

TAMPA BAY NEWSWIRE

Two Riverview Coexistence Club Students Are Awarded Scholarships from Embracing Our Differences

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Chloe Labrecque and Cam Pham, seniors entering the University of Florida this year, will each receive \$1,000 renewable scholarships for four years.

(Sarasota, FL) Chloe Labrecque and Cam Pham, two Riverview High school seniors who have served as members of the school's Coexistence Club, were recently awarded \$1,000 four-year renewable scholarships by Embracing Our Differences. According to Ben Jewell-Plocher, EOD's education director, the two students are part of an inaugural EOD scholarship initiative, which will grant annual \$1,000 renewable scholarships to three students at regional high school Coexistence Clubs. Current Coexistence Club locations include Booker, North Port, Riverview, and Sarasota high schools. Coexistence Club members serve as docents for thousands of students from area elementary and middle schools who visit EOD's outdoor exhibit every year in addition to designing and leading student-driven initiatives in their schools to promote inclusion and acceptance.

“The fierce commitment of Coexistence Club members to promote diversity, inclusion, integrity and respect in their schools and at EOD’s annual exhibit led us to consider how we could further honor their efforts while also supporting their education after graduation,” says Jewell-Plocher. “We are thrilled to have the chance to work with all the amazing students in our Coexistence Clubs, congratulate Cam and Chloe on being the inaugural recipients of the Riverview High School Coexistence Club scholarship and thank Riverview club advisor Dena Sturm for her mentorship of both students.”

Jewell-Plocher adds that award recipients need to demonstrate how the Coexistence Club and their participation as docents for EOD’s exhibit has had an impact on their life, point of view, and high school career.

Chloe Labrecque has been a Riverview Coexistence Club member and EOD exhibit docent for four years and will be starting at University of Florida in the fall, majoring in English. Labrecque moved to Florida the summer before her freshman year and says she saw “more intolerance and hatred in my first month of high school than I had during my entire childhood. I searched for ways to make a difference in my community, met with school guidance counselors, and always advocated for empathy, but it wasn’t until I joined Coexistence Club that I felt like I had a real outlet to create change again.” She says that her experience with Embracing Our Differences was life-changing. “In an often apathetic world, Embracing Our Differences has created a community that fosters empathy and connection. Throughout my time with EOD, I have led discussions about real issues, but what was more rewarding than leading these conversations was hearing the insightful things my peers and student groups had to say. Receiving this scholarship and the support of these incredible people reassures me that I am capable of turning my good intentions into actions that serve others and creating positive change regardless of where I may find myself.”

Cam Pham has been a Riverview Coexistence Club member and EOD exhibit docent for three years and will be starting at University of Florida in the fall, majoring in business. “A change does not need to be big; it can start within yourself and then spread to those around you,” says Pham. “Embracing Our Differences gave me the opportunity to participating in raising awareness for important social issues. One of my favorite quotes from this year’s exhibit is ‘To open your arms to people who are different is to open your mind to infinite possibilities.’ This made a huge impact on me. EOD advocates embracing diversity. One of the best ways to do that is to learn about different cultures and traditions. Without knowing someone’s background, some people generalize and that can lead to misunderstanding—and even hatred.”

For 17 years, Embracing Our Differences has drawn on the passion and perception of artists, children 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 3,308,000 million visitors since its inception. This exhibit is the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **The 2021 exhibit will be January 20 through April 1, 2021, in Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota.** *For more information, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a not-for-profit organization that uses the transformational power of art and education to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through an annual, large-scale outdoor juried art exhibition and a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.