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**To interview local students and teachers whose artwork and quotes are included in this exhibit, please email your request to [subyron@verizon.net](mailto:subyron@verizon.net).**

## **10th Annual "Embracing Our Differences" Exhibit Opens March 31**

*This year's exhibits will be on display March 31-June 2 in Sarasota's Island Park; March 31-April 29, in the Anthony T. Rossi Waterfront Park in downtown Bradenton; and May 1-June 2 at North Port High School.*

(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, a grant from the William G. and Marie Selby Foundation enabled the organization to mark its tenth anniversary with an expansion of the exhibit to Bradenton. The "Embracing Our Differences" 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. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-313-2311 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

According to Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, nearly 250,000 people visited the exhibit in Island Park in 2012. "By creating

simultaneous exhibits in Bradenton and Sarasota, we expect to increase audiences by 25,000 for this year alone, says Shelton. "We look forward to providing even more opportunities for our community to deepen its awareness that respecting the views of others and standing up against hatred and prejudice will lead to a better world for everyone."

Shelton says the organization received more than 4,000 total artworks and statements from people from 52 countries, including Kenya, Malaysia, Israel, Iran, the Philippines, Singapore, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Students from 128 elementary, junior and high schools comprised 60 percent of the individuals submitting art and quotes.

The Best-in-Show adult winner for artwork is Liat Waks from Petach-Tigwa, Israel, for her work entitled, "Differences Work, Just Ask a Fork." The Best-in-Show student winner for artwork is "Cyber Bullying: Beware of the Big Bad Predator" by Steven Staub, Bobby Alvarez, and Gennadity Kazimirov, 7th-grade students at Heron Creek Middle School in North Port. Grace Castilow, a seventh-grade student from Booker Middle School, won Best in Show for her statement, "No one deserves to be limited by another's perspective." *(To interview the local winning students, contact Su Byron at [subyron@verizon.net](mailto:subyron@verizon.net).)*

Area residents, especially students, fared well in the competition. Artwork and quotes from students from 43 schools in Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte counties were chosen for the exhibit, including artwork created by an entire kindergarten class from Phillippi Shores Elementary and works by two Ringling College of Art and Design students. In all, entries from 22 area-based artists and 28 area-based quote writers were

chosen, with 19 of the artworks and 20 of the quotes created by local students. Two more local student artists also received honorable mentions.

Shelton points out that one reason local students fare so well is that area-based teachers participate in various Embracing Our Differences' educational outreach programs. Developed by nationally acclaimed educators, these workshops help teachers find concrete ways to help their students express their personal thoughts about the abstract topic of diversity.

**In addition to the annual outdoor exhibit, Embracing Our Differences' other programs include:**

- 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.
- An **annual teacher workshop** designed to provide teachers with a well-planned curriculum for use before, during and after their students' visit to the annual exhibit.
- An **art teacher retreat** presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, designed to reinvigorate teaching practices while inspiring teachers' art and art integration skills.
- A **docent program** that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit, with more 200 student docents participating in 2012.

*For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-323-1010 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://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, 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.