



**For Immediate Release**

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**Three Year Grant of Nearly \$150,000 Awarded to Realize Bradenton to Advance an  
“Informed” and “Engaged” Bradenton**

*Knight Foundation funds an innovative project that connects art and history in public art and social media with youth driving the conversations about the city’s past, present, and future*

BRADENTON (February 14, 2011) The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation through its Donor Advised Fund and in partnership with the Manatee Community Foundation has awarded \$149,639 to Realize Bradenton to fund **Project Art Connects**. This grant is matched by \$286,944 of local funds and in-kind donations to support the \$436,583 initiative.

**Project Art Connects** will develop a core of young people who will inform and engage the community with downtown Bradenton’s future by connecting art and history in public places and social media.

At a time when civic engagement of youth is increasingly important, students will examine the people and various factors that have shaped the downtown Bradenton area. Their research will include on-site investigations, historical documents, museum exhibitions, and oral history stories. Students will record their newly gained knowledge, ideas, and envisioned improvements in both words and images during classroom and hands-on experiences at South Florida Museum, Manatee Village Historical Park, and the Manatee riverfront.

Because art and history are mutually supportive in providing access to the past and promoting dialogue about the present and future, the students’ work will be integrated into murals, banners, and/or mosaics for a history-inspired art walk on the downtown Riverwalk. This student-inspired public art will attract residents and visitors to the Riverwalk and educate about the rich history and heritage of the City of Bradenton.

The students’ learning journey and their findings will be available online in a continuous blog that invites other youth, civic leaders, and community members to converse about critical local issues and opportunities. The **Project Art Connects** blog and videos will be accessible from the Riverwalk on WIFI access installed by Bright House Networks. Citizens will be encouraged to add their stories and ideas to the project blog on location at the Riverwalk, as well as access the research and drawings that inspired the public art.

To further extend the public outreach, the project will be documented by METV, and IPPL will conduct programs that examine the leadership of youth and how public art and social media can promote civic conversations that serve as agents of social good.

**Project Art Connects** reflects the mission of Realize Bradenton to promote economic development by attracting greater numbers of people to visit the downtown through collaborative events, strategic partnerships, and creative media strategies.

Realize Bradenton’s project has attracted eight significant strategic partners—The Bradenton Downtown Development Authority, School District of Manatee County, South Florida Museum, Manatee Village Historical Park, Bright House Networks, Manatee Educational Television (METV), Institute for Public Policy and Leadership at the University of South Florida Sarasota-Manatee (IPPL), and the Manatee Education Foundation.

Realize Bradenton Board Chair, Vernon DeSear, understands the far-reaching impact of **Project Art Connects** from his perspective as a Board member of both the Bradenton Downtown Development Authority and Tourist and Development Council: “Project Art Connects will advance the livability of Bradenton, which is key to attracting more tourists, businesses, and developers to downtown. Additionally, an enhanced Riverwalk with public art will competitively position downtown Bradenton as a nationally recognized, vibrant riverfront destination where arts, culture, and heritage create a friendly, livable, and creative community for all.”

Marilyn Howard, Executive Director of the Manatee Community Foundation, is enthusiastic about **Project Art Connects**, because “Funding from the Knight Foundation validates that Bradenton can be a model for other cities showing how youth, art, and online strategies inform and engage residents to produce positive community impact.”

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**About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation**

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation advances journalism in the digital age and invests in the vitality of communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Knight Foundation focuses on projects that promote informed, engaged communities and lead to transformational change. For more, visit [www.knightfoundation.org](http://www.knightfoundation.org)

**About the Manatee Community Foundation**

Since 1998, the Manatee Community Foundation has been “connecting the charitable interests of our donors with the ongoing needs of the community.” Grants awarded from our donor funds support broad areas of charitable interests. Make a difference For Good. For Ever.® Establish a permanent charitable fund at the Manatee Community Foundation. For more, visit [www.manateecf.org](http://www.manateecf.org)

**About Realize Bradenton**

Realize Bradenton is a non-profit organization that builds community and promotes economic development so that downtown Bradenton is one of the best riverfront communities in the United States. For more, visit [www.RealizeBradenton.com](http://www.RealizeBradenton.com)