

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community Foundation of Sarasota County Awards Inaugural Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$3,000 grant, issued from the Our Sarasota Fund and the McCauley-Brown Fund, will fund projects that expand LGBT inclusivity.

(Sarasota-Manatee FL) The Our Sarasota Fund and the McCauley-Brown Fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$3,000 grant on May 22 in recognition of the organization's outstanding work promoting diversity and LGBT issues. The funds will be directed to projects that expand LGBT inclusivity. The Our Sarasota Fund is a new charitable group focused on assisting local non-profit organizations that offer programs that improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. Seven other organizations were recognized for their work with the LGBT community at the May 22 awards event, including ALSO Youth, Inc., Asolo OUT Subscription Series, Community AIDS Network, Diversity Chorus, the Harvey Milk Festival, Planned Parenthood and Trinity Charities.

"We're honored to be awarded this significant inaugural grant," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "The late Dick McCauley and Clayton Brown shared my belief that everyone deserves an environment in which

they can thrive and achieve their full potential regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. We're grateful to the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and to the founders of these funds for their commitment to the growing presence of the regional LGBT community.”

“The mission of Embracing Our Differences wonderfully reflects and supports our mission,” says Ken Shelin, founder of the Our Sarasota Fund, which collaborated closely with the Community Foundation of Sarasota County and the McCauley-Brown Fund on the grants. “EOD uses the power of art and education to expand consciousness and open the heart to celebrate the diversity of the human family. The LGBT community is part of that rainbow of humanity. It’s a powerful affirmation that we’re all part of the same family.”

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 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. Since 2004, the Sarasota exhibit has been viewed by more than 1,350,000 visitors. **For more information, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.**

About the Community Foundation of Sarasota County

The Community Foundation is a public charity founded in 1979 by the Southwest Florida Estate Planning Council as a resource for caring individuals and the causes they support, enabling them to make a charitable impact on the community. With assets of over \$230 million in nearly 1,100 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and scholarships totaling more than \$16 million dollars this past year in the areas of arts, culture and humanities; education; civic engagement; health and human services; animal welfare; and the environment. **For more information, call 941-955-3000 or visit www.CFSarasota.org.**