

Nanette's New Life - Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes

Time flies when you're having fun! I started this blog in 2010 as a transplanted New Yorker discovering all that Southwest Florida has to offer. I continue this blog today as someone who's fallen in love with Southwest Florida, particularly its arts scene. Hope you enjoy my musings!

Embracing Our Differences



"Strength Lies in Our Differences"
by Rasa Pamedylyte from Denmark

The Sarasota-based nonprofit Embracing Our Differences "envision[s] a world that embraces diversity, respects differences and actively rejects hatred and prejudice." And when they say they "envision" such a world, they mean it literally. Since 2003, the organization has sponsored a juried international art exhibit around the theme "enriching lives through diversity." Bayfront Park hosts the exhibit, which features 45 billboards on which the art--along with related quotes--is posted. I was eager to check it out.



"Uni-Tea" by Casey Hunter Kessous from Osprey, FL
(the writing is words like coexist, joy, harmony & community)

This year's exhibit received 10,761 submissions representing 115 countries, 48 states and 204 schools from such distant places as India, Iran, Israel, Vietnam and South Korea. There are separate committees that select the art and the quotes. The quotes and artwork are then matched.

While the exhibit would certainly draw visitors with a bit of advertising, Embracing Our Differences doesn't take an "if we build it, they will come" approach. Their goal, after all, is to encourage young people to recognize that our differences make us stronger and more interesting and should not be a cause for bullying.



"Don't Hide" by Natalia Balashova from Russia

To this end, Embracing Our Differences partners with schools across Southwest Florida to offer free field trips to the exhibit. High school students are available to serve as docents. A wide assortment of resources are available to teachers to introduce the subject in their classrooms. And the "Make a Day of It" program provides discounts to school groups at institutions like Mote Marine and Florida Studio Theatre.

While the exhibit might be produced with students in mind, its message speaks to adults as well. During my visit I chatted with two women who commented that, while they liked the art, they found the quotes even more powerful. I had just been thinking that myself (honestly!) Here's a sampling:



"America's Favorite Card Game: The Race Card"
by Helene Ruis from Virginia

"If you don't fit into a scene, always remember there is a bigger picture." From Jessica Ritchie, 6th grader, Sarasota (Best in Show Quote) (Matched with "Strength Lies in Our Differences")

"If people saw difference of opinion as the birth of new ideas rather than conflicts, the world could be a better place." From Nausheen Tabassum, Bangladesh (Matched with "Uni-Tea")

"Similarities keep us comfortable; differences permit us to progress." From Raisah Ali from Trinidad & Tobago

"Speak as if your words are written with indelible ink." From Cindy Hancock-Cuffage from North Port.



"Different Hats Fit Different People"
by Kaitlyn Freeman from Sarasota

Embracing Our Differences is also the organization that sponsored the Dr. Seuss reading day I participated in earlier this year. And so I thought the inclusion by Kaitlyn Freeman of the hat made famous by the Cat in the Hat in her "Different Hats" painting was particularly clever. As was Sarasota senior Evelyn Baldwin's quote: "Dr. Seuss never said, 'one fish, two fish, white fish, white fish.'"

The Embracing Our Differences exhibit runs through May 31 and is definitely worth a stop if you're in Sarasota. If you can't make it, you can enjoy the exhibit virtually by clicking [here](#). Kudos to Embracing Our Differences and its sponsors (including the Community Foundation Community Foundation, The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee and Ringling College of Art and Design) for bringing this exhibit to our area each year.

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