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Celebrating Diversity

Embracing Our Differences Announces

Winners of 2016 Outdoor Art Exhibit

*Thirty eight area students are among the 90 winners whose artwork and inspirational quotes were selected to participate in the 13th-annual outdoor art exhibit celebrating diversity. More than 8,350 entries were submitted by individuals from 104 countries and 44 states. **This year's exhibit is on display March 30-May 31 in Sarasota's Island Park.***

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and education to promote diversity. It accomplishes this through its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 45 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote. The response to this year's call for artwork and inspirational quotes was stronger than ever, with more than 8,350 entries pouring in from 104 countries and 44 states. Students from 106 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit; 40 of this year's winners were students, and 38 of those were from local schools. **The winning quotes and art will be showcased in the 13th-anniversary exhibit, March 30 to May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park.** *For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org. **A fact sheet is attached.***

"Our art selection committee spent weeks reviewing the record-setting number of submissions we received from all corners of the world," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "We were inspired by the high quality of the artwork and by the heartfelt conviction and encouraging messages found in this year's entries. We take heart that thousands of people who responded to our call share our mission to promote respect, acceptance and understanding in a positive way."

According to Shelton, the first criterion in judging a submission is by the underlying concept or idea each represents.

"We believe *all* people should feel safe, be empowered and make a difference," he says. "That's our guiding philosophy. We select the quotes and artworks that best reflect that conviction." Shelton adds that winning artwork is also judged on how effectively its message can be read when enlarged to billboard size. Awards are given for "Best-in-Show Adult," "Best-in-Show Student," and "People's Choice" categories, with the last chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Adult winners each receive \$1,000; students receive \$1,000 to be directed to their school's art program.

Shelton adds that, in recognition of the exhibit's growth, the number of artworks and quotes chosen for this year's exhibit increased from 39 works to 45.

2016 ART WINNERS

The **Best-in-Show Adult** winner for art is **Chad Glass** of Canyon Lake, Texas, for his work entitled "**Planting Peace.**" In an image evocative of the iconic scene of the second flag raising at Iwo Jima, Glass depicts young children raising a flag that is a patchwork of world peace against a stormy sky. Glass says: "In my art I

embrace emotional honesty and beauty even if that requires facing tragic situations. There is beauty in this life among the horrors. Isn't life about being present to what is experienced in the act of facing it? The theme 'Embracing Our Differences' embodies innocence and peace that begins with nurturing our children, and, as adults, to become childlike and non-judgmental."

Zach Sherman, a 10th-grade student at Booker High School, was selected to receive the **Best-in-Show Student** award for his striking work, "**Ability to Change**," depicting a circle of individuals of assorted vibrant colors unlocking each other's head to remove negativity. "I believe we all have the ability to help each other change for the better," says Sherman. "My work shows an individual unlocking another individual's head and removing the hate and negative components. In essence, each and every one of us can help other people change their outlook from negative to positive."

2016 QUOTE WINNER

Quotes selected for the 2016 exhibition include, "**Just the idea of 7.3 billion replicas of only me is horrifying. How then can I not appreciate diversity?**" (Joseph Obe, Roseau, Dominica); and "**The equal sign shouldn't just be used in math, but also in everyday life.**" (Emily Rumisek, North Port High School). The award for **Best-in-Show** inspirational quote was given to **Josslynn Oran** of McIntosh Middle School. Oran took the prize for her quote: "**Night and day are exact opposites but they come together to make a beautiful sunset.**" Oran's school will receive \$1,000 for its art department or creative writing department.

Shelton explains that the statements accompanying each artwork are vital.

“Every quote provides insight into our common humanity—as well as the differences that make us all unique,” he says. “We’re always moved by the heartfelt thought, creativity, wit and compassion the quotes represent. In the end, we choose the ones that best complement the artwork.”

According to Embracing Our Differences founding co-chairman, Dennis McGillicuddy, “These exhibits connect the dots between artistic experience and the realities of bullying, prejudice and injustice. From elementary school children to senior citizens, I hear how deeply moved and inspired they feel to be part of a kinder and more respectful world and for us, that’s what it’s all about.” He adds that over two million people have visited the exhibit since its inception in 2004, with 271,000 visitors, including over 30,000 area students, attending the exhibit in 2015 alone. “Enhancing the resources we provide to area teachers remains our top priority,” he says.

Embracing Our Differences' annual juried international art exhibit is at Sarasota's Island Park, March 30- May 31. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

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 2015, the 37 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 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 (Bully Prevention in Schools):** 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. **More than 85 Sarasota school guidance counselors, psychologists and sociologists participated in a recent condensed version of the workshop, organized out of popular demand by area school administrators.**

- 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. **13,320 students participated during the 2015 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 7,706 K-8 children visiting the 2015 exhibits. There are approximately 115 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 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 transformational power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world. *For more information, visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*