

Patch

Sarasota Poet Spreads Message Of Inclusion, Diversity

For the past four years, 19-year-old Seth Morano's work has been featured in the Embracing Our Differences exhibition at Bayfront Park.

Tiffany Razzano, Patch Staff

Posted Tue, Feb 2, 2021 at 6:00 am ET | Updated Tue, Feb 2, 2021 at 6:02 am ET



For the past four years, 19-year-old Seth Morano's work has been featured in the Embracing Our Differences exhibition at Bayfront Park. (Jennifer Morano) SARASOTA, FL — Each year, the Embracing Our Differences exhibition features 50-billboard-sized works of art accompanied by an inspirational quote at Sarasota's Bayfront Park.

The competition to be selected for the festival is steep. Thousands of artist and writers submit their work annually. This year, Embracing Our Differences received 15,912 entries

from 128 countries and 48 states.

So, it's no easy feat to be selected for the exhibit even just once, let alone multiple years.

But one Sarasota poet and writer has defied the odds. Seth Morano, a 19-year-old University of South Florida student studying professional and technical communications, has had at least two quotes featured in the exhibition each of the last four years. That includes [this year's show](#), which went up Jan. 20 and is on display through April 1. "It's been absolutely crazy. I don't know the odds of this happening because there are thousands of people who submit every year," he said. "It's crazy. Each and every time that my work has been selected has been an absolute blessing."

Embracing Our Differences launched 18 years ago. As an elementary and middle school student, Morano visited the exhibit many times on class field trips.

"It was always there in my community, but I first entered in a high school English class as kind of a fun assignment," the Booker High School graduate said.

He had always loved writing though, first exploring his talent as a poet with help from Booker Middle School's creative writing teacher Joanna Fox and her coffeehouse classroom known as Dragonfly Café.

Quote submissions to Embracing Our Differences are limited to 20 words or less, Morano said. "It's kind of a science, especially when you're trying to write down or speak an idea and you have to get it down to 20 words."

He's always been drawn to the theme of Embracing Our Differences, though, so he's an endless fount of ideas.

Morano, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is drawn more to social justice and civil rights issues than his own personal experiences when he writes for Embracing Our Differences, though.

"Because I'm the disabled kid at school with CP, it kind of feels forced. I try not to use that. I try to not pull out the disability card when I do quotes because there are so many other great topics out there that I love to explore," he said. "Something might strike me in the news or civil rights history. I know that the killing of George Floyd was on my mind this year... and coronavirus influenced my thinking."

The result was four quotes selected for the exhibit, including:

"A better society is not a creation, but a collaboration."

"Don't wait for better leaders, become one."

"Brutality against one is an assault on us all."

Morano is amazed every time he sees his work displayed on the billboard.

"The massive scale of these billboards and having your name up there, it's been a completely wild ride, especially this year because of quarantine," he said. "Because I'm trying to keep myself safe, I've only visited once this year."

Still, it's the ideal outdoor pandemic activity and features messages that everyone needs to hear right now, Morano said. "We're all cooped up and Bayfront Park is just as beautiful and normal as ever, and I think due to quarantining due to the coronavirus, we've kind of lost that personal connection with one another, especially with divisiveness in our society compounded by the quarantine. I think we need Embracing Our Difference's message of embracing diversity and inclusion more now than ever, even though we are supposed to be safe in our homes."

He's already thinking about his submissions for next year's competition, trying to find his "sweet spot," which is "making my quotes as broad and relevant and sometimes even as timeless as I can," he said.

Morano added, "I consider myself extremely lucky to get this far... It's been an honor and a privilege as a writer and as a global citizen."