

MEDIA CONTACTS

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The Junior League of Sarasota Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences

The \$3,500 grant will help fund the organization's Classroom Art Integration Project and positively affect 1,200 Sarasota County elementary students.

(Sarasota, FL) The Junior League of Sarasota recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$3,500 grant to help fund the organization's Classroom Art Integration Project. According to Sarah Wertheimer, Embracing Our Differences' executive director, the project offers the opportunity for more than 1,200 elementary school students to engage in critical thinking and visual inquiry. The initiative also extends leadership opportunities for 125 high school students who will work directly with the students and their teachers.

Wertheimer explains that the Classroom Art Integration Project is an extension of Embracing Our Difference's celebrated high school docent program. "Our docent program with Riverview High School continues to be the jewel in our crown with more than 150 students participating this past school year," she says. "Under the guidance of faculty advisor Dena Sturm, these students serve as guides for thousands of area elementary, middle and high school students who visit Embracing Our Difference's outside exhibit every year—inspiring the younger students to more fully comprehend the messages delivered through the art and quotes."

For the Classroom Art Integration Project, the student docents will visit Sarasota County elementary schools and engage the younger students in conversations about the importance of diversity and inclusion. The older students will then work with the elementary school students to create their own works of art inspired by the messages of Embracing Our Differences. These young students will then share their artwork with their classmates and express what it means to each of them. At the end of the session, the high school docents will honor the elementary school students with their own "EOD Docent Pin" making each one an honorary docent and showing them that they, too, can be role models and make a difference in their schools and communities.

"We're very grateful to Junior League of Sarasota for recognizing the importance of this project," says Wertheimer. "Arts integration promotes the importance of culturally responsive classrooms, while strengthening innovative and creative thinking and enhancing students' cultural awareness, acceptance and appreciation of others. Art helps celebrate and interpret differences while bridging communities and creating places of understanding and acceptance."

Since 2004, EOD's outdoor art exhibit, celebrating the theme of "enriching lives through diversity," showcases the art and words of thousands of artists and writers from around the world, including hundreds of area-based students and educators. 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. The 2019 exhibition is runs January 19 through March 15 at Bayfront Park in downtown Sarasota.

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

Photo caption: L to R: Kelly Fernandez (JLS Executive VP); Amy Sankes (JLS President); Sarah Wertheimer (Embracing our Differences Executive Director); Ashley Najjar (JLS Community Grants Vice Chair); Laura Mayhew-Purcell (JLS Community Grants Chair); Heather Ferrigno (Community Council VP)

About the Junior League of Sarasota

The Junior League of Sarasota is an organization of women committed to promoting voluntarism, developing the potential of women, and improving the community through the effective action and leadership of trained volunteers. Its purpose is exclusively educational and charitable. In 2017, the League celebrated 60 years of service in Sarasota.

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.