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Obradovich: Two men and their mission for 'Ding'

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The legendary conservationist Jay N. 'Ding' Darling. / REGISTER FILE PHOTO

Written by **ON POLITICS**
Kathie Obradovich

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Documentary filmmaker Samuel Koltinsky thought he was wrapping up his project on the life and work of Jay N. “Ding” Darling, the famous conservationist and political cartoonist.

“It’s been one of the most inspiring projects that I have worked on in 20 years,” he said. “It’s the one project I can’t let go of.”

Koltinsky was in Iowa last week to show the film “America’s Darling: The Story of Jay N. ‘Ding’ Darling” at Iowa State University. The Brunner Gallery at ISU is featuring an exhibit of Darling’s work and aired the film Nov. 3. I caught up with Koltinsky two days later when he showed the film to a political science class on campus.

Afterward, I listened as he met with professor Steffen Schmidt about his idea to make Darling’s legacy a permanent part of Iowa State. “There is no center nor curriculum that looks at Ding Darling, either through conservation, art, cartooning, leadership,” Koltinsky said. “I want to make sure this happens. I’m determined to make sure this happens.”

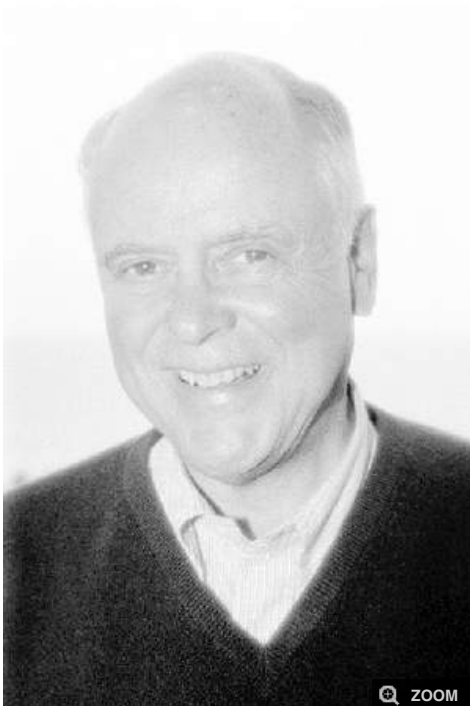
Koltinsky, who lives in Kentucky, envisions a multidisciplinary center at Iowa State that could bring people together the way Darling himself did. Such a center could “keep this legacy alive and inspire others to move forward and make a difference the way Ding Darling did,” he said.

The filmmaker spent his time in Iowa meeting with ISU officials and faculty and said he had received a largely enthusiastic reception. Schmidt said he thinks there would be “a huge amount of interest” in such a project. Darling’s work related to agriculture and environmental studies, journalism, political science and art, and

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Christopher 'Kip' Koss

more. "It has so many different dimensions to it," he said.

Darling, who was born in Michigan in 1876, spent his boyhood in Sioux City, teaching himself about the natural world. He worked as a reporter for the Sioux City Journal. A talented artist, he later won two Pulitzer Prizes as a political cartoonist for The Des Moines Register.

As a conservationist, he was visionary and relentless at lobbying government leaders for goals such as the creation of the Duck Stamp program and establishment of the national system of wildlife refuges. He organized conservation groups into the National Wildlife Federation.

"He was truly a modern-day Renaissance man," Koltinsky said.

The effort to consolidate and preserve Darling's history took on new urgency last week.

While in Iowa, Koltinsky learned that Darling's grandson, Christopher "Kip" Koss, who was intimately involved in the film project, had died early Monday in Florida. Koss was 78. During his life, Koss had worked diligently to preserve his grandfather's history, including spending

over a decade compiling and cataloging over 7,000 cartoons into a searchable, digital format.

Darling was ahead of his time, but his influence is needed today. Environmental stewardship and conservation should not be a partisan issue — and it's usually not with younger Americans.

Koltinsky asked Koss recently what Darling would have thought of today's polarized politics and denial of global climate change. Koss told him Darling would have "shuddered at what's taking place in Washington. This was contrary to the way that Darling operated.... He was able to bring people together in a cooperative way."

It's easy to detect Darling's influence in the way Koltinsky is pursuing this project. You can be sure you haven't heard the last of it, and that's a good thing for Iowa.

HERE'S HOW TO LEARN MORE

If you are interested in the Ding Darling documentary see the Marvo

Entertainment Group website:

<http://tinyurl.com/9zffwvt>

The Brunnier Gallery exhibit at Iowa State:

<http://tinyurl.com/n7evzv8>

Christopher "Kip" Koss' obituary:

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