

TAMPA BAY NEWSWIRE

Rotary Club of Sarasota Foundation Awards Grant to Embracing Our Differences for its Outstanding Education Initiatives

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The \$5,000 grant will help fund the organization's educational outreach programs and initiatives.

(Sarasota, FL) The Rotary Club of Sarasota Foundation recently awarded Embracing Our Differences a \$5,000 grant to help fund and enhance its education outreach initiatives.

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.

Also crucial to the organization's mission are its ongoing education initiatives. Presented in partnership with the regional school district and nationally recognized educators, these programs positively impact the lives of thousands of area teachers and students every year. These include annual workshops and retreats provide diversity curricula for area educators, free bus transportation for students and teachers to visit area cultural venues, and student docent programs in high schools.

With more than 780 teachers and 42,000 students participating in the organization's exhibit and educational programs in 2017 alone, Embracing Our Differences continues to lead as one of the largest education programs in southwest Florida.

"We're grateful to the Rotary Club of Sarasota Foundation for its commitment to providing resources for thousands of area students and educators to play a leadership role in transforming lives and building stronger communities," says Sarah Wertheimer, Embracing Our Differences' associate executive director.

“Since 2004, more than 1,300 area educators have participated in our workshops,” says Wertheimer. “This grant will help us provide more teachers with the best practices necessary to create safe environments that inspire our youth to develop a sense of identity and confidence, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, color or religion. For both educators and students, this new awareness can be life-changing.”

Wertheimer adds that the grant will also provide vital resources for Embracing Our Differences’ Make-A-Day-of-It! program, which funds bus transportation for thousands of students and teachers to visit the outdoor exhibits and other arts and cultural venues.

Embracing Our Differences’ annual juried international art exhibit returns to Sarasota’s Island Park, April 4 to June 1.

Aside from the annual outdoor exhibition, Embracing Our Differences’ educational 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 2017, the 44 participating art teachers were collectively responsible for more than 12,000 students from Sarasota and Manatee counties.**
- **Lesson Plans 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 three-day 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. **12,703 students participated during the 2017 school year.**

- **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 5,578 K-8 children visiting the 2017 exhibit. There are approximately 150 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.