

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2013

### MEDIA CONTACTS:

Gisele Pintchuck ▪ 941-313-2311

Su Byron ▪ 941-922-7274

## Embracing Our Differences

### Student Docent Program Enters Its Fourth Year

*More than 140 students from Riverview and North Port high schools will serve as docents and mentors to thousands of students visiting the 2013 Embracing Our Differences exhibit*

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2010, Embracing Our Differences has partnered with Riverview High School's International Baccalaureate (IB) program to train students to serve as docents for the organization's annual "Embracing Our Differences" exhibit in Sarasota's Island Park. These docents serve as guides for thousands of area elementary, middle and high school students who will visit this year's exhibit in Sarasota's Island Park through June 2. This year, the docent program has expanded to North Port High School, where the exhibit is on display, May 1-June 2.

According to Dena Sturm, a teacher at Riverview High School and a docent coordinator for Embracing Our Differences, the program has grown exponentially in four years. "We started with 12 docents in 2010," she says. "Last year, we had 88 docents who took nearly 11,000 students on docent-led tours of the exhibit. This year, with the expansion of the program to North Port High School under the

guidance of teacher Marilyn Caruso, we're up to 145 docents, and expect more than 15,000 students."

In addition to creating a meaningful and inspiring experience for young visitors, Sturm says the docent program has its other rewards, including watching a student's personal growth as he or she goes through the program. "Countless times I've watched a shy or introverted youngster transform into a confident, solid, mature young adult," says Sturm. "The transformation is astonishing—and incredibly rewarding."

According to Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, the docent program is a vital element of Embracing Our Differences' educational initiatives.

"These dynamic student docents make a profound impact on the young people who visit the exhibit," says Shelton. "We continue to be impressed by their eloquence and ability to tell the captivating story behind each work of art and quote. The impact of students teaching students is fantastic."

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 is in Sarasota's Island Park, March 31-June 2, 2013; at Bradenton's Riverwalk, 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).*

**In addition to the docent program, Embracing Our Differences' other education 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.

### **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 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.