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MEDIA CONTACT

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Embracing Our Differences

Expands 2013 Exhibit to Bradenton and North Port

A major grant by the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation enables Embracing Our Differences to expand its annual exhibit celebrating diversity to the communities of Bradenton and North Port.

(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." This year, thanks to a \$25,761 grant from the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation, the organization marks its tenth anniversary with an expansion of the exhibit to Bradenton and North Port. The exhibit will be showcased in Sarasota's Island Park, March 31-June 2, 2013; at the Anthony T. Rossi Waterfront Park in downtown Bradenton, March 31-April 29; and at North Port High School, May 1-June 2.

"We are very grateful to the Selby Foundation for this vital grant," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "This funding has allowed us to expand the exhibit just in time for our tenth anniversary—an inspired anniversary gift!" He explains that the funds will be spent on a second set of the heavy-duty reusable steel framing required for the outdoor exhibit.

According to Shelton, the exhibit in Bradenton will attract an estimated 55,000 visitors to the city's new Rossi Waterfront Park, including thousands of students from Manatee County schools. Embracing Our Differences' "Make a Day of it" program provides area students and teachers with free field trips to the exhibit—and to other partner cultural attractions. In past years, distance and travel time prevented some students from Manatee County, south Sarasota County and Charlotte County from attending. "The added exhibits will change that," says Shelton.

"Since 2004, more than 117,000 students have participated in our education program, including 23,627 from 186 schools in 2012," he says. "By creating simultaneous exhibits in Bradenton and North Port, we expect to increase student participation by 5,000 for this year alone."

In addition to free transportation, Embracing Our Differences provides a variety of resources for teachers, including workshops, materials and lesson plans developed by leading professionals that cover art appreciation, character building and diversity education. Embracing Our Differences also routinely partners with nonprofit arts organizations in the area to maximize resources and extend free transportation to any teachers who request it for their classes.

"While we're known best for our annual art exhibits, the most important aspect of Embracing Our Differences is the educational programs we provide area teachers and students," says Shelton. "The students take away a deeper understanding of diversity and how it enriches their lives."

For more information about the exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-323-1010 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

About the Selby Foundation

William G. and Marie Selby created the Selby Foundation in 1955 to provide assistance and support to long-lasting endeavors that made a positive impact on the community. Since then, the Foundation has focused primarily on academic scholarships and grants for capital projects in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte and DeSoto counties. Today, over five decades later, their legacy continues to enhance our area as a result of more than \$94 million in grants and scholarships given to nearly 400 organizations and over a thousand students.

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, tolerance, 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. Since 2004, the Sarasota exhibit has been viewed by more than 1,350,000 visitors.