

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Embracing Our Differences and Louies Modern**

### **Selected as “Best Business Partnership” in 2014 Giving Challenge**

*The initiative, which included a hip cocktail party and a 30-second video about an adorable puppy who is turned away from two restaurants before being embraced by Louies Modern, earns Embracing Our Differences a \$5,000 grant.*

(May 15, 2014) Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, announced today that Embracing Our Differences (EOD) and Louies Modern were selected by the editors of *Biz 941* as the Best Business Partnership in the 2014 Giving Challenge. The non-profit organization promoting diversity and the downtown Sarasota restaurant joined forces to present “Louies Embraces Thor’s Differences,” an event that took place at Louies Modern during the 2014 Giving Challenge on May 6. The free event featured artwork from EOD’s past and present exhibits, live music, and an opportunity to meet EOD docents, artists and supporters. The initiative also included a 30-second video about Thor, an adorable Maltese puppy who is denied entrance at several restaurants before being warmly welcomed at Louies Modern. As the winning non-profit, Embracing Our Differences was awarded a \$5,000 grant by the 2014 Giving Challenge.

“We liked the freshness and excitement of this event,” says Susan Burns,

editor of *Biz 941*, adding that her judges also enjoyed the “Thor-tini,” a cocktail invented for the occasion. “It showed great success attracting young professionals and new blood to the cause.” Burns adds that they especially liked the 30-second video of Thor and the fact that the owner of Louies Modern, Steve Seidensticker, made a substantial pledge that night, solidifying his support of the organization.

Shelton says that the event and video was a team effort directed by Sarah Wertheimer, EOD’s associate executive director. When he and his Maltese puppy, Thor, were turned away from a downtown restaurant recently, he ended up at Louies Modern. It was the start of a beautiful collaboration.

“It was our first visit to Louies Modern and we were made to feel welcome—even though Thor is a dog,” says Shelton. “This is bigger than just allowing man’s best friend to be with their human companions. The Seidensticker family are accepting, open-minded people who are always looking for ways to enhance their customers’ experience. It’s a heartwarming demonstration of how diversity and inclusion are good for business.”

The Community Foundation of Sarasota County, The Patterson Foundation, Manatee Community Foundation, William G. and Marie Selby Foundation, Charlotte Community Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation partnered to make the 2014 Giving Challenge possible for local organizations with completed profiles in The Giving Partner, an online tool helping donors make more informed decisions about philanthropy.

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 returned there this year for an expanded two-month run. The Embracing Our Differences exhibits are being showcased simultaneously in Sarasota's Island Park and at Bradenton's Riverwalk through May.

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. **For more information, please visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).**