A colorful three-section mural along the Erie Canal in the heart of downtown Newark is now affording boaters, motorists and T. Spencer Knight park-goers a glimpse of the heyday of the village when it was known as “The Rose Capital of America.” During the 1930s, 40s, 50s and early 60s, thousands of rose-loving tourists, from all over, flocked to the village from mid-June to September to see Jackson and Perkins’ spectacular rose gardens and other related festivities including the beloved Rose Parade.

Created by Mural Mania, James Zeger _ who also just finished his first-year of teaching graphic design, photography, media art and arts-in-culture at Newark High School _ was the lead artist on this year’s mural addition. He and Lyons resident Mark DeCracker founded the mural design company in 2007, with the Newark mural the latest of several done by Mural Mania in Wayne County communities like Lyons, Sodus, Sodus Point, Williamson and Clyde.

The recently completed third section of the Newark mural depicts a scene from a Rose Parade. Six NHS Art Club students: Sheridan Verstraete, Claire Ketcham, Grace Ketcham, Ashley Allegretti, Catlyn McEmery and Jasmine Johnson assisted with this year’s mural. Zeger said this mural is 7 feet by 26 feet and took about 2 months to paint in an NHS hallway and was completed in July.

“We worked from a design I came up with after researching several historic photographs and postcards at the Newark Historical Society,” he said. “The design includes the Rose Queen, elephants, a classic car and a float made from roses. Art Club students helped me paint the mural at the high school on Evolon, a canvas-like material. Since Legendary Auto Interiors in Newark helped fund part of the mural with a generous donation that helped pay for the Evolon and a few other art supplies, we included the name "Legendary" on the license plate of the car as a thank you for the donation. After completion of the mural it was mounted onto the cement wall under the Rt. 88 bridge by the canal, next to the Rose Garden mural that students helped paint last summer.”

“The students not only dedicated a lot of their time helping to paint the Rose Parade mural, but I was able to educate all of them about the Rose Parade and how Newark was once the “Rose Capital of America.” They also learned how to paint on a large-scale, basic design principles and color mixing/theory that including the process of mural painting from an initial sketch to drawing out the design; staining the drawing, blocking in colors and finally painting the details! This was a very successful project and I am proud of the students who helped contribute to it. They have given something back to their community while learning about the town’s rich history.”
Newark Board of Education member and Newark Village Board member Rebecca Vermeulen, applied for and won a $2,000 grant from the Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor for the project, on behalf of the Village, with the Village also contributing funds to the project.

As part of the grant application, Newark Central School District Superintendent Matt Cook added words of support for the idea submitted, and wrote: “Having our students and members of the Newark High School Art Department working collaboratively with an initiative sponsored by the Village to promote the positive influence of the Erie Canal is just the kind of partnership we are looking for. Having students and adults working together to beautify our community builds a shared sense of accomplishment and helps the children being raised in Newark to appreciate our history in hands-on ways that is more meaningful than reading from a textbook.”

The grant money, along with $2,200 provided by the Village of Newark, and generous donations including paint and other supplies from many businesses made the project possible.

Last summer, DeCracker was the lead artist on the Union Street mural scene while Zeger was the lead artist on the Rose Garden mural scene. NHS students helped paint both.

“This project is something that will leave a lasting impression for all involved and for many to enjoy, for years to come,” Vermeulen said. “I am thankful for the partnership between the Village and School; Erie Canalway Heritage Corridor for the grant; to my fellow village board members for their support, the many local businesses that supported our artists with food and drink and those that donated supplies. The outpouring of support from the community has been incredible. Our students and Mural Mania artists who created these scenes should be very proud— I’m so thankful to them for sharing their time and talents. It looks beautiful!”

Newark Mayor Jonathan Taylor agrees. “These murals have been a community project in every sense of the word. The dedication and commitment of the students, school, and so many others made these pieces of beautiful artwork a reality. They are a welcome addition to our canal trail.”
A closer look at the artistic components of the new Rose Parade mural section.