

BRINGING PUBLIC ART TO NEWPORT

IDEAS AND PROPOSALS FROM STUDENTS
IN NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY'S
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

Two offices at Northern Kentucky University, the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement and the School of the Arts (SOTA), have collaborated with the City of Newport over the past two years to produce public art projects in Newport. Some of those projects, including murals on Southgate Street and a wall sculpture in the Northern Kentucky Scholar House, already are completed and installed. Additional projects are contemplated, including those described in this booklet.

“Public works of art are prominent in cities and places throughout the world and the United States. Unlike private works of art, viewing public art is free and nonexclusive; you just have to be where the art is. Public works of art aim to enrich the community by evoking meaning and purpose in the public settings.”

— Kevin Irons, Ourpastimes.com



Four murals created by an NKU painting class depict Newport's history, including this one celebrating the Southgate Street School. More about the murals, Pages 7-8.

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ART AS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Whether it was the colorfully decorated flying pigs of the Big Pig Gig, the murals that decorate many of Cincinnati’s downtown buildings or the floodwall murals in Covington that capture northern Kentucky’s history, public art brings our community together. It can be fun. It can be informative. It can be interactive.

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

The Southgate Street School in Newport is an inspirational place. Inside its brick walls, generations of African American children were given primary and middle school instruction from the years immediately after the Civil War until the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the desegregation of public schools in 1954 with the Brown vs. Board of Education decision.

The teachers at the Southgate Street School wanted their students to dream without limits. An education could make those dreams real.

After the school closed, the African American community arranged to save the building. Using it for the next 60 years as a Masonic Lodge, they preserved a building

that symbolized a history too often lost. The Masons still meet on the top floor. But since 2017, the two classrooms on the first floor have housed a municipal museum, telling the school’s history and also the city’s.

In early 2018, Newport’s historic preservation officer, Scott Clark, met with a team from Northern Kentucky University to talk about the city’s vision to create an arts corridor in and around the school. How could NKU students and classes contribute to this vision?

Students already had helped with the museum. Its initial exhibits were designed by an NKU public history class. A public relations class designed a PR campaign, a business informatics class



Robert Ingguls, now in his 80s, attended the Southgate Street School as a boy. He and another alumnus, Viranda Dodd, spoke to the art classes before the students started their projects.

THE CLASSES
ARTC 341: Ceramic Sculpture, taught by JeeEun Lee, produced public art proposals for the museum and the surrounding arts corridor.
ARTS 362: Special Topics in Spatial Arts: Public Art, taught by Steven Finke, produced public art proposals for the museum and the surrounding arts corridor.
ARTP 333: Materials and Techniques in Painting, taught by Kevin Muent, produced murals for Southgate Street, interpreting Newport history.

provided budgeting models, a communication class outlined ways to include community voices and a documentary class is telling the school’s story.

Connecting NKU to the arts corridor grew from the seeds of those engagements and, in the Fall 2018 semester, three NKU School of the Arts (SOTA) classes got started. One class painted murals interpreting Newport’s history. Those were installed in February 2019. The other two classes produced project concepts that a panel of judges reviewed. Four of those projects were further developed and are included in this booklet as proposals for public art on Southgate Street.

This booklet provides a quick look at each proposal. You can visit the project website to see more detail at nku.edu/newportpublicart.

ORIGINS OF AN IDEA

At NKU, the Scripps Howard Center and SOTA have worked together to create art for public places frequently in recent years.

Our first project was in 2013 and designed for public space on the NKU campus. A second project produced sculptures that incorporated Little Free Libraries for installation in Covington and Newport.

Those projects became the blueprint for the collaboration with the Southgate Street School and the Newport arts corridor. Once again, art students created models, a panel of judges reviewed those and then selected projects that might be built to scale and installed.



As part of her project model, SOTA student Megan Stieritz made a bust of Virinda Dodd, who attended Southgate School as a child.



Katrina Campbell’s sculpture “Renewal” was unveiled in 2013 and became the blueprint for public art projects created by SOTA classes.

OUR JUDGES

Here are the judges who reviewed the ARTC 341 and ARTS 362 projects. There were 28 projects submitted.

- Scott Clark**, preservation officer, City of Newport
- Ed Davis**, neighborhood leader, Newport
- Melvin Grier**, photojournalist, Cincinnati
- Robert Ingguls**, Southgate Street School alumnus, Newport
- Lisa Jamenson**, professor & program head, NKU Visual Arts
- Jill Morenz**, Catalytic Development Funding, Covington
- Josh Tunning**, ReNewport, Newport
- Sheila Williams**, novelist, Newport

GETTING STARTED

To get the arts projects started, NKU art student Michea Supinger

created a scale model of the Southgate Street School and the surroundings so that her fellow students could scale their projects to the environment where they could eventually be installed.

VALUE PROPOSITION

NKU SOTA Professors Steven Finke and JeeEun Lee taught the classes that resulted in these public art proposals for Newport. Here are their reflections on public art and its value in teaching their students:

Public art has been used to exalt and demonize, to welcome and create fear. It has created beauty for some and an eyesore for others. Contemporary practice in public art is diverse and our students are exposed to examples that range across sanctioned, guerilla, commercial and moral activities.

The benefit of public art is the enlivening of space through beauty, storytelling and creative discourse. An underlying but equally powerful benefit is it provides evidence of human creativity and the inspiration to pursue dreams.

A contemporary practice in public art implies a relationship between the artist and the community for which the work is intended. This relationship allows the individual creativity of the artist to address the needs and desires of those who will



At the ceramics and sculpture studio on campus, judges scored 28 project proposals for public art in Newport. Student Michea Supinger's scale model of the Southgate Street School (detail below) was on display so the judges could see how the projects might fit the surroundings.



OUR PROFESSORS

Steven Finke
Associate professor, visual arts (1992); MFA, University of Miami, 1982; BFA, Ohio University, 1980.

JeeEun Lee
Assistant professor, Art (2017); MFA, Syracuse University, 2013; MFA, Ewha Womans University, 2002; BFA, Ewha Womans University, 1998.



live with the artwork. Art that arises out of community is going to be more successful than art imposed upon a community.

To initiate a relationship with Newport and understand how art could have positive impact, our students considered history, environment, beautification, green space, transportation and Newport's citizens.

We met with representatives of civics organizations, businesses, individual citizens and NKU professors researching Newport from various disciplines.

Twenty-eight students designed projects based on this information and their own artistic interests. The resulting projects were diverse, ranging from artistic bicycle racks, benches, ceramic murals and solar powered phone charging stations to sculptures honoring local heroes.

A jury of Newport representatives chose five projects that they wished to see realized in the city.

The practice of public art is not for all artists. These students have demonstrated a desire and ability to use their artistry for the good of the community. Satisfying their need to do something positive in the world is to their benefit as well. Doing this through their art helps grow the local culture.



FIVE PROJECTS SELECTED

The jurors chose five projects that they wished to see realized in the city. One of the five projects was purchased with a grant and installed inside the Southgate Street School, where it can be viewed now. Produced by Seanna Bryant, a studio arts major who is graduating this year, it interprets Newport's storied history in ceramic and through the motif of a jazz album's cover.

INTERPRETING NEWPORT'S HISTORY IN MURALS



Professor Kevin Muentz's students painted murals that were unveiled across from the Southgate Street School during ceremonies on Feb. 5, 2019.

THE MURAL TEAM Professor Kevin Muentz's painting class, ARTP 333:

Elizabeth Anneken;
Nia Burney; Kathleen Curry;
Paul Dieterlen; Taylor Draud;
Gina Erardi; Madeline
Filimonov; Elizabeth Frietch;
Dedra Grooms; John Kohls;
Kailey Maggard; Sherman
Parnell; Cooper Sodana; and
Tia Tobergte.

Art Professor Kevin Muentz's students began their engagement with Newport's art corridor and the Southgate Street School in a large, open painting studio in NKU's School of the Arts. The project itself began with penciled drawings on large plywood panels.

The drawings depicted scenes from four themes in Newport's history: education, firefighting, floods and the Sin City days of the early- to mid-1900s. The drawings were based on the city's history as recorded in *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, *The Kentucky African American Encyclopedia*, local libraries and other sources.

The class was ARTP 333: Materials and Techniques in Painting. The murals gave the students the opportunity to work with unfamiliar materials and techniques, thus aligning with the learning outcomes of the class while also making a lasting creative contribution to the community.

Students also had to learn to paint collaboratively. In painting their own canvases, artists can work in their unique styles. But for murals, the work



of many has to look like the work of one – another skill the class developed.

The murals were installed on the north wall of Steinhauser Printing Building, just across from the Southgate Street School at the western boundary of Newport's historic Mansion Hill neighborhood. They were unveiled during a public ceremony on Feb. 5 that drew 65 people and featured remarks from NKU President Ashish Vaidya and Newport Mayor Jerry Peluso.

The murals represent NKU's first contribution of public art to Newport's new Southgate Street arts corridor. NKU is grateful to the City of Newport and to Steinhauser Printing for collaborating with us on this project. Also, a special thank you to Mike Kolb, a preservation craftsman and Newport resident, who installed the murals.



Students worked on the murals together, learning to paint in a common style rather than as individuals so that all the murals would share a "look." Each mural is made up of two plywood panels, which were installed side-by-side.

A CONTRIBUTION TO NEWPORT'S VISION

SOUTHGATE STREET SCHOOL

- With two classrooms, the school opened in 1873 for the African American citizens of Campbell County.
- Newport established the school with assistance from the Freedmen's Bureau.
- Congress established the bureau immediately after the Civil War to assist former slaves and poor whites in the South.
- The school's first graduation ceremony was in 1893. The first two graduates were Louisa Smith and Lavina Ellis.
- Primary and middle school students remained at Southgate until school desegregation was completed in 1955.

Source: *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, article by Theodore H.H. Harris

A MESSAGE FROM THE CITY

For our city, the collaboration with the NKU art students has been a gift – one we deeply appreciate.

We've worked very hard to remake Newport into a vibrant, family friendly, business friendly city where people want to live, visit and invest. Newport on the Levee, our historic district, our restaurants and small businesses have remade the Newport many of us knew a generation ago.

Our arts corridor around the Southgate Street School is yet another phase of our vision. But it's easy to have ideas, harder to make them real. What the art students are doing with these projects is accelerating our efforts to make Southgate Street a destination. People are going to want to see this art. They are going to interact with and enjoy.



Our vision for our city is grand, and our work is not finished. But the sculptures, murals and ceramics move us closer to our goals of modernizing Newport while also remembering and celebrating our history.

We are grateful to our partner, NKU, and especially to the students who have created these public art proposals. Their work will contribute to our city's vitality for years to come.

— **Scott Clark, Newport Historic Preservation Officer**

NEWPORT PUBLIC ART PROPOSALS



TJ DIXON
Donovan Scholar, studio
arts (BFA, theater arts, West
Virginia University, 1972)

CONTACT
dixont4@nku.edu

PROJECT
"I'LL BE BACK"

PROPOSED LOCATION
Entry steps of the Southgate
Street School

BUDGET
\$2,790

MATERIAL
Bronze

SIZE
12½ inches wide by 12½
inches long by 4 inches tall

PROPOSAL

This sculpture honors the learning that occurred at the Southgate School and is a reminder of the building's historical significance. The simple piece depicts an open textbook, composition book and an apple arranged as if a student briefly abandoned studies to participate in a quick game before the school bell. A dog-eared page keeps the child's place with a sense the student will soon return.

The sculpture will be molded in wax and cast in bronze using the lost wax casting method, which captures intricate detail. The bronze is highly durable and with little maintenance beyond cleaning to remove accumulated dirt and environmental pollution. The surface of the sculpture will gradually acquire a patina with age.

ARTIST'S STATEMENT
*"Simple beauty is frequently overlooked
when we value only the complex."*



PROPOSAL

The work depicts stylized schoolchildren in a classroom with vibrant rhythms of colored mosaic tile flowing throughout the composition.

These figures represent the students and teachers of Southgate Street School. The history of segregation is complex and serious. The piece celebrates the positive impact the school had on its students while still making evident that these events were part of the past. To accomplish this, the students and classroom are depicted in a monochrome sepia, like an old photograph. The desks are modeled after the historic desks from the school. The blips of color, which were inspired by jazz-related artwork of Newport's bustling Sin City era, represent the values and confidence that this school planted within its students, which catalyzed the spread of social change and awareness within our community.



ARTIST'S STATEMENT
"I am interested in both individual and social identity, their relationship to one another, and how they intertwine to create a unique human experience. My point of departure is the human figure, inspired by the raw expression conveyed through face and body language."

*"Humans are social creatures, so my work examines this interdependency between both the figures and the observer. Although my style procures a sense of **realism for means of familiarity**, still I synthesize imagination with observation, strengthening my visual language and striving to conceive art that can be universally understood and true."*

GINA ERARDI
Senior, majoring in painting

CONTACT
erardig1@nku.edu
(859) 468-3797

PROJECT
"Education Empowers"

PROPOSED LOCATION
On the north wall of
Steinhauser Printing
Building, facing the
Southgate Street School.

BUDGET
\$6,994

MATERIAL
Ceramic tile and mosaic,
stucco cement

SIZE
9 feet long by 6 feet tall



MEGAN STIERITZ

Senior, major in ceramics and sculpture

CONTACT

stieritzm1@nku.edu
(850) 420-5726

PROJECT

"Virinda Doddy: Forever in Bloom"

PROPOSED LOCATION

Inside the Southgate Street School

BUDGET

\$5,010

MATERIAL

Fired ceramic clay with metal reinforcement

SIZE

2½ feet wide by 6 feet

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

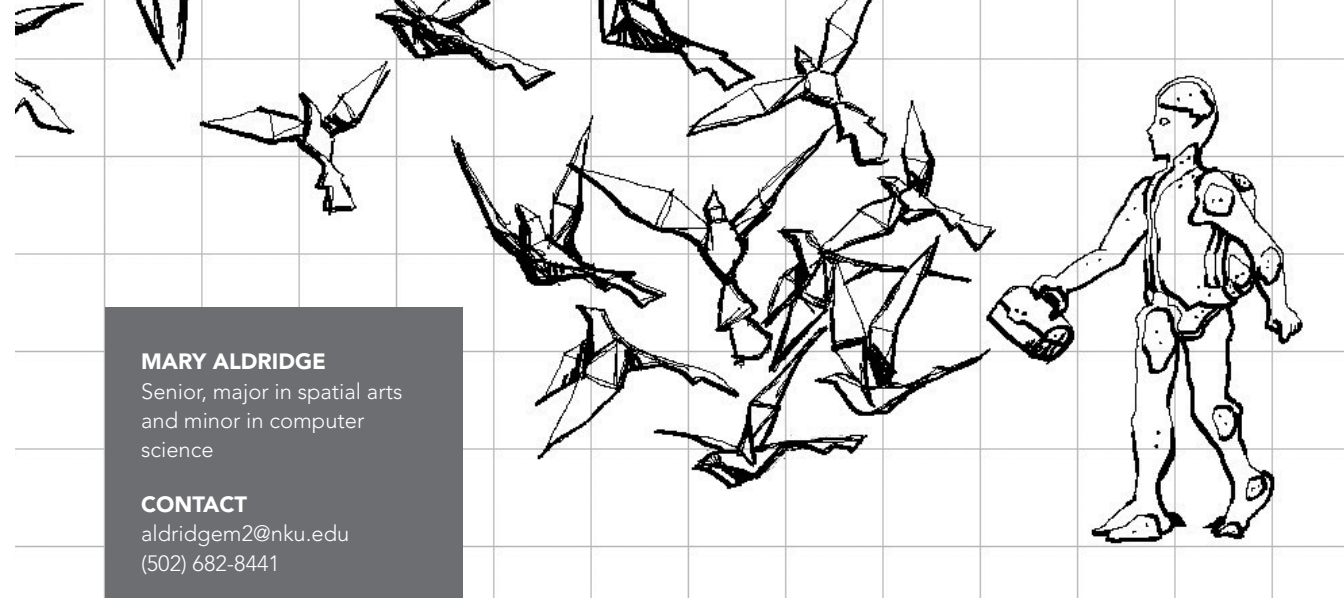
"As an artist I like to create work that explores aspects of the universe that I find mysterious and fascinating. My current focus is an exploration into how **humanity and plant-life intersect biologically**, as well as how humans have fabricated cultural significance for plant-life. By investigating these connections, I aim to create commentary on complicated aspects of the human experience such as emotions, states of mind, mental illness, etc."



PROPOSAL

This work was inspired by the story of Newport resident and former student at the Southgate School, Virinda Doddy, who told the story of the discrimination she experienced as a child after the Newport schools were desegregated, and how she went on to earn three college degrees. The sculpture will memorialize a local individual who has worked hard to overcome the inequalities of the past and who continues to be a guiding light for the future.

The piece consists of a hand-sculpted portrait bust of Virinda, depicted smiling triumphantly, supported by a pedestal sculpted to look like her three degrees. Crowning her head will be ceramic flowers, specifically laurels and irises, with irises symbolizing wisdom, valor, and power and laurels symbolizing success and glory, further emphasizing Virinda's triumph.



MARY ALDRIDGE

Senior, major in spatial arts and minor in computer science

CONTACT

aldrigem2@nku.edu
(502) 682-8441

PROJECT

"One Step Before Flight"

PROPOSED LOCATION

By or near the Southgate Street School

BUDGET

\$3,229

MATERIAL

Stainless steel sheet metal, steel round bar, plywood & carbon steel MIG wire

SIZE

7 feet wide by 5 feet tall

PROPOSAL

"One Step Before Flight" is a figure sculpted to resemble a silhouette. The figure is walking forward and is designed after an elementary school-aged child. In the figure's hand is a lunchbox, lifted in front of her. The sculpture extends to form abstract birds taking flight. This piece illustrates the step forward the Southgate Street School represents – the step toward freedom through education. A step before taking flight.



ARTIST'S STATEMENT

"Sculptures that can start a conversation about history are a perfect means of accomplishing this. By instilling a curiosity in people for the past, we promote the growth of our society despite the horrible things that have, are, and will happen in the past, present, and future.

"In the past, I have worked on finding a method for expressing rebirth – that is, **taking something that is either damaging or has negative connotations and creating something beautiful** out of that. A real-world example would be plant life emerging from the decay of an animal. In the context of this region, it would be the Southgate School in its entirety – building a place for learning and hope in a place that crumbles under the weight of its own hate."

ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE



PROPOSAL

This would be a one year appointment for Jessica Holtman, who, as an undergraduate at NKU, designed a public art project in collaboration with the Northern Kentucky Scholar House in Newport’s West Side Neighborhood. She also conducted art classes for the residents of the Scholar House, which provides affordable housing for single parents and their school-age children.

Her elegant sculpture, “Nurture,” depicts a mother nurturing her child. Installed in the entrance hall, the work celebrates the support the Scholar House provides to parents trying to educate themselves and their children. A grant from the Kentucky Foundation for Women supported the project.

The artist-in-residence proposal would take Ms. Holtman’s engagement with Newport to a

higher level. She would spend the year working with residents, conducting community classes, developing and producing public art, and otherwise contributing to furtherance of the arts in Newport. The idea is to create an artist-in-residence program that could be replicated and expanded in the years to come.

Professor Steven Finke, who mentored Ms. Holtman during the Scholar House Project, provides this explanation for the artist-in-residence idea:

“The NKU Spatial Arts Program presents public art as a genre for students to explore in both course work and independent study. Public art has been around for about as long as humans have. A contemporary practice in public art, coming out of an academic environment, implies a unique artistic intervention within a

JESSICA HOLTMAN
Senior, major in spatial arts

CONTACT
jholtmanart@gmail.com

PROPOSED LOCATION
Newport and/or Northern Kentucky’s urban core (Newport, Covington, Bellevue, Dayton, Ludlow, and Bromley)

BUDGET
\$10,000+

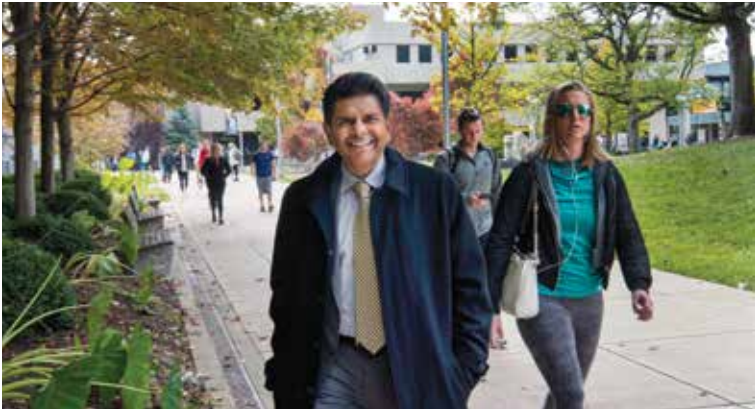
community based on dialogue and a relationship with that community.

“Artists working in the public art realm have to balance their personal creativity within the context of the community. It is not for all artists. I have been working with Jessica for more than three years. When I first asked her what she was interested in doing as an artist, her reply was, ‘I want to be an activist artist who helps create communication between the races.’

I connected her with the project at the Scholar House that involved artmaking events with the residents as well as the creation of ‘Nurture.’ She spent more than one year on this project.”

One option under consideration for this program is to make use of the federal VISTA program, which places recent college graduates in community engagement positions to build community capacity.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AT NKU



NKU’S FOCUS

When Dr. Ashish Vaidya became Northern Kentucky University’s sixth president in July 2019, he quickly established his interest in connecting the campus and community, committing to the university to being “a valued partner with the region and the community.”

An immediate priority was to develop a strategic framework to guide the university’s efforts. The starting point was a simple statement: NKU is committed to advancing student success aligned with regional needs.

NKU’s engagement with the region takes many forms. Partnerships are with local and state government, businesses, schools and nonprofits. Students connect through service learning classes, research with community partners, co-ops, internships, practicums and volunteering.

PROJECT HOPE

In January 2013, NKU launched Project Hope: The 505 Initiative in an effort to concentrate some of NKU’s community engagement efforts in federal census tract 505, which the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments identified for us as northern Kentucky’s most distressed neighborhood by key demographic

measures. It’s a place we could make a difference.

Census tract 505 is, essentially, Newport’s West Side Neighborhood. The West Side is northern Kentucky’s oldest neighborhood, which brought added opportunities for historical research. That, in turn, led us to connect with Newport’s plans in 2017 to open a municipal museum a few blocks from the West Side in the Southgate Street School. Like the West Side, the museum is proving to be rich with opportunities for students to engage.

NKU’s Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, which works to connect campus and community, oversees Project Hope.

LEARN MORE

SCRIPPS HOWARD CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

nku.edu/civicengagement

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS (SOTA)

nku.edu/sota



An early SOTA/Scripps Howard Center collaboration in Newport involved a photography class taught by Matt Albritton, who is now SOTA's chair. This is one of the street scenes his students shot, depicting a vibrant neighborhood where families live, work and play.

HOW TO INVEST

Each of the art projects in this booklet are ready to be built and installed in Newport in or near the Newport Museum at Southgate Street School.

**All they lack is funding.
All they lack is you.**

The same is true for the idea of artist-in-residence to work with neighborhood residents, young and old, to create and celebrate art.

THREE WAYS TO GIVE

If you want to support an art project in its entirety, you can do so by making your donation to the Newport Foundation, 998 Monmouth Street, Newport, Ky., 41071.

**Contact Scott Clark
859-655-6347 or
sclark@newportky.gov.**

If you would like to support the artist-in-residence project,

**Contact Mark Neikirk at
NKU's Scripps Howard
Center for Civic Engagement
at 859-572-1449 or
neikirkm1@nku.edu.**

If you don't have the capacity to support a single project in its entirety but would still like to contribute to the overall initiative at any level, you can do by sending a check to the NKU Foundation to the Scripps Howard Center for Civic Engagement, GH 529, Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, KY 41099 or give online at nku.edu/newportpublicart.

If donating by check, please make a note in the memo line, "Newport Art Projects" and if online add that to the comment line.

"The purpose of art is washing the dust of daily life off our souls."

PABLO PICASSO



SCRIPPS
HOWARD
CENTER

for CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



SOTA
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

THANK YOU, CITY OF NEWPORT, FOR YOUR COLLABORATION WITH NKU



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