

'Embracing Our Differences'

The annual "Embracing Our Differences" exhibit at Island Park features artwork and quotes from local students celebrating diversity.



By Charles Schelle

Oversized artwork on Sarasota's Island Park is out to celebrate diversity thanks to student and professional work from Sarasota and Manatee county students.

The exhibit is called "Embracing Our Differences" and it's 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, tolerance, acceptance and respect.

Ringling College of Art + Design will host the 2012 Artist and Quoters Reception for Embracing Our Differences honoring students and professional artists/writers whose work is included in this year's exhibit at 6 p.m. Tuesday at the college's Ulla Searing Student Center and Exhibition Hall.

The event includes a short program announcing the "Best in Show" winners, a musical performance, and light refreshments.

Before you see the winners, go see the billboard sized art in the park in person. Each piece of art is accompanied by a quotation to compliment the piece. Also, have your smartphone or tablet handy with an app that reads QR codes (Google Goggles on Android or Google app for iPhone). Each panel has QR barcodes that gives enhanced information about the art.

Select artists submitted short videos about the inspiration behind their art and its meaning.

Art submissions from Phillippi Shores Elementary, SCTI, Lakewood Ranch High, North Port High, The GAP School, Booker High School as well as North Port High and Port Charlotte High in Charlotte County are featured.

Quotations were selected from Pine View, Sarasota Middle School, Riverview High School, Booker Middle School, Goldie Feldman Academy, The Out-of-Door Academy, Carlos E. Haile Middle School in Bradenton, and Laurel Nokomis School.

Student submissions were received from such distant places as Australia, China, Greece, India, Japan, Romania, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and many other countries. About 43 percent of the submissions selected for display in 2012 were submitted by students.

More than 4,502 submissions poured in from 40 states and 53 different countries. Schools from around the world submitted artwork representing a 48% increase from last year. Embracing OurDifferences' panel of judges narrowed down the submissions, and the art selection committee voted on the final show pieces.

"Choosing the final art is increasingly difficult every year," says Executive Director Michael Shelton. "With thousands of inspiring submissions, our mission is universal and resonates with so many different cultures and nationalities. Their passion for our purpose comes across in the art and quotations we receive."

Last year's exhibit broke the record for attendance with 277,000 people viewing the exhibit, and 18,000 of those attendees were students from Sarasota and Manatee Counties.