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Celebrating Diversity

Embracing Our Differences Announces

Winners of 2017 Outdoor Art Exhibit

Carly Stafford, a 12th-grade Booker High School student, won Best-in-Show Student award. The award for Best-in-Show inspirational quote was given to Jessica Ritchie, a sixth grader at Sarasota Middle School.

A record 10,761 entries from 115 countries and 48 states were submitted for inclusion in the 14th annual outdoor art exhibit celebrating diversity. Thirty-three area students are among the 90 winners whose artwork and inspirational quotes were selected.

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and prose to promote diversity. One way it accomplishes this is through its annual, juried international outdoor art exhibition consisting of 45 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote. The response to this year's call for artwork and inspirational quotes was staggering, with 10,761 entries pouring in from 115 countries and 48 states. Students from 204 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit; 49 of this year's winners were students, and 33 of those were from local schools. **The winning quotes and art will be showcased in the 14th-anniversary exhibit, April 1 to May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park.** *For more*

information about this exhibit or *Embracing Our Differences*, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org. **A fact sheet is attached.**

"We were very moved by the flood of entries that arrived for this year's exhibit," says Sarah Wertheimer, associate executive director of Embracing Our Differences. "The number of entries broke the 10,000 mark for the first time in the exhibit's history, beating last year's record by more than 2,400. Our art selection committee was working overtime to review each one." Wertheimer adds that her team was inspired by the high quality and "the sense of humanity that permeated this year's entries. We take heart that thousands of people who responded to our call share our mission to promote respect, acceptance and understanding in such a positive way."

According to Wertheimer, the first criterion in judging a submission is by the underlying concept or idea each represents.

"We believe now more than ever that *all* people should feel safe, be empowered and make a difference," she says. "That's our guiding philosophy. We select the quotes and artworks that best reflect that conviction." Wertheimer adds that the winning artwork is also judged on how effectively its message can be read when enlarged to billboard size. Awards are given for "Best-in-Show Adult," "Best-in-Show Student," and "People's Choice" categories, with the last chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Adult winners each receive \$1,000; students receive \$1,000 to be directed to their school's art program.

2017 ART WINNERS

The **Best-in-Show Adult** winner for art is **Dylan Caçador** of Smithfield, Rhode Island, for his work entitled "**Pulse, Pride, Hope.**" Caçador's photograph was one of many the artist took to cope with the tragedy of last June's mass shooting at the Pulse

Night Club. “After a day of silence and mourning, I turned to art and this photo was one of the resulting pieces,” says Caçador. “I decided to go back into it for this exhibition as a tribute to those we lost that night and as a reminder that there is still good in the world, and that we must never give up hope for a better tomorrow.”

Carly Stafford, a 12th-grade student at Sarasota’s Booker High School, was selected to receive the **Best-in-Show Student** award for her work, "**Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil.**" Stafford’s work turns the classic theme of the three wise monkeys on its ear—transforming it into a statement about the plight of overlooked victims of abuse. “This work is meant to represent the way society treats women who have been abused,” says Stafford. “Often, media and society turn a blind eye against victims of abuse—sometimes even blaming the victims. I made this piece to create a discussion and shed light on the issue.”

2017 QUOTE WINNER

Quotes selected for the 2017 exhibition include, “If people saw difference of opinion as the birth of new ideas rather than conflicts, the world could be a better place.” (Nauseen Tabassum, Dhaka, Bangladesh), and “Bullying is a disease, why spread it?” (Zacchary Smith, Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota). The award for the **Best-in-Show** inspirational quote was given to **Jessica Ritchie**, a sixth grader at Sarasota Middle School. Ritchie took the prize for her quote: "**If you don’t fit into a scene, always remember there’s a bigger picture.**" Ritchie’s school will receive \$1,000 for its art or creative writing department.

Wertheimer explains that the statements accompanying each artwork are vital. “Every quote provides insight into our common humanity—as well as the differences

that make us all unique,” she says. “We’re always moved by the heartfelt thought, creativity, wit and compassion the quotes represent.”

According to Embracing Our Differences founding co-chair, Dennis McGillicuddy, “The exhibit connects the dots between artistic experience and the realities of prejudice and injustice. From elementary school children to senior citizens, I hear how deeply moved and inspired they feel to be part of a kinder and more respectful world and for us, that’s what it’s all about.” He adds that more than two million people have visited the exhibit since its inception in 2004. 209,000 visitors, including more than 37,000 area students attended the exhibit in 2016 alone. “Enhancing the resources we provide to area teachers remains our top priority,” he says.

Embracing Our Differences' annual juried international art exhibit is at Sarasota's Island Park, April 1- May 31. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

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:
 - **Mastering the Art of the Quote Workshops:** This workshop is designed to take the difficult topics of diversity, prejudice and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Presented in partnership with Florida Studio Theatre,

the workshop fulfills a critical need of providing teachers with creative resources to meet Florida's Language Arts Standards.

- **Art Teacher Retreat:** This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, is designed to reinvigorate educators' teaching practices while offering new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the abstract concepts of prejudice, diversity and inclusion. Substitute teachers are provided for participating educators. **In 2016, the 30 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 9,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
- **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to deliver new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion of the value of diversity and inclusion, all lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, materials needed, activities, step-by-step instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.
- **Summer Diversity Institute (Bully Prevention in Schools):** This three-day annual event provides information and support on bullying in our schools, in cyberspace, and in our community. The workshop offers support and structures for educators to use with students in their classrooms and on the school campus. Participants work individually and in small groups based upon grade level, as well as school location, to create lesson plans and action plans that will be used within each school to provide support to both students and faculty as they encounter incidents. **48 participants from 11 schools took part in the 2016 workshop.**
- 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 Laboratory, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Sarasota

Film Festival, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. **12,469 students participated during the 2016 school year.**

- **Coexistence Clubs**, via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, provide student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 6,820 K-8 children visiting the 2016 exhibit. There are approximately 145 student docents.**

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please 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.**