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Gulf Coast Community Foundation Awards Major Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$40,000 grant will help fund the organization's 2015 exhibition season, which runs March 29-May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park and Bradenton's Riverwalk.

(Sarasota, FL) Gulf Coast Community Foundation recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$40,000 grant to help fund its 2015 exhibition season, which runs March 29-May 31, in Sarasota's Island Park, and at the Riverwalk in downtown Bradenton. 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 deeply honored to be awarded this major grant," says Michael Shelton, executive director of Embracing Our Differences. Shelton explains that the funds will also empower EOD's ongoing educational outreach programs and initiatives. "These funds open up a world of possibilities for thousands of students and educators in our area," says Shelton, adding that the grant will be directed to Embracing Our Differences' annual teacher workshops and retreats, which provide area teachers with skills, strategies and resources to inspire their students to explore the concepts of prejudice and diversity.

"Since 2004, more than 700 teachers have participated in our workshops, which represent one of the most important aspects of our efforts—to positively impact the lives of students," says Shelton. "Not only do students explore effective ways to tap into their creativity; they also experience new ways to learn and succeed in the world."

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 11 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 39 billboard-sized works of art and accompanying quotes. For the 2014 exhibit, the organization received more than 6,000 artworks and statements from people representing 52 countries and 44 states. Students from 126 elementary, middle and high schools comprised 65 percent of the submissions. The 2014 exhibits saw a record number of visitors, with 293,000 people who visited one or both exhibits.

"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 welcomed more than 500 charitable funds established by generous donors and invested more than \$145 million in the community through

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.

