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## WGCU premieres 'Sanctuary Islands: The Sanibel Legacy'

Sanibel Island's natural beauty remains intact, thanks to waves of conservation movements that have shaped the Lee County barrier island through the past century — waves that continue to ebb.

Today, more than 60 percent of the island is designated forever wild, the result of its national wildlife refuge, aggressive land acquisition programs, and 35 years of home rule. WGCU's latest "Untold Stories" episode, "Sanctuary Islands: The Sanibel Legacy," tells the story of how grassroots determination and diligent environmental awareness created a sanctuary in spite of plans to the contrary.

"Sanctuary Islands: The Sanibel Legacy" premieres Friday, March 27, at 8:30 p.m. It re-airs Saturday, March 28, at 6:30 p.m. and Sunday, March 29, at 11 p.m. on WGCU-TV.

"Living on Sanibel for 25 years, I was aware of how much foresight went into keeping it rural and natural as it is," says Chelle Koster Walton, who produced "Sanctuary Islands" for WGCU-TV.

Sanibel has been a world-class destination since the first inns opened there in the late 1800s. Fishing, shelling, wildlife and warm Gulf waters immediately impressed visitors. But it was the staggeringly massive flocks of ducks and migratory shorebirds descending each winter to rest, nest and feed throughout the rookeries of Pine Island Sound that made it a focus early on for environmental conservationists.

Chief among those concerned about bird populations, and the ravages of plume-hunting for the millinery industry, was President Theodore Roosevelt, a founding officer of the Florida Audubon Society in 1900. The society assigned wardens to protect shore-



J.N. "Ding" Darling was a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist.

birds, but poachers killed three wardens, including Columbus McLeod on Sanibel.

The conservation movement got a real boost when Roosevelt's friend and colleague, Jay Norwood "Ding" Darling, began visiting Captiva Island in 1935 and built a home.

The year before, the prize-winning editorial cartoonist had been named by Franklin D. Roosevelt as chief of the U.S. Biological Survey (the predecessor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) and had established the Federal Duck Stamp Program as a way to raise funds to purchase refuge lands. (It's estimated that the program has led to the preservation of at least six million acres of wetland habitat nationwide.)

Darling campaigned for the preservation of those freshwater wetlands. And in 1945, the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge was created with the acquisition of the 100-acre Bailey Tract. After Darling's death in 1962, it was renamed the J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge. ■

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