



BLACK TIE INSIDE:

<CHAMPIONS DINNER: Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota celebrate their all-stars for children. **6**

WHISKEY FOR WISHES: New nonprofit takes a sip of success with its first fundraiser. **8**

ARTS + ENTERTAINMENT

DECEMBER 2, 2021

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Self Education is the study of everything and anything. It's about trying to improve yourself and better yourself.

Try new things. I'm tired of being judged because I feel like I'm judged when people look at me and think that I can't do something or how I feel about situations, because I'm trying to be non-judgmental and to overcome my judgement of others and situations that I can't control. And to be happy and efficient in my life and to face my fears and to be fearless in my life. I feel challenged when I take on new roles and responsibilities in my life and feel inspired to do something or help someone else do something new and great.

STRONG WORDS

A notable poet summons the healing power of creativity to turn community poems into works of art. **PAGE 2**

Reflection
The scariest things I ever had to encounter wasn't a ghost or a big scary monster. It was the reflection I saw as I looked in the mirror the moment I had to face all the dark parts I tried hard to erase yet as I looked a bit closer at the eye's staring back at me I realized they were still there untouched and unfazed waiting for the day to be let out of their cage.

They say practice makes perfect. And you've always been smart.

I feel challenged when I take on new roles and responsibilities in my life and feel inspired to do something or help someone else do something new and great.

I feel inspired when I do more things like helping my mom, does the dishes, I help her with the house and I want to help her with the boys and clothes to a salvation army when I feel that I can help people. I want to help teachers get more money on their lives and I want to help people buy food, canned goods, BANANAS. I want to help employees who are unemployed to help people buy books every day.

Exploring the oneness of art

Embracing our Differences taps popular poet to transform community members' words into art. And, hopefully, affect change along the way.

ABBY WEINGARTEN
CONTRIBUTOR

For teaching artist and noted poet Cedric Hameed, inspiring people to connect through creative pursuits can be immeasurably cathartic — and nothing has made that fact more evident than the pandemic.

That is why Hameed has introduced the Oneness of Art this fall, a yearlong pilot program that is part of the annual Embracing Our Differences initiative.

Hameed is running several community-based poetry workshops with individuals from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Sarasota, Manatee and DeSoto counties; Second Heart Homes and Easterseals Academy. The pieces produced in these workshops will ultimately be incorporated into public art and exhibited locally. The Oneness of Art is, in essence, an opportunity to connect, create and heal.

“Throughout the pandemic, I started seeing these themes screaming at me: self-image, self-esteem and fear. Ultimately, what everybody wants to feel right now is triumph — to be able to overcome the obstacles presented to us,” Hameed says. “When I was looking at the world we live in, I wanted to not just remember despair but also to remember the beauty of humanity — of people coming together to face issues together.”

Coming together is the overarching aim of these workshops. Hameed is collaborating with five- to 15-person groups at each organization once a week for 16 weeks. Each monthlong block of time will revolve around a different interpersonal theme: self-image, self-esteem, fear and tri-



Above: Cedric Hameed leads a poetry workshop as part of Oneness of Art. Right and far right: Kids at the Boys & Girls Club of Sarasota write their own poems around one of four themes.

umph.

Hameed will collect the poems written by the participants and disperse them among Ringling College of Art and Design students and local artists, who will then translate the poems into visual and performance art. The entire endeavor is being filmed by Nate Ilardi, who has worked for the U.S. Men's Soccer Team and the Women's National Basketball Association.

“We hold a uniqueness in this place and time, and inspiration can be garnered in so many different ways. When we look back on this time, we can look at the beauty we were able to grab in this moment,” Hameed says. “With the Oneness

of Art, we are being proactive with love — giving people a platform and a place to express themselves.”

During the winter 2022 season, the poems from Hameed's workshops will be displayed and performed in various locations (such as museums, public spaces and partner organization facilities). The work will serve as the backdrop for public engagements that “foster healing and unite us around the possibilities for the future of our community,” according to organizers at Embracing Our Differences.

FROM FEELINGS TO CHANGE
In Hameed's opinion, local, national and global change can be accom-



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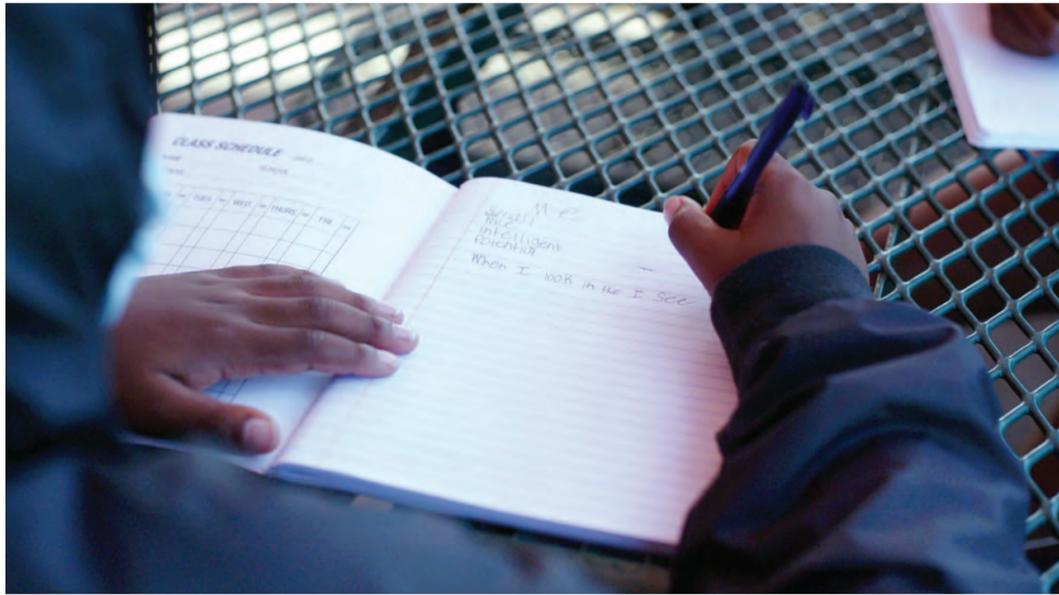


Photos courtesy of Nate Ilardi

Above: Cedric Hameed believes creative outlets can help people of all ages overcome obstacles.

LEARN MORE

For more information about the Oneness of Art, call 941-404-5710 or visit EmbracingOurDifferences.org/oneness.



plished through expression. And the team at Embracing Our Differences is thrilled to work toward this goal alongside him. It has already been an ongoing collaboration.

“We started working with Cedric about seven years ago. He has trained our staff and helped with professional development workshops for our creative writers, and he has inspired everyone in the room,” says Sarah Wertheimer, the executive director of Embracing Our Differences. “Teachers and students have said that he has this magical way about him, where he can help you pull out your deepest thoughts and emotions and express them in a way that you never imagined was possible.”

The way Hameed does this will also be fully captured on film.

“We’re really looking forward to seeing the end results of this,” Wertheimer says. “That’s why having it documented on film is so special

because we’ll be able to capture the experience of the participants.”

The Oneness of Art truly builds on the spirit of Embracing Our Differences as a whole. It is a nonprofit organization “that uses the transformational power of art and education

to celebrate and promote the diversity of the human family,” according to its mission statement.

Since 2004, Embracing Our Difference has accomplished its mission through its yearlong, large-scale, outdoor juried art exhibition

at Sarasota’s Bayfront Park, along with a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students.

More than 477,000 students have participated in Embracing Our

Differences programs, including 41,585 students during the 2020-2021 school year alone. For the 2021 exhibit, there were 15,912 submissions from 48 states, 412 schools and 128 countries (and more than 384,000 people visited the exhibit). This coming year, as people begin to gather more than they did at the height of the pandemic, the program will carry its own special significance.

“Because of the pandemic, I think we’ve all experienced so much more isolation, sadness and challenging times. We’ve been in situations that felt very fearful. Through this program, participants are able to express what we’ve gone through instead of just keeping it bottled it up – to realize we’re not as alone as we’ve felt this past year,” Wertheimer says. “Through this, hopefully many others will feel that they’re able to reconnect and focus not only on themselves and their self-confidence but also relate to those around them.”

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