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“Enriching Lives Through Diversity” Embracing Our Differences Announces Winners of 2019 Outdoor Art Exhibit

Exhibit is January 19-March 15 in Bayfront Park

The organization received 11,791 entries from 111 countries and 44 states in submissions for the 16th annual outdoor art exhibit celebrating diversity. Anna Wright, a seventh-grade student at Johnson Middle School in Bradenton, received the Best-in-Show Student. Seth Morano, a 12th-grade student at Booker High School, won Best-in-Show inspirational quote. The Best in Show Adult artwork went to Anna Zigel of Ukraine.

(Sarasota, FL) Since 2004, Embracing Our Differences has used the power of art and prose to promote diversity. One way it accomplishes this is through its annual, juried international outdoor art exhibition consisting of 45 billboard-sized works of art, each accompanied by an inspirational quote. The response to the call for artwork and inspirational quotes was record-breaking, with 11,791 entries pouring in from 111 countries and 44 states. Students from 239 schools around the world submitted artwork or quotes to the juried exhibit. **The winning quotes and art will be showcased in the 16th annual exhibit, January 19 through March 15, in Sarasota’s Bayfront Park.** *For more information about this exhibit or Embracing Our Differences, call 941-404-5710 or visit www.embracingourdifferences.org.*

Sarah Wertheimer is the executive director of Embracing Our Differences. She notes that a host of global creators answered this year's call for submissions. "Once again, thousands of people used the power of art and language to celebrate the values of diversity, inclusion and respect," she says. "The art selection team was deeply impressed by the candor and artistic quality of their work."

According to Wertheimer, the flood of submissions is proof that artists worldwide strongly believe that all people should feel safe and empowered to be their true selves. "That's our guiding philosophy," she says. "We select the quotes and artwork that best reflect it. We can't create billboards for every heartfelt statement we receive. But it's thrilling to see how many people share our core beliefs." Wertheimer adds that submissions are judged by the truth and clarity of their core idea. "What works is a blend of medium and message," she says. "It's not enough to have something to say. Your message should engage the viewer when the art is blown up to billboard size. The best submissions work on many levels. They're open to multiple interpretations and make you stop and think."

Awards are given for "Best-in-Show Adult," "Best-in-Show Student," and "People's Choice" categories, with the last chosen by visitors to the exhibit. Adult winners each receive \$1,000; students receive \$1,000, which they split with their school's art program.

2019 ART WINNERS

The **Best-in-Show Adult** winner for art is for "One World, One Heart" by Anna Zigel of Boyarka, Ukraine. Her vibrant, colorful work depicts a rainbow of women around the globe. Each has a distinct identity, and each joins in solidarity with her

sisters. The artist says her intentions were to show that “every person on the planet has a loving heart. All people are beautiful in their own way, different on the outside and the same on the inside.”

Anna Wright, a seventh-grade student from Johnson Middle School in Bradenton, won **Best in Show Student** for her painting, “United in a Quest for Knowledge.” This work contrasts two sets of students in vastly different classrooms. On one side, western-clothed students learn algebra in a modern classroom. On the other side, impoverished children learn the same lesson in shabby squalor. “All my life I’ve taken things for granted, but when I was introduced to Embracing Our Differences, my eyes were opened,” says Wright. “I learned about places that are very different from my home. Everyone is different, and the meaning of different is so much more than a word to me. We all come from different backgrounds, yet we can be friends. We have different beliefs, but we have things in common. I want to embrace that and show that we are all different, but we can unite to make a better world.” Wright’s teacher is Jeannie Mendez. Wright will receive \$500 and Johnson Middle School’s art department will receive \$500.

2019 QUOTE WINNER

The award for the **Best-in-Show** inspirational quote was given to Seth Morano, a 12th-grade student at Book High School, for his quote “Have the courage to stand up for what’s right and have the wisdom to sit down and talk.” Morano will receive \$500 and Booker High School will receive \$500 for its art or creative writing department.

Wertheimer explains that the statements accompanying each artwork are vital. “Every quote provides insight into our common humanity—as well as the differences

that make us all unique,” she says. “We’re always moved by the heartfelt thought, creativity, wit and compassion the quotes represent.”

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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:**

- **Mastering the Art of the Quote Workshops:** This workshop is designed to take the difficult topics of diversity, prejudice and inclusion and teach students to express themselves through critical thinking and creative writing. Presented in partnership with Florida Studio Theatre, the workshop fulfills a critical need of providing teachers with creative resources to meet Florida's Language Arts Standards.
- **Art Teacher Retreat:** This two-day seminar, developed in partnership with Ringling College of Art and Design, is designed to reinvigorate educators' teaching practices while offering new skills and strategies for inspiring students to explore the abstract concepts of prejudice, diversity and inclusion. Substitute teachers are provided for participating educators. **In 2018, the 41 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 13,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
- **Lesson Plan Workshops:** Designed to deliver new and innovative methods of engaging students in critical thinking while creating the perfect environment for a rich discussion of the value of diversity and inclusion, all lesson plans identify the relevant curriculum standards, educational objectives, materials needed, activities, step-by-step instructional strategies and assessment guidelines.
 - **Summer Diversity Institute:** This annual workshop provides information and support for the creation of a respectful and civil classroom culture, while offering tools and structures for educators to use with students in their

classrooms and on the school campus. Participants work individually and in small groups based upon grade level, as well as school location, to create lesson plans and action plans that will be used within each school to provide support to both students and faculty.

Other programs include:

- 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 Laboratory, Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, The Ringling, Sarasota Film Festival, and Marie Selby Botanical Gardens. **6,995 students participated during the 2018 school year.**
- **Embracing Dr. Seuss' Differences Day:** For the past five years, Embracing Our Differences has organized hundreds of volunteers to read Dr. Seuss books to Sarasota and Manatee county students giving them the experience and clear message that reading is fun and inclusion is important. Our partnership with the Suncoast Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and an anonymous family foundation provided more than 7,000 books for classrooms and individual students for their home libraries. **6,700 students, from 47 schools and 396 classrooms, participated in the 2018 event.**
- **Coexistence Clubs**, via partnerships with Riverview, Booker and North Port high schools, provide student-led docent tours of the annual exhibit. **Student docent tours were provided to 6,450 K-8 children visiting the 2018 exhibit. There were 153 student docents.**

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

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.

Photo captions:

- **EOD 2019: Best in Show, Adult:** *“One World, One Heart”* by Anna Zigel of Boyarka, Ukraine
- **EOD 2019: Best in Show, Student:** *“United in a Quest for Knowledge”* by Anna Wright, a seventh-grade student from Johnson Middle School in Bradenton.