

*From Service Comes Growth: Neosho, The Beloved*

*Community* is a 9 x 6 foot mural designed by Teri Diggs. It was painted on panels in 2026 by artists and public servants of Neosho with NovaColor Acrylic paint. The mural was installed onto a brick wall located at the main entrance to Neosho's George Washington Carver Elementary School.

Light blue sky fills the top of the mural with four fluffy white clouds scattered across it. A cluster of five green trees are seen at the horizon line on the mural's right side.

Stretched across the grassy part of the horizon line we see the following in white capital letters: "You must learn all you can then go back out into the world and give your learning back to the people." — Mariah Watkins."

Mariah Watkins served the community of Neosho as a midwife during the late 1800's and early 1900's. Seeking an education, young George Washington Carver arrived in Neosho after walking from Diamond, Missouri and took refuge for the night in a barn owned by Andrew and Mariah Watkins. Mariah, a former slave, showed empathy to Carver's situation and offered him a place to live in her home while he attended the Neosho Colored School. During this time, Mariah encouraged Carver's pursuit of education and instilled in him a solid work ethic.

In the middle foreground, we see George Washington Carver standing in a small peanut patch holding a peanut plant with green leaves, peanuts, and roots all visible up to the viewer in his left hand. He has on a light grey, page boy cap, a matching grey suit, a white, button-down shirt,

black tie, dark red vest, and black dress shoes. A small, purple flower is tucked into his suit's left lapel.

Brown rounded mounds of dirt of the peanut patch have many green, leafy sprouts and a wooden sign that labels it "Peanut Patch" in black, painted letters. Carver became famous for his work with peanuts and agriculture. He shaped the future of farming by developing innovative crop-rotation methods for conserving nutrients in soil. Light green grass fills the space around him and in-between the other designs of the mural.

Moving left from Carver, we see the abundant spring waters of Neosho flowing. Two rainbow trout swim in the light blue waters. Stripes of green, blue, and pink run laterally across their bodies, while their underbellies are

yellow, and fins are speckled pink. They represent the active work of the Neosho National Fish Hatchery which is the oldest, continually operating fish hatchery in the nation having been established in 1888. The employees of the hatchery work daily to promote conservation of natural resources. A stone wall runs along the top edge of the spring representing the WPA (Works Progress Administration) era project to build pond walls during the 1930's which are still in use today at the Hatchery. The Hatchery represents the public servants of the federal government in our community.

Continuing up the left side of the mural, we find a red-brick planter filled with native purple and blue flowers blooming. Two butterflies - one orange and one blue - flutter around the planter's blooms. Continuing up, we come to a white,

four-leveled, bee box a-buzz with bees building their community. This represents the community builder staff of the Harry S. Truman Coordinating Council. They serve the area by helping secure funds needed to build improved roadways, ensure safe waterways, and supply first responders with vital equipment. The native flowers represent the growth the council brings to the community.

To the right of the bee box, the spring waters continue to wind up the mural. We come to a male mallard swimming near the stone bridge of Neosho's Big Spring Park. The duck's green head and brown and white feathered body are pointed away from the small rapids below the bridge. Ducks are a signature of Big Spring Park as they call the waters their home. This tableau represents the City of Neosho employees who work to make Neosho a place to

raise a family, make memories, and enjoy nature. Large grey stones are seen on either side of the bridge and to the left side of the mural where the spring flows out of our view.

Moving up to the left background of the mural, we see the Newton County Courthouse standing tall with a green, leafy tree tucked behind its left side. The building is grey with multiple boxy structures making up the Art Deco style building. The top of the building's facade reads "NEWTON COUNTY" in chiseled letters decorated with three, stacked horizontal lines on each side of the words. The front has brown, double doors with a large window above them and four, smaller windows that frame the doors and large window. We see many more windows, in orderly lines, across the courthouse's exterior. Built in 1936 as a WPA

project, this is the seat of government in Newton County. Each person working within these stone walls have been called to serve the community. It is within these walls that elections are coordinated, public records are maintained, and the judicial system works.

Below the courthouse, we see a road start at the right side of the Big Spring Park bridge and run down to the bottom-left corner of the mural. Found on this road, at the mural's center, is the Neosho Police Department's community outreach vehicle, a vintage Volkswagen Beetle, with an oversized service cap resting on top. The vehicle is mostly white, but its front and back fenders are blue, and on the side are two horizontal, blue lines with a white stripe running along the middle. "Neosho Police" is painted in white letters over these three stripes. The oversized

service cap is dark blue adorned with a silver stripe and silver badge above its bill. The badge reads “Neosho Police MO.” This represents the dedication that each first responder has to serve Neosho and their hope for a peaceful and safe community. As the road continues, we see names on a mixture of vibrant colors painted on top of the road or Senior Hill, as it is referred to in Neosho.

Senior Hill represents the service of the school district and how teachers work daily to ensure students achieve educational goals, year after year, so they can reach graduation and enjoy the tradition of “painting the hill!” Each May, before graduation, seniors of Neosho High School paint their names on the road behind the school in celebration of graduating. The names on this mural’s

Senior Hill double as the signatures of the public servants who helped paint this mural.

Flanking the Senior Hill section of the road are two, wooden flower boxes filled with bright red Begonias. Both boxes have white letters painted on them: the one on the right reads “FLOWER BOX WELCOME” and the one on the left reads “Neosho CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.”

These represent the service of the Neosho Area Chamber of Commerce, established in 1949, which works to increase interest in the area’s businesses and further growth in our community. The Neosho Area Chamber of Commerce sponsors the “Bring Back the Bloom” program each spring to usher in a bright future of growth for Neosho while honoring past endeavors to better the community. Since the 1950s, Neosho has been well-

known locally as *The Flower Box City*. In 1955, the town received a grant from the New York Community Trust for a civic beautification project. Local companies donated lumber to build 200 wooden flower boxes, 400 wooden barrels for container gardens, and town nurseries supplied plants at reduced rates. This effort earned Neosho a coveted All-America City Award from *Look* magazine and the National Municipal League in 1957.

Moving slightly above the Senior Hill section of the road, we see a blooming Dogwood tree. Since the 1960s, Neosho's Rotary Club has hosted the annual Dogwood Tour. The Dogwood's slender, brown trunk branches out and is full of green leaves and blooms of pink with yellow centers. This tree represents the deep roots of service in Neosho by civic and charitable organizations, while the

tree's blossoms represent the many different organizations that serve the community of Neosho.

In January 2026, the Harry S. Truman Coordinating Council received a ServMO grant to create a community-wide, volunteer project that honored Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his legacy of service. Dr. King believed in the idea of a "Beloved Community" where all were willing to serve others and work towards equitable conditions. The goal of this project was to show that every act of giving fosters growth through a mural inspired by Neosho's public servants and painted, in part, by community volunteers. George Washington Carver's life was defined by a profound commitment to public service - particularly in improving the lives of farmers. Dr. King used Carver's life and work to illustrate the creative power of people

even under difficult circumstances. This mural showcases the many types of public service that have been at the heart of Neosho since its founding.