

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Booker High School Student Wins "People's Choice Award" in "Embracing Our Differences" Exhibit**

*Tenth grader Wade Turner's work, "It's All Up to You Now," was voted best of show by exhibit goers. The \$1,000 award was presented to Booker's Visual and Performing Arts program*



(Sarasota, FL) "It's All Up to You Now," Booker High School student Wade Turner's masterful depiction of a seasoned older person passing the world and a paintbrush to his young apprentice, won visitors' hearts and the "People's Choice Award" at Embracing Our

Differences'10<sup>th</sup> annual outdoor juried art exhibit celebrating diversity. A cash award of \$1,000 was recently presented to Booker's Visual and Performing Arts program.

Turner's composition expresses the passing of the inheritance of the world to a child, representing the next generation. "Nothing lasts forever," writes Turner in his artist's statement for the work. "Even in our complex society some things need assistance to continue. Like the master and apprentice in my painting, everything the master has learned for himself will be bestowed to the child so he can grow, learn and present to the next generation of the world."

Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, says that more than 1,000 people completed an exhibit survey, which includes ballots for visitors to choose their favorite artwork. "This award is especially meaningful because it's determined by exhibit goers choosing the artwork that has moved and captivated them the most," he says.

Turner, 18, will be entering the 11<sup>th</sup> grade next year at Booker High. Thrilled to receive this honor, he's quick to thank his art teacher, Jeff Cornwell, for encouraging him. "He's been an excellent mentor," says Turner. "He understands that young artists can't just rely on skill and talent—we need a strong work ethic to pursue a career in the arts." Turner, whose skills include painting, illustration, printmaking, and animation, says he hopes to be accepted into a top arts school like Ringling College of Art and Design when he graduates. He also praised the Visual and Performing Arts program at Booker High, where he's "thrived."

"Our VPA program is strong in all areas, including drawing, painting, sculpture, photography and visual design," says Rachel Shelley, Booker High's principal, adding that

the school has been actively involved with Embracing Our Differences for five years. "We believe it's vital to involve students with this initiative because the theme of diversity is very age-appropriate for all students," she says.

For 10 years, "Embracing Our Differences" has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, children and others to create powerful statements of diversity and acceptance in its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 39 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. This year, the organization received 4,419 total artworks and statements from people representing 52 countries and 41 states. Students from 128 elementary, junior and high schools comprised 60 percent of the submissions. This year's exhibits, which closed on June 2, saw a record number of visitors.

*For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-323-1010, or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

### **About Embracing Our Differences**

Embracing Our Differences is a project of Coexistence, Inc., a local non-profit that began in 2004. The project showcases a community-based outdoor exhibit promoting positive, inspirational artistic and verbal expressions of inclusion, acceptance and respect. The mission of Embracing Our Differences is to use the arts as a catalyst for creating awareness and promoting, throughout our community, the value of diversity, the benefits of inclusion and the significance of the active rejection of hatred and prejudice.