

MEDIA CONTACTS

Sarah Wertheimer ▪ 941-404-5710 ▪ sarah@embracingourdifferences.org

Su Byron ▪ 941-955-8103 ▪ subyron@verizon.net

Gulf Coast Community Foundation Awards Major Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$40,000 grant will help fund the organization's 2016 exhibition season, which runs March 28-May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park.

(Sarasota, FL) Gulf Coast Community Foundation recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$40,000 grant to help fund its 2016 exhibition season, which runs March 28-May 31, 2016, in Sarasota's Island Park. 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."

"We're honored to be awarded this major grant," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. He adds that the funds will empower EOD's ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives. "This opens up a world of possibilities for thousands of students and educators throughout our area," says Shelton. He notes that the grant will be directed to Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops and retreats, which provide area educators with skills, strategies and resources to provide curricula and lesson plans relating to art appreciation, character building and diversity education.

"Since 2004, more than 900 teachers have participated in our workshops," says Shelton. "That translates to one of our most important missions. We're teaching students to turn away from destructive attitudes and tap into their creativity and humanity. They experience new ways to learn and succeed. For some kids, it's a true breakthrough. The joy they feel is written all over their faces. It's always inspiring."

Shelton says that the grant will also provide vital resources for EOD'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.

For 12 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. For the 2015 exhibition, the organization received nearly 6,500 total artworks and statements from people representing 42 states and 80 countries, including Australia, Portugal, Haiti, Israel, Iran, Kuwait, Canada and Italy. Students from 118 elementary, middle and high schools submitted both art and quotes.

"We're all in this together," says Shelton. "Gulf Coast Community Foundation shares Embracing Our Differences' deep commitment to the human family."

For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.

About Gulf Coast Community Foundation

Together with its donors, Gulf Coast Community Foundation transforms our region through bold and proactive philanthropy. Gulf Coast is a public charity that was created in 1995 through the sale of the Venice Hospital. Since then, it has become the philanthropic home of more than 600 families who have established charitable funds there and has invested more than \$208 million in

grants in the areas of health and human services, education, civic and economic development, arts and culture, and the environment. Learn more at GulfCoastCF.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 arts as a catalyst for creating awareness and promoting, throughout our community, the value of diversity, the benefits of inclusion and the significance of the active rejection of hatred and prejudice.