

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Embracing Our Differences Welcomes Two Riverview Students as Docent Leaders**

*Riverview High School juniors Jaclyn Colgan and Radina Bubova were appointed as presidents of the school's Co-Existence Club, a group that has trained hundreds of student docents for Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibits.*

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2009, Embracing Our Differences has partnered with Riverview High School's Co-Existence Club to train students to serve as docents for the organization's annual "Embracing Our Differences" exhibits. The docents serve as guides for thousands of area elementary and middle school students who visit the outdoor exhibit every year.

Dena Sturm, docent coordinator and teacher in the International Baccalaureate Program at Riverview High School, says that the Co-Existence Club recently appointed two junior year students, Jaclyn Colgan and Radina Bubova, as the new presidents of the club.

"We're delighted to have two very accomplished young women assume leadership roles," says Sturm. "We'll be tapping into their energy, poise and enthusiasm as we prepare for Embracing Our Differences' 12th annual outdoor exhibit March 29-May 31, 2015."

Both Colgan and Bubova juggle a number of activities while maintaining high grades in the school's challenging International Baccalaureate program. Bubova also met the challenge of learning a new language and assimilating herself into a new culture when her family moved here from Bulgaria when she was six.

The Co-Existence Club started as a way to create a more meaningful and inspiring experience for young visitors to Embracing Our Differences' annual outdoor exhibit. With guided questions and planted seeds of inquiry, the docents allow the exhibit's young visitors make realizations of their own about diversity and the acceptance of others. According to Sturm, the program has grown exponentially over the years. "We started with 12 docents in 2009," she says. "Last year, we had 115 docents who took more than 8,500 students on tours of the exhibit."

According to Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences, the Co-Existence Club and its docent program are vital components of Embracing Our Differences' education initiatives.

"These dynamic student docents make a profound impact on the young people who visit the exhibit," says Shelton. "We continue to be impressed by their eloquence and ability to tell the captivating story behind each work of art and quote. The impact of students teaching students is fantastic."

For Sturm, the docent program has its other rewards, including watching a student's personal growth as he or she goes through the program. "Countless times I've watched a shy or introverted youngster transform into a confident, solid, mature young adult," says Sturm. "The transformation is astonishing—and incredibly rewarding."

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." The exhibit will be in Sarasota's Island Park and Bradenton's Riverwalk, March 29-May 31, 2015. *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

**In addition to the docent program, Embracing Our Differences' other education programs include:**

- 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.
- An **annual teacher workshop** designed to provide teachers with a well-planned curriculum for use before, during and after their students' visit to the annual exhibit.
- An **art teacher retreat** presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, designed to reinvigorate teaching practices while inspiring teachers' art and art integration skills.

### **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.

**Captions:**

- *Riverview High student Radina Bubova (left), EOD associate executive director Sarah Wertheimer (center), and Riverview High student Jaclyn Colgan (right).*
- *Dena Sturm, EOD docent coordinator (left) with Riverview High students Radina Bubova and Jaclyn Colgan and EOD associate executive director Sarah Wertheimer (right).*