

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**To interview local students and teachers whose artwork and quotes are included in this exhibit, please email your request to [subyron@verizon.net](mailto:subyron@verizon.net).**

## **11th Annual Embracing Our Differences Exhibit Opens March 30**

*This year's exhibits will be on display March 30-June 1 in Sarasota's Island Park and at Bradenton's Riverwalk.*

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences' annual juried art exhibit has graced downtown Sarasota's bayfront with billboard-sized images created by artists, writers and students from around the world reflecting their interpretation of the message, "enriching lives through diversity." Last year, in celebration of the exhibit's tenth anniversary, the exhibit made a successful debut in Bradenton and returns there this year for an expanded two-month run. The Embracing Our Differences exhibits will be showcased simultaneously in Sarasota's Island Park and at Bradenton's Riverwalk, March 30-June 1. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710, or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

According to Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, more than 275,000 people visited the Sarasota and Bradenton exhibits in 2013, including more than 25,000 students from 180 area schools.

“We enjoyed another tremendously successful year,” says Shelton. “Ninety percent of the visitors who responded to our survey said that the art had favorably influenced their opinions on diversity. We look forward to more opportunities to deepen community awareness. By standing up to hate and prejudice and respecting the views of others, we really can make this a better world for everyone.” Shelton says the organization received submissions of more than 6,000 total artworks and statements from people from 52 countries, including South Korea, Greece, Israel, Serbia, China, Canada, India, Portugal, Scotland, and the United States. Students from 110 elementary, junior and high schools submitted both art and quotes.

The **Best-in-Show Adult** winner for art was **Marija Doric** of Westfield, Indiana, for her work entitled, "**Pressure and Tension**." In addition to the honor, Doric will receive a \$1,000 cash award. For the first time in EOD's history, two artists were selected to receive **Best-in-Show Student** awards. **Nina Edelsbacher**, a student at the NewGate School in Sarasota, won for her work, "**Everything is Equal**." Nina's teacher is Roberta Schlesinger. **Elise Raimon**, a student at Carlos E. Haile Middle School in Bradenton, won for her work, "**wePhones**." Her teacher is Joseph Gibson. Each school will be awarded a \$1,000 cash prize to be used in their art programs.

Winning quotes in the 2014 exhibition include, "**If you judge people by how far they have to go, you'll never know how far they've come**" (Aliyah

Cunningham, a student at Sarasota Middle School); and **“The hardest part of standing up for something is believing you can”** (Alexa Capo, Sarasota). The award for **Best-in-Show** inspirational quote was given to **Zachary Lasebny,** a student at Louise R Johnson Middle School in Bradenton for his quote: **“It shouldn't take your reading this quote to know that you should accept people for who they are.”** Lasebny's school will receive \$1,000 for its art department.

Area residents, especially students, fared well in the competition. Artwork and quotes from students from 10 schools in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties were chosen for the exhibit. In all, entries from 20 area artists and 34 area-based quote writers were chosen.

Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences' ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives include:**

- **Teacher workshops** developed by nationally acclaimed educators to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education. These include:
  - **Creative Writing Workshops** presented in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Florida Studio Theatre. These are designed to tackle the abstract topic of diversity by teaching students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. **Collectively, the 105 teachers participating in 2013 were responsible for more than 15,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
  - **Art Teacher Retreat:** Presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, this two-day retreat is focused on

reinvigorating art educators' creativity while teaching new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the concepts of prejudice and diversity. **Participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 Sarasota and Manatee county students.**

- **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to provide curriculum-aligned lesson plans and other resource materials. Participating teachers discover new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion on the value of diversity.
- The "**Make-a-Day-of-It!**" program, providing free bus transportation for area students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and to other cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Aquarium and Ringling Museum. **More than 13,000 students participated during the 2012-2013 school year.**
- A **docent program** that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 10,453 K-8 children visiting the 2013 exhibits. There are approximately 150 student docents.**

*For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org). **To view the 2013 annual report, visit <http://embracingourdifferences.org/pdfs/2013report%20low.pdf>.***

### **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.