

Reminiscent of early Morris County Black History education

Biggers' mural on display at NTCC Library

By Marlene Bohr

Dr. Ron Clinton advised the NTCC board members at a recent meeting, that the John Biggers mural that is now in the college library and is on loan from Paul Pewitt CISD.

"The original loan of the mural from Pewitt was 20 years, and recently we asked the Pewitt board of trustees if we could add another 10 years to it, making a total of 30 years," Clinton said. "They agreed. NTCC will enjoy that work of art for the next 30 years. The benefactor for the mural agreed to put \$75,000 in trust to be used for any maintenance and upkeep during that length of time."

Dr. Andy Reddock, Superintendent of Pewitt CISD said the Pewitt School Board made a resolution last year that the mural would be on loan from the district for 20 years. With the recent remodeling, the college had requested an extension of 10 years and recently it was approved.

"Pewitt originally got the mural for the campus when the elemen-

tary was Carver School, which was the black school for the community," Reddock said. "Mr. Biggers painted it for Carver School, which is now the elementary school.

"It has been several years on the elementary campus and it was removed when they were doing some remodeling. The mural was rediscovered in the late 1980s, and was put on display in the elementary library.

"The mural was probably given to Pewitt some time in the 1950s and community folks requested it be restored and be put on loan to the college. They have done all the recent restoration work."

John Biggers (1924-2000) was known for his narrative murals and outstanding craftsmanship. He dedicated his work to the depiction of the human condition. Born to Paul and Cora Biggers, he was the youngest of seven children, and grew up in Gastonia, North Carolina.

A partnership between Paul Pewitt ISD, NTTC and The Burt and Nancy Marans Charitable

Fund at the East Texas Communities Foundation led to the recent conservation of a 22-foot long by 6-foot tall mural. The beautiful mural entitled, "A History of Education in Morris County, Texas" was created by John Thomas Biggers, Ph.D. The piece was commissioned by Frank C. Bean who was the Pewitt School Superintendent in 1953-1954, when the school board sought to honor Prof. Phineas Y. Gray (1886-1976). Gray was the principal of the newly completed George Washington Carver High School at the time and was retiring after 30 years of service. Dr. Biggers researched the late Mr. Gray's contributions to Morris County Schools before creating the piece. The four phases of the mural tell a fascinating story of the history of the progress of African-American education in Northeast Texas. The mural (*shown below*) is now displayed in the Biggers Room on the campus of NTCC where it may be viewed and enjoyed by the community and visitors to Northeast Texas Community College.