

Refuge to host 2008-09 Duck Stamp Competition

[w/Stamp image] “Ding” Darling’s original 1934 Duck Stamp.

The nation’s oldest, most prestigious art contest, the Federal Duck Stamp, is coming October 12-13, 2007, to Sanibel Island for its 75th anniversary. Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tennessee, are the only other places that have hosted the contest in the past 75 years.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decided to hold the anniversary event on Sanibel to honor Jay “Ding” Darling, the nationally known cartoonist and conservationist who designed the first Federal Duck Stamp in 1934. He created the program as the federal tax required for hunting migratory waterfowl.

“We are excited to bring the Federal Duck Stamp Contest to Sanibel and ‘Ding’ Darling Refuge,” said Dale Hall, Director of the USFWS. “I can think of no better place to honor ‘Ding’ with the selection of artwork for America’s 75th Federal Duck Stamp.”

The \$15 stamp is the cornerstone of one of the most world’s most successful conservation programs. Money from Duck Stamp sales are a vital tool for wetland conservation, with 98 cents of every dollar generated going to purchase or lease wetland habitat for the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since the stamp’s inception, nearly \$700 million has been raised to acquire more than 5.2 million acres of habitat and hundreds of refuges across the nation to conserve America’s fish and wildlife resources.

The public will be invited to view the exhibit of Duck Stamp entries on display at BIG ART’s Phillips Gallery the week before the competition on October 12 and will be able to sit in on the judging and special presentations October 12 and 13. “Ding” Darling Days Family Fun Day will follow on October 14 to kick off more birding and environmental activities in days to follow.

Hundreds of prominent wildlife artists from across the country enter the Duck Stamp competition each year. The winning design graces the following year’s stamp. Artists have a choice of five waterfowl to portray for the 2008-2009 stamp: the Mallard, American Green-winged Teal, Pintail, Canvas, or Harlequin Duck. A panel of five judges with expertise in waterfowl, stamp design, and artistic detail will select the winner.

“This is a once-in-a-lifetime event for us and we’re very excited,” said Rob Jess, Refuge Manager. “Part of our mission is to celebrate ‘Ding’s’ legacy. When he created the first Duck Stamp, I wonder if he knew what a tremendous influence he would have on conservation in this country.”

In 2005, more than 1.6 million people purchased a Duck Stamp. Every waterfowl hunter over the age of 16 is required to buy one. In addition, Duck Stamps are highly sought after by collectors and provide free entry into any national wildlife refuge in the country.