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Artist from Toronto Wins "People's Choice Award" in 2018 Embracing Our Differences Exhibit

Mary Chen's work, "Progression of Hope," was voted best in show by visitors to the exhibit. Chen received a \$1,000 cash award.

(Sarasota, FL) "Progression of Hope," Mary Chen's powerful artwork exploring the immigrant experience, won visitors' hearts and the "People's Choice Award" at Embracing Our Differences' 15th annual outdoor juried art exhibit celebrating diversity. Chen, who is an 11th grade student at York Mills Collegiate Institute in Toronto, Canada, received a cash award of \$1,000.

In creating "Progression of Hope," Chen explores the emotions and challenges of being an immigrant who gains acceptance in her new country—but still feel the loss of having left family and friends behind. "My family immigrated to Canada when I was six and I commemorate Canada for its acceptance," wrote Chen in her artist's statement. "I am touched that Canadians have accepted me with open arms. But when I left China, I left a friend behind. To this day, although I have returned in search of her, I cannot find her. She told me that we'll always be connected by the sky. Every time I look up into the sky, I imagine that she's also looking at the same sky. In that sense, we're not so far apart. People can be connected by simple things and ideas."

According to Sarah Wertheimer, associate executive director of Embracing Our Differences, the People's Choice award is determined by a survey that was available to

more than 202,000 visitors who attended this year's exhibit. "This award is especially meaningful because it's what captivated visitors the most," she says.

For 15 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 45 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow, attracting more than 2.7 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 2019 exhibit is scheduled for January 19 through March 14 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.