

Venice Gondolier Sun

SYC Cares awards grant to Embracing Our Differences

By SU BYRON Guest Writer

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SYC Cares (Sarasota Yacht Club) recently awarded Embracing Our Differences (EOD) a \$5,000 grant to help enhance its year-round education initiatives.

With 932 teachers and 39,211 students participating in EOD's annual exhibit and educational programs in 2018 alone, EOD continues to lead as one of the largest education outreach programs in southwest Florida.

“We are extremely honored to support Embracing our Differences,” said Kim Bleach, SYC Cares committee co-chair: “Our members are proud to be associated with this nonprofit that makes such a positive impact on our community and our children.”

EOD Executive Director Sarah Wertheimer said, “A vital part of our mission is to reach young people through the power of art and language. Since 2004, more than 1,500 teachers and counselors have participated in our annual retreats and workshops. This significant grant will further empower those and other efforts.”

Wertheimer explained that through the initiatives, educators learn to “teach concrete strategies to inspire students to reject destructive attitudes and embrace the full potential of inclusion and diversity.”

EOD's education outreach initiatives include:

Art Teacher Retreat: This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, can reinvigorate teaching practices and

offer new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the abstract concepts of prejudice, diversity and inclusion.

Creative Writing Workshops: These workshops take the difficult topics of diversity and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Teachers leave with creative resources to meet Florida's Language Arts Standards.

Lesson Plan Workshops: Workshops deliver innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating an ideal environment for an enriching discussion about the value of diversity and inclusion.

Diversity Institute: Intensive workshop serves as a model educators can follow in creating a safe environment for students to appreciate that a healthy respect for diversity and inclusion is a way of thinking and acting.

In the classroom: Each fall, students in Sarasota and Manatee counties spend time creating art and quotations for submission to EOD's competition. Students benefit by engaging in a comprehensive approach to critical thinking and visual inquiry that helps them clarify their own identities and develop an enhanced self-esteem and social skills.

"Make-a-Day-of-It!" provides free bus transportation for students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and other cultural venues — Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Lab, and Westcoast Black Theatre Troupe.

Docent program: Via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, students tour the annual exhibit.

Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day: For the past six years, EOD has coordinated hundreds of volunteers to read Dr. Seuss books to area students. Students can see that reading is fun and inclusion is important. EOD's partnership with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and an anonymous family foundation provides thousands of books each year for classrooms and individual students. In 2019, over 6,000 students from 45 schools participated.

For more information, call 941-404-5710, visit embracingourdifferences.org.