhibition in November and December, Vince Thomalla Art Exhibition in January and February 2023, and Matsumoto Art Exhibition in March and April.

For more information on refuge art exhibitions or becoming a sponsor, contact Ann-Marie Wildman at wildman@dingdarlingsociety.org or 239-789-8991.

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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