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Artist from Virginia Wins "People's Choice Award" in 2017 Embracing Our Differences Exhibit

Caleb Mathews' work, "Everyone Has Their Own Spot," was voted best in show by visitors to the exhibit. Mathews received a \$1,000 cash award.

(Sarasota, FL) "Everyone Has Their Own Spot," Caleb Mathews' fanciful artwork, won visitors' hearts and the "People's Choice Award" at Embracing Our Differences' 14th annual outdoor juried art exhibit celebrating diversity. Mathews, who lives in Warrenton, Virginia, received a cash award of \$1,000.

In creating "Everyone Has Their Own Spot," Mathews wanted to explore the challenges of being the one who stands out from the crowd. "I aimed to capture this idea using giraffes, bringing a childlike innocence to the piece," says Mathews. "At the center of the work you see the most unique of the bunch, who is much shorter and paler than the others. The others tower above as they ignore him and do their own thing, although some have turned and are beginning to notice. As you look closer, you'll see each giraffe has its own individual facial features, spots, and personalities. We are all different in our own unique ways, which makes our world a better and more beautiful place. It is our humanity, acceptance, and love for others that unites us."

According to Sarah Wertheimer, associate executive director of Embracing Our Differences, the People's Choice award is determined by a survey that was available to more than 212,000 visitors who attended this year's exhibit. "This award is especially meaningful because it's what captivated visitors the most," she says.

For 14 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 45 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. The response to the call for artwork and

inspirational quotes for the 2017 exhibit resulted in a record 10,761 entries pouring in from 115 countries and 48 states. Students from 204 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit; 46 of this year's winners were students, and 33 of those were from local schools. More than 2 million people have visited the exhibit since its inception in 2004.

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:
 - **Mastering the Art of the Quote Workshops:** This workshop is designed to take the difficult topics of diversity, prejudice and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Presented in partnership with Florida Studio Theatre, the workshop fulfills a critical need of providing teachers with creative resources to meet Florida's Language Arts Standards.
 - **Art Teacher Retreat:** This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, is designed to reinvigorate educators' teaching practices while offering new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the abstract concepts of prejudice, diversity and inclusion. Substitute teachers are provided for participating educators. **In 2016, the 30 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 9,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
 - **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to deliver new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion of the value of diversity and inclusion, all lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, materials needed, activities, step-by-step instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.

- **Summer Diversity Institute:** This three-day annual event provides information and support on bullying in our schools, in cyberspace, and in our community. The workshop offers support and structures for educators to use with students in their classrooms and on the school campus. Participants work individually and in small groups based upon grade level, as well as school location, to create lesson plans and action plans that will be used within each school to provide support to both students and faculty as they encounter incidents. **48 participants from 11 schools took part in the 2016 workshop.**
- 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 Laboratory, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Sarasota Film Festival, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. **12,703 students participated during the 2017 school year.**
- **Coexistence Clubs**, via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, provide student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 5,578 K-8 children visiting the 2017 exhibit. There are approximately 140 student docents.**

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. **Visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.**