

## MEDIA CONTACTS

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### **4th Annual Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day Is March 2!**

**More than 11,000 students in Sarasota and Manatee counties will celebrate reading and diversity on the 113th birthday of Dr. Seuss.**

*Embracing Our Differences is partnering with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading to distribute 4,000 Dr. Seuss books and stimulate conversations about diversity, bullying, and respect in nearly 700 classrooms.*

(Sarasota-Manatee, FL) More than 11,000 elementary school students in Sarasota and Manatee counties will celebrate reading and diversity on March 2, the 113th birthday of Dr. Seuss. Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day is the brainchild of Embracing Our Differences, a local non-profit organization that created the event four years ago as part of its ongoing educational initiatives. For the second year in a row, the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is participating through funding from The Patterson Foundation, the Community Foundation of Sarasota County, the United Way of Manatee County and the Manatee Community Foundation.

According to Brenna Wilhm, education director for Embracing Our Differences, readings are scheduled for more than 630 classrooms in 65 schools across Sarasota and Manatee counties. To date, approximately 450 volunteers from the community have signed up to be readers. Over the course of the day, more than 4,000 books will be distributed in Title I schools.

"Dr. Seuss epitomizes a love of children and learning," says Wilhm. "His use of rhyme is an effective tool for teaching young children about the joys of reading and language. When we celebrate Dr. Seuss and reading, we send a clear message to our children that reading is fun and important." She adds that the books selected for this year's readings are designed to stimulate conversations regarding diversity, bullying, character education and respect for others.

"The Patterson Foundation is supporting the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's participation in Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day to raise awareness about the importance of reading proficiently by the end of third grade," said Debra Jacobs, president and CEO of The Patterson Foundation. "By connecting community volunteers with children in the Title I schools, their joy can spark a love of reading, especially when the student receives their own copy of a Dr. Seuss book to read and read again at home."

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, attracting over two million visitors since its inception. **The 2017 exhibit is set for April 1 to May 31 in Sarasota's Island Park.** *For more information about Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit [www.embracingourdifferences.org](http://www.embracingourdifferences.org).*

### **About Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading**

The Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading is a communitywide effort in Manatee and Sarasota counties to help all children, especially those from low-income families, succeed in

school and life by ensuring they read on grade level by the end of third grade. For more information, please visit [www.gradelevelreadingsuncoast.net](http://www.gradelevelreadingsuncoast.net).

### **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).

### **Photo captions:**

- *John Berteau, The Patterson Foundation Governing Board Chairman, helps kindergarten students at Wilkinson Elementary school show off the Dr. Seuss books they received on Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day 2016. More than 2,000 books were distributed to students in Title 1 schools in 2016; this year that number is expected to double. Photo Credit: Dale Smith*
- *Wilkinson Elementary School kindergarten teacher Michelle Scotese and her students show off the Dr. Seuss books they received on Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day 2016. More than 2,000 books were distributed to students in Title 1 schools in 2016; this year that number is expected to double.*