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"Ding" Darling Wildlife Society - Friends of the Refuge

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Sanibel Rec partners with "Ding" Darling to offer free mindfulness sessions.

'Ding' Darling expands wellness program for 2023

Building on the 2022 debut of Wellness Week and the Bailey Tract Mindfulness Trail, staff at J.N.

"Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island partners with the Sanibel Recreation Center to offer residents and island workers opportunities to relieve the stress of post-hurricane recovery and everyday life through free meditation and nature mindfulness programs.

Starting Wednesday, Jan. 4, refuge mindfulness specialists will lead half-hour, entry-level Mindfulness Meditations at the rec center starting at 8:30 a.m. The seated meditation programs will take place every Wednesday following. On Saturdays, starting at 10 a.m. on Jan. 7, 60-minute Guided Mindfulness Walks will depart from the center for an outdoor grounding experience.

The programs will be walk-in; no pre-registration needed at this point. Participation in the mindfulness walks is limited to 25, so that's on a first-come basis.

"We are so grateful to Sanibel Rec for helping us present our wellness programs to the public while the facilities at 'Ding' Darling undergo hurricane recovery," said Supervisory Refuge Ranger Toni Westland. "These programs are a part of our greater 'Ding' Wellness Program: Mind, Body & Heart. Its purpose is

to provide programs and opportunities to connect individuals and communities to themselves, each other, nature, and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's mission of conservation."

With support from the "Ding" Darling Wildlife Society-Friends of the Refuge (DDWS), wellness initiatives since Hurricane Ian have included social media posts and remote mindfulness programs. The wellness team has plans to further expand its programs to include yoga, mindful birding, journaling, a mindfulness workbook, participation in February's Heart Healthy Month, and a second annual Wellness Week in May to align with National Mental Health Awareness Week.

The refuge is also taking its wellness mission into the community with mindfulness garden activities at certain Title-1 schools throughout the Lee County School District.

"The mental health of our youth is so important these days, and the more removed they become from nature by urbanization, the more important our wellness initiative becomes to keep them centered and in touch with their mind, bodies, and heart," said Ranger Jessica Barry, who leads the design of the wellness programs. "Our wellness program makes that connection between physical and mental health and the healing properties of being out in the natural world, especially coming off the stressful climate of pandemic and hurricane recovery in our communities."

Learn more about the refuge wellness initiatives as they continue to expand at dingwellness.com.

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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