FROM J. N. DARLING, CAPTIVA, FLORIDA

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THE LASTING LEGACY OF LILLY PULITZER

WHY MID-CENTURY MODERN MATTERS

"DING" DARLING: THE DEBUT OF A NEW DOCUMENTARY

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Documenting the Life of J.N. "Ding" Darling

America's Darling *shines a spotlight on the man who helped protect Sanibel's natural wonders*

WRITTEN BY CORNELIA REINHARDT

When film producer Sam Koltinsky presents his documentary *America's Darling: The Story of Jay N. "Ding" Darling* on Sanibel in October, he will not only celebrate the magnum opus of his career but also a personal change. "I will never be the same person again," he smiles.

This irreversible side effect occurred during two years of intensive research and work on the film. Plunging into the life story of Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling and exploring his versatile talents, captivating personality, and multilayered legacy, the fifty-eight-year-old filmmaker caught the bug. "Darling reminds us of who we have been and who we can aspire to be," says Koltinsky.

The premiere of the sixty-minute movie coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of Darling's passing. It will be shown at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge during this year's "Ding" Darling Days, on October 19 at 1:00 p.m.

J.N. "Ding" Darling (above) bought the land that became the Sanibel national wildlife refuge named after him (top right) and served as the father of the Federal Duck Stamp Program (inset).

Five years ago, a phone call to Darling's grandson, Christopher "Kip" Koss, started Koltinsky's involvement with the project. Koss, age seventy-seven, has always nurtured his grandfather's legacy and was happy to help.

"What I liked about Sam's idea of the documentary was that it would spread Darling's word, his gospel," says Koss. "My grandfather wasn't a tree-hugger, but he preached the wise use of our natural resources."

It was around 1935 when Darling, a Pulitzer Prize–winning political cartoonist, visited Sanibel and Captiva for the first time. He recognized the importance of the ecology of the islands, with their mix of salt- and freshwater habitats, and he wanted to protect it.

Darling took immediate action when he found out that developers were going to buy a big parcel of land from the City of Sanibel. Ultimately, this land was turned into the national wildlife refuge that would be named after him.

"My grandfather never did anything in a halfhearted manner," says Koss. "He devoted his full attention to each person and every project."

Darling's way of thinking and his ability to stay on task until completion enthralled Koltinsky. The Kentucky-based filmmaker and CEO of the Marvo Entertainment Group followed Darling's path, from his roots in Iowa across the country and around the world. On the way, he discovered that Darling was not only an artist, award-winning political cartoonist, and visionary envi-

PHOTOS COURTESY OF J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Darling's personal art supplies (above) were used to create cartoons, taking on issues like the extinction of species (right); Darling lived in this fish house he built on Captiva (below right).

ronmentalist, but also a musician, writer, pilot, family man, and hands-on wood carver.

"Darling was a true, modern-times Renaissance man," says Koltinsky. In fact, the artist is also widely known as the father of the Federal Duck Stamp Program, founder of the National Wildlife Federation, and creator of the Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Units.

The documentary illuminates all facets of Darling's personality and also shows still-unpublished material about the former Captiva resident, who was acquainted with U.S. presidents and traveled to Russia to find out firsthand about the results of the Russian Revolution. His visit with Russian dictator Joseph Stalin is one of the remarkable anecdotes Darling tells in his book *Ding Goes to Russia*.

Paul Tritaik, who serves as refuge manager for the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, is one of the people Koltinsky interviewed for his documentary. Tritaik looks forward to hosting the film's premiere.

"'Ding' Darling is one of our conservation heroes," he says. "He was not only a man ahead of his time, he was a man for all times. In this sense, he truly was 'America's Darling.'"

Koltinsky interviewed a number of others sources offering both local and national perspective, including Larry Schweiger, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation; Mark Madison, historian for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Kristie Anders, educational director at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation; and Jerome Ringo, an environmentalist and chief business officer of Bard Holding, a Pennsylvania-based company working on algae technology.

"Once you go the path of a visionary like 'Ding' Darling, it makes you want to excel," says Koltinsky. "You will want to be a better stalwart." He has met some of the best stalwarts while working on the documentary. "I call them the darlings," he says. "And I am one of them."

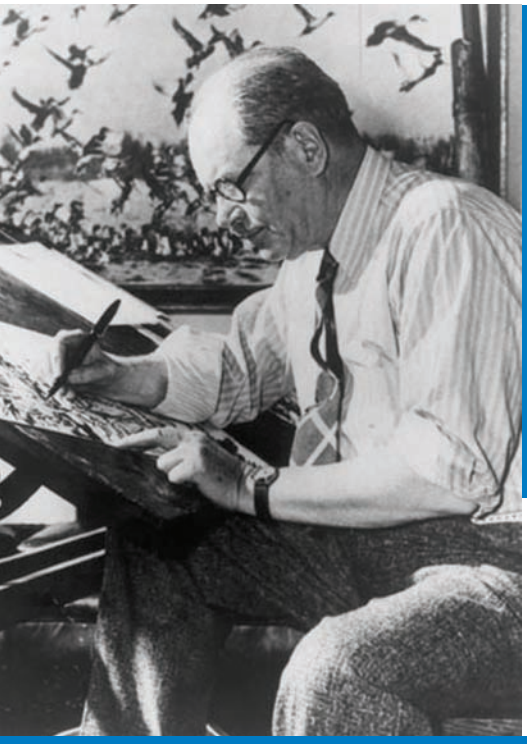
The premiere of the documentary America's Darling *will take place on October 19 at 1:00 p.m. at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel. For information about attending the premiere, call 239-472-1100.*

Cornelia Reinhardt is a German journalist living in Sanibel.

Film producer Sam Koltinsky interviewing Darling's grandson "Kip" Koss

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO COURTESY OF SAM KOLTINSKY; OTHER PHOTOS COURTESY OF J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

REMARKS ON "DING" DARLING'S LASTING LEGACY



"MY GRANDFATHER WAS A GREAT EGALITARIAN. LONG BEFORE ANTIDISCRIMINATION LAWS, HE VIGOROUSLY ESPOUSED HIS BELIEF THAT ONE'S VALUE TO SOCIETY WAS INDEPENDENT OF COLOR, SEX, OR CREED. 'DING' SUPPORTED AND APPLAUDED THOSE WHO PURSUED THEIR GOALS THROUGH HARD WORK AND PERSISTENCE. AT THE SAME TIME, HE WAS QUITE DISDAINFUL OF THOSE WHO, THROUGH LAZINESS, IGNORANCE, GREED, OR A SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT, FAILED TO LIVE UP TO THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. HIS WARMTH AND HUMOR COULD FILL A ROOM, JUST AS HIS DISAPPROVAL COULD CAUSE A CHILL."

—Christopher "Kip" Koss

"[DARLING] DID NOT BEAT AROUND THE BUSH; HE WAS CLEAR, CONCISE, AND DIRECT. NO MATTER WHO YOU WERE, HE LET YOU KNOW WHAT HE WAS THINKING."

—Kristie Anders, educational director at the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation

"WE TALK ABOUT ['DING' DARLING] AS A CONSERVATIONIST, BUT HE WAS A WELL-RESPECTED POLITICAL CARTOONIST WHO HAD A PROFOUND INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICS OF HIS DAY."

—Larry Schweiger, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation

"'DING' DARLING WAS A VISIONARY AND PRAGMATIST, A STAUNCH BELIEVER IN PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE. AS AN AVID HUNTER, FISHERMAN, AND OUTDOORSMAN, HE WITNESSED FIRSTHAND THE VANISHING OF WILDLIFE POPULATIONS AND THE DESTRUCTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES. WHEN 'DING' SAW A PROBLEM, HE DIDN'T JUST COMPLAIN ABOUT IT. HE TOOK ACTION."

—Paul Tritaik, refuge manager at the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge

"'DING' DARLING IS AN AMERICAN INDIVIDUALIST. HE DOESN'T BELONG IN ANY SOCIETY; ULTIMATELY, HE JUST MARCHED TO THE BEAT OF HIS OWN DRUM....'DING' DARLING ENDED UP MEETING KINGS AND QUEENS AND BEFRIENDED PRESIDENTS AND TRAVELED EVERYWHERE IN THE WORLD, BUT HE WAS AN IOWA FARM BOY WHO LOVED THE OUTDOORS FIRST AND FOREMOST."

—Douglas Brinkley, professor of history at Rice University

"DARLING WAS NOT A BIOLOGIST. HE WAS NOT A SCIENTIST. HE WAS NOT A TRADITIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST. INSTEAD, HE WAS AN ARTIST. AND YOU CAN PROTECT NATURE OFTENTIMES MORE EFFECTIVELY THROUGH LITERATURE, THROUGH ART, THROUGH CARTOONS. [P]EOPLE SHOULD REALIZE THERE'S A HUMANISTIC ASPECT TO THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT."

—Mark Madison, historian for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

PHOTO COURTESY OF J.N. "DING" DARLING NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE