

Duck Stamp art exhibit opens to public Sept. 25

The nation's oldest, most prestigious art contest, the Federal Duck Stamp, is coming next week to Sanibel Island to celebrate the judging for the 75th stamp. Washington, D.C., and Memphis, Tennessee, are the only other places that have hosted the contest in the past 75 years.

The exhibit will open to the public on Tuesday, Sept. 25, 2007, at 1 p.m. in BIG ARTS' Phillips Gallery. It will display all 247 entries into the competition, from which the 2008-2009 stamp will be selected.

The gallery will be open for viewing Monday through Saturday 1 to 4 p.m. through Oct. 20, 2007. Docents will be on hand to disseminate information about the duck stamp program and judging. The exhibit will close on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 12 and 13, during the official contest judging, to which the public is also invited. Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne and other government dignitaries will be on hand during the judging events.

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 a 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 world's most successful conservation programs. Money from duck stamp sales provides 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.

Artists had 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."

For more information on events surrounding the Duck Stamp Contest and concurrent "Ding" Darling Days birding and eco-festival, visit www.fws.gov/duckstamp75 or www.dingdarlingdays.com.