



Venice Gondolier

Embracing Our Differences receives \$50,729 grant

By SU BYRON Guest Writer

The Sarasota County Commission awarded Embracing Our Differences (EOD) a \$50,729 Tourist Development Cultural/Arts grant to help fund its 2020 exhibition season, which runs Jan. 18 through April 5 in Sarasota's Bayfront Park.

For 16 years, EOD has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, writers, students and others to create powerful statements of diversity and acceptance in its annual outdoor public art exhibition consisting of 50 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes.

The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow, attracting more than 2.9 million visitors since its inception in 2004. This exhibit is the heart of a year-round program of initiatives designed to use art and words as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity.

"This grant empowers us to reach and engage new audiences outside of our region," says Sarah Wertheimer, EOD executive director.

According to Wertheimer, the 2019 exhibit attracted 218,000 visitors, of which 14 percent came from counties in Florida outside of Sarasota County; 48 percent were visitors from out of state; and six percent were international tourists.

"As an open-air, free exhibit placed in an easy-to-access location, Embracing Our Differences is a natural draw for visitors," says Wertheimer. "Embracing Our Differences is a critical component of what defines our region as a sophisticated arts destination."

Wertheimer says that the response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotes for the 2019 exhibit resulted in 11,791 entries pouring in from 111 countries and 44 states. Students from 239 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit and over 70 percent of this year's submissions were from students.

A call for art and quote submissions for the 2020 exhibit is ongoing through Oct. 8.

For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710, or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.