

MEDIA CONTACTS

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Embracing Our Differences Wins WEDU's "Be More Enriched" Award

The award, which was presented at the 10th annual WEDU Be More Awards ceremony in Tampa on February 12, recognizes Embracing Our Differences for its acclaimed educational outreach initiatives.

(Sarasota, Florida) Embracing Our Differences earned WEDU's 2015 "Be More Enriched Award" at the 10th annual Be More Awards ceremony on February 12 in Tampa. The organization received the honor for its acclaimed educational outreach initiatives, including annual workshops, retreats and interactive training programs for teachers, and for the organization's Make-A-Day-of-It! program, which provides free bus transportation for thousands of students and teachers to visit the outdoor exhibits and other arts and cultural venues. WEDU's "Be More Enriched Award" acknowledges cultural organizations that contribute to the spirit of adventure, exploration and education in the regional arts scene. Finalists included Florida Studio Theatre, Glazer Children's Museum, Ruth Eckerd Hall and Art Center Sarasota. Embracing Our Differences was also a finalist for the coveted Nonprofit Organization of the Year.

"For more than a decade, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and education to expand consciousness and open hearts to celebrate the

diversity of the human family," says Sarah Wertheimer, associate director of Embracing Our Differences. "We're very grateful to WEDU for recognizing our efforts."

Since 2004, downtown Sarasota's Island Park has been the backdrop for Embracing Our Differences' colorful, larger-than-life canvases integrating powerful imagery and thought-provoking messages celebrating diversity. The scale and impact of this outdoor exhibition has continued to grow since its inception. In 2013, the organization marked its tenth anniversary with an expansion of the exhibit to Riverwalk in downtown Bradenton. **The 2015 exhibition is set for March 29-May 31, 2015, in Sarasota's Island Park and Bradenton's Riverwalk.** *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:
 - **Creative Writing Workshops** presented in partnership with the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Florida Studio Theatre. These are designed to tackle the abstract topic of diversity by teaching students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. **Collectively, the 105**

teachers participating in 2014 were responsible for more than 15,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.

- o **Art Teacher Retreat:** Presented in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, this two-day retreat is focused on reinvigorating art educators' creativity while teaching new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the concepts of prejudice and diversity. **Last year, the 37 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
- o **Lesson Plans Workshops:** Designed to provide curriculum-aligned lesson plans and other resource materials. Participating teachers discover new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion on the value of diversity.
- o **New this year! The Summer Diversity Institute:** June 2015 marks the debut of this three-day retreat designed to provide educators with the skills and resources needed to foster a healthy respect for diversity in their students, and to teach the importance of safely standing up to bullying and discrimination.
- 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, The Ringling, Marie Selby Botanical Gardens, Sarasota Film Festival and the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall. **Nearly 14,000 students participated during the 2014 school year.**
- A **docent program** that, via partnerships with Riverview, Southeast and North Port high schools, provides student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 8,709 K-8 children visiting the 2014 exhibits. There are approximately 200 student docents.**

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, please call 941-404-5710 visit www.embracingourdifferences.org. To view the 2014 annual report, visit <http://embracingourdifferences.org/pdfs/2014-Annual-Report-Insert>.

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. Through the transformative power of the arts, we educate and inspire to create a better world. *For more information, visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

ABOUT WEDU PBS

WEDU is West Central Florida's leading PBS station and public media company reaching 16 counties through media platforms including on-air programming and online experiences that broaden horizons, transport and transform and open gateways to new ideas and new worlds. Financially supported by the community, the organization offers a wealth of award-winning inspirational, educational and enlightening content over a variety of media platforms including: television programming, station's website, wedu.org and various social media platforms, monthly member magazine Premiere, educational outreach activities and a myriad of special events. WEDU's focus on the local community has resulted in the station being regarded as a beacon of trust for men, women and children of every walk of life no matter their age, ethnicity or socio-economic status. WEDU is a treasured community resource; a window to the world for the homebound and a vital educational source for the youngest members of society. WEDU prides itself on its position in the Tampa Bay community as a leader, partner, informed citizen and a member of PBS, the most trusted institution in America (Harris Interactive Trust QuickQuery, January 2013). *For more information, program schedules or to support WEDU visit wedu.org; WEDU Public Media on Facebook and Twitter or call 813-254-9338.*