



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Oversized Art Exhibit Celebrating Diversity Arrives on Sarasota Bay Front April 1

March 13, 2012 – Sarasota, FL – Embracing Our Differences® will return to Island Park on Sarasota's Bay front for its 9th consecutive year on April 1. Visitors can expect to see 39 billboards featuring artwork and written expressions that celebrate diversity produced by professional artists, writers, students and from international submissions.

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.

More than 4,502 submissions poured in from 40 states and 53 different countries. Schools from around the world submitted artwork representing a 48% increase from last year. Embracing Our Differences' panel of judges narrowed down the submissions, and the art selection committee voted on the final show pieces.

"Choosing the final art is increasingly difficult every year," says Executive Director Michael Shelton. "With thousands of inspiring submissions, our mission is universal and resonates with so many different cultures and nationalities. Their passion for our purpose comes across in the art and quotations we receive."

Judges were impressed with artwork and quotations from local schools in this year's exhibit. Art submissions from Phillippi Shores Elementary, SCTI, Lakewood Ranch High, North Port High, The GAP School, Port Charlotte High, and Booker High School were selected to be featured. Quotations were selected from Pine View, Sarasota Middle School, Riverview High School, Booker Middle School, Goldie Feldman Academy, The Out-of-Door Academy, Carlos E. Haile

Middle School in Bradenton, and Laurel Nokomis School. Student submissions were received from such distant places as Australia, China, Greece, India, Japan, Romania, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and many other countries. 43% of the submissions selected for display in 2012 were submitted by students.

Last year's exhibit broke the record for attendance with 277,000 people viewing the exhibit, and 18,000 of those attendees were students from Sarasota and Manatee Counties.

This year, Embracing Our Differences will apply QR technology into the art panels to further enhance the educational experience for exhibit guests. Select artists submitted short videos about the inspiration behind their art and its meaning. Visitors with smart phones or portable tablets can scan the QR Codes which link to online content, such as videos and podcasts, that enrich the exhibit experience.

Buzz about this year's Embracing Our Differences exhibit is also going viral. Embracing Our Differences Facebook and Twitter feeds receive posts from hopeful artists expressing their enthusiasm for the exhibit and anticipation of being chosen to participate in the showcase.

One artist from New York posted her submission on her Facebook page, and wrote, "Fingers crossed that my work is included!" A young girl in Texas let her Facebook friends know that her quote was selected to be featured in the 2012 exhibit. Another artist in New York tweeted that she wishes she lived closer to Sarasota, so she could see her artwork blown up to billboard-size.

The most fundamental aspect of Embracing Our Differences is the rich educational and cultural experience that area schools receive. Teachers in Sarasota and Manatee County can apply for free transportation and request Riverview High School International Baccalaureate students to serve as docent for field trips to the exhibit. Through partnerships with local non-profit organizations such as Sarasota Film Festival, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, Florida Studio Theater, Ringling Museum, and Selby Gardens among others, Embracing Our Differences leverages the field trip experience for participants by enabling them to visit twice as many cultural attractions. This collaborative effort is unique on Florida's Gulf Coast.

Since 2004, more than 94,000 students have participated in our various education initiatives including 19,695 students and 127 schools in 2011 alone. Embracing Our Differences continues to be one of the largest education programs in Sarasota County.

For more information on Embracing Our Differences, and how to get involved, visit www.EmbracingOurDifferences.org.

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