

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Neal Communities Partners with Embracing Our Differences

The esteemed building firm joins an elite group of local businesses and organizations by contributing \$10,000 to Embracing Our Differences' 2014-2015 season.

(Monday, April 28, 2014) Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, announced today that Neal Communities has become a major sponsor of Embracing Our Differences by contributing \$10,000 for the upcoming season.

"We're grateful to Neal Communities for joining other progressive business leaders to show support for this exhibit and its message of celebrating diversity," says Shelton. He adds that the funds will be directed toward EOD's many educational outreach initiatives, including the organization's Make-A-Day-of-It! program, which provides free bus transportation for thousands of students and teachers to visit the outdoor exhibits and other arts and cultural venues.

According to Shelton, the Make-A-Day-of-It! program immerses students in a transformative day of diversity appreciation. "Neal Communities' sizeable sponsorship will allow thousands more students and teachers to experience this program," he says. "The art and messages are amazingly moving—but if a student never sees the exhibit, it has no effect. Covering the cost of transportation makes this

life-changing educational experience possible.” According to Shelton, more than 25,000 students throughout Sarasota and Manatee counties will receive free field trips in 2014, thanks to sponsorships and grants.

Pat Neal is the founder and CEO of Neal Communities. “Diversity and respect are essential to 21st-century life on our planet,” he says. “Embracing Our Differences is getting that message across loud and clear in our community—and across the world. We’re proud to stand behind the organization and its vital message.”

Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences' annual juried art exhibit has graced downtown Sarasota's bayfront with billboard-sized images created by artists, writers and students from around the world reflecting their interpretation of the message, “enriching lives through diversity.” Last year, in celebration of the exhibit’s tenth anniversary, the exhibit made a successful debut in Bradenton and returned there this year for an expanded two-month run. The Embracing Our Differences exhibits are being showcased simultaneously in Sarasota's Island Park and at Bradenton's Riverwalk through May.

Embracing Our Differences’ annual outdoor exhibits are the heart of a year-round program of activities designed to use art as a catalyst to create awareness and promote diversity. **Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences' ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives include:**

- **Teacher workshops** developed by nationally acclaimed educators to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education. These include:

- **Creative Writing Workshops** presented in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Florida Studio Theatre. These are designed to tackle the abstract topic of diversity by teaching students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. **Collectively, the 105 teachers participating in 2013 were responsible for more than 15,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
- **Art Teacher Retreat:** Presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, this two-day retreat is focused on reinvigorating art educators' creativity while teaching new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the concepts of prejudice and diversity. **Participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 Sarasota and Manatee county students.**
- **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to provide curriculum-aligned lesson plans and other resource materials. Participating teachers discover new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion on the value of diversity.
- The "**Make-a-Day-of-It!**" program, providing free bus transportation for area students and teachers to the outdoor exhibit and to other cultural venues, including Florida Studio Theatre, Mote Marine Aquarium and Ringling Museum. **More than 13,000 students participated during the 2012-2013 school year.**
- A **docent program** that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 10,453 K-8 children visiting the 2013 exhibits. There are approximately 150 student docents.**

*For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org. **To view the 2013 annual report, visit <http://embracingourdifferences.org/pdfs/2013report%20low.pdf>.***

About Neal Communities

Neal Communities was named one of 2012's "America's Best Builders" by BUILDER Magazine and voted the "2013 Best Residential Builder in Southwest Florida" in a readers' poll sponsored by Gulfshore Business Magazine. The company is ranked #1 locally by Metrostudy and by Hanley Wood Market Intelligence based on number of home sales and ranked #64 nationally among homebuilders by BUILDER Magazine. To date, Neal has built over 9,000 homes in Southwest Florida. As the area's largest and most established, locally owned and operated private builder, Neal Communities is continually striving for excellence in every aspect of the home building and development business. John Neal Homes, Neal Signature Homes, Charlene Neal PureStyle, Waterscapes Pools & Spas, and Allegiant Title Professionals all contribute to the firm's continued, record-setting local success. The company's honors and accolades include 42 Parade of Homes 2014 awards, 49 Aurora Awards, 5 Best in American Living Awards, and hundreds of local and regional industry awards. **For more information, please visit www.nealcommunities.com.**

About Embracing Our Differences

Embracing Our Differences is a project of Coexistence, Inc., a local non-profit that began in 2004. The project showcases a community-based outdoor exhibit promoting positive, inspirational artistic and verbal expressions of inclusion, acceptance and respect. The mission of Embracing Our Differences is to use the arts as a catalyst for creating awareness and promoting, throughout our community, the value of diversity, the benefits of inclusion and the significance of the active rejection of hatred and prejudice. **For more information, please visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.**