



## Embracing Our Differences Receives Tourist Development Cultural/Arts Grant for 2018 Season



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The Sarasota County Commission awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$50,383 Tourist Development Cultural/Arts grant to help fund its 2018 exhibition season, which runs March 30-May 31 in Sarasota's Island Park. For 14 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 2.5 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 of and promote diversity.

"This grant will help us continue to get the word out to audiences beyond our immediate region," says **Michael Shelton**, the executive director of Embracing Our Differences. According to Shelton, this year's exhibit attracted 211,000 visitors, of which 16 percent came from counties in Florida outside of Sarasota County; 20 percent were visitors from out of state; and four percent were international tourists.

"Embracing Our Differences is a vital part of Sarasota's rich cultural tapestry and has consistently drawn people from around the region and the country during the past 14 years," notes Shelton. "As an open-air, free exhibit placed in easy-to-access locations, it's a natural draw for visitors. We're proud that it's become a critical component of what defines our region as a sophisticated arts destination."

Shelton says that the response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotes for the 2017 exhibit resulted in record 10,761 entries pouring in from 115 countries and 48 states. Students from 229 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit; 46 of this year's winners were students, and 33 of those were from local schools. A call for art and quote submissions is ongoing now through January 9, 2018. For more information about this and Embracing Our Differences, visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).

The Arts and Cultural Alliance of Sarasota County administers almost \$2 million each year in Tourist Development Cultural/Arts grants. Grants are available to non-profit

organizations with a recognized ability to produce, present and promote cultural and arts activities that appeal to tourists.

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call **941-404-5710**, or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://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](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).