

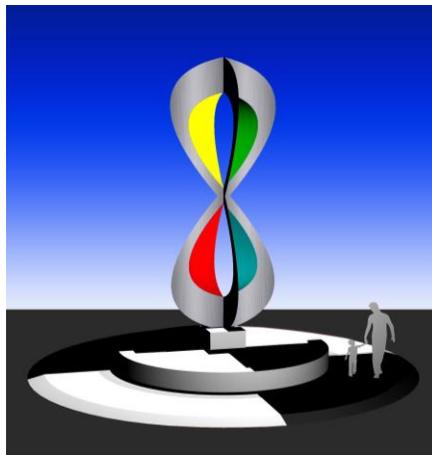
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Embracing Our Differences Announces: Nationally Acclaimed Sculptor's Work Chosen for Downtown Sarasota's One Palm Project

The Sarasota City Commission and Public Art Committee approve Embracing Our Differences' selection of a powerful work of public art by Arizona artist Blessing Hancock.



(Sarasota, FL) A public art sculpture by Arizona-based sculptor S. Blessing Hancock was approved on October 19, by the Sarasota City Commission for One Palm, a mixed-use project currently under construction at the corner of Ringling Boulevard and Palm Avenue, in downtown Sarasota. The work, entitled “Embracing Our Differences,” was approved by the city's Public Art Committee on September 23. When completed, the stainless steel, 20-foot-tall, site-specific sculpture will fulfill One Palm Avenue's public art requirement and be located in the center of the roundabout at Main Street and Orange Avenue, a site selected by the city. The piece resembles an infinity symbol and shines with the rainbow colors of the Embracing Our Differences logo, a local non-profit

best known for its annual outdoor art exhibit and educational initiatives celebrating diversity.

Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, says there's a reason for the work's title. "The One Palm project developers wanted to call attention to the work Embracing Our Differences has done promoting diversity at home and across the world. We were honored to be delegated with the selection of the piece."

Shelton explains that his organization received 39 submissions in response to a nationwide call to artists. He then gathered a panel of five judges: **Vicky Randall**, a regionally based artist and Ringling College instructor who has participated in more 180 invitational exhibitions; **Susan McLeod**, who had served on Sarasota Sculpture Center's board of directors, and on the board of trustees of the International Sculpture Center and American Craft Enterprises; **Tim Cameresi**, an artist and designer whose clients include Embracing Our Differences; **Graci McGillicuddy**, past member of the Florida Arts Council and co-founder and board member of Embracing Our Differences; and **Shannon Warren**, a Florida artist known for generously sharing her time and talent to organizations she feels can benefit from her talent, including the Child Protection Center.

"The panel narrowed the submissions to three artists, whom we invited to come to Sarasota and share their concepts," says Shelton. "Ultimately, the panel chose Blessing's work for its powerful symbolic message celebrating the infinite power of human diversity." Shelton adds that the sculpture's colors match Embracing Our Difference's brightly colored logo of red, yellow, green and blue.

Hancock owns a 14,000-square-foot fabrication facility in Tucson, which she shares with 14 other artists, designers, engineers and craftspeople, who make art out of fabricated metal, acrylic materials, LED lighting, and electronics. Hancock's own sculpture is largely site-specific; she has completed monumental sculpture projects throughout the world.

"Blessing's work captured our hearts and imaginations, says Shelton. "On top of that, she has extensive experience working with city agencies, project teams and community groups around the world, which adds value to the project."

Hancock's description of the work affirms the humanistic power of public art: "There is enormous potential for public art that is skillfully integrated with the built environment. As an artist, my goal is to find new ways to live with art—ways in which art relates to its setting, enriches the human experience and creates an atmosphere of participation, curiosity, and connection to community."

The city of Sarasota's public art program consists of works commissioned for or donated to the city, or placed on city-owned land. City zoning rules also require a public-art contribution from many large downtown construction projects. The Public Art Committee leads the selection of public art, but the Sarasota City Commission has the final say. The city's official criteria for public art include a balance of artistic styles, excellence, durability and moderate price.

"Public art not only enhances a community, it helps create community," says Shelton. "It's part of the fabric of life in the Sarasota-Manatee area. Blessing Hancock's powerful sculpture will only add to the conversation of ideas that public art creates."

Embracing Our Differences returns to Sarasota's Island Park, March 30-May 31, 2016. Submissions of art and inspirational quotes are being accepted through January 4, 2016. Applicants can learn more and submit their work online at www.embracingourdifferences.org. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710, or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

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 transformational power of the arts to educate and inspire to create a better world. Information: www.embracingourdifferences.org; 941-404-5710.

About One Palm

One Palm is Sarasota's newest luxury rental project offering easy access to Sarasota's business districts with an exciting array of entertainment, cultural attractions, world class shopping and dining. One Palm offers an unprecedented living experience with first class amenities including a roof top pool and bar, entertainment area, cyber café, coffee bar and a fitness/wellness center. Residents may choose from one, two or three bedroom models with breathtaking views of the downtown waterfront, a lush tropical courtyard or the city skyline. Each feature of the residences has been carefully selected to ensure comfort and convenience . . . from expansive balconies, tiled bathrooms with walk-in showers, front-load washers and dryers, large closets, well-appointed kitchens with designer cabinetry, granite countertops and stainless steel appliances.

