

Energy from the Heartland

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Honoring the visionaries, workers, and innovators whose contributions fuel our world, the first mural dedicated to the oil and gas industry is installed in Downtown Wichita.

The Kansas oil and gas industry began in the late 19th century with the discovery of the state's first commercial oil well in Neodesha in 1892. Early success in eastern Kansas was followed by transformative milestones, including the 1915 discovery of the El Dorado oil field and the 1920's development of the massive Hugoton Natural Gas Area. Through cycles of boom and bust, Kansas has produced more than 6.7 billion barrels of oil, shaping the state's economy and identity.

The mural features numerous pump jacks—often called “nodding donkeys”—and a classic derrick. They represent the many facets of the oil and gas industry; from extraction and production to the energy that fuels daily life. While modern drilling often relies on portable rigs, the derrick and pump jack remain powerful historical and artistic symbols of the industry and petroleum extraction.

Depicted within the artwork is the practice known as “throwing chain.” A roughneck wraps a heavy chain around a drill pipe to tighten or loosen connections. This physically demanding technique required immense strength, coordination, and skill—qualities that continue to define the Kansas oil industry today.

Wheat stalks woven into the mural symbolize Kansas's dual identity as both an agricultural and energy heartland. Working alongside one another to strengthen the state's economy and resilience.

The mural also reflects Wichita's rise as the “Air Capital of the World.” A transformation directly fueled by the 1915 oil boom in nearby Butler County. Oil profits provided the capital, investors, and industrial infrastructure that launched early aviation pioneers such as Cessna, Beech, and Stearman. This wave of investment established Wichita as a national center for aircraft manufacturing. By 1929, the city had become the highest-volume aircraft producer in the United States—earning its enduring title.

Energy from the Heartland began in the early 1900s and continues today. The *Energy from the Heartland* mural was designed and painted by BrickMob. Special thanks to all of our sponsors for their generous contributions and continued support.

The Wichita Desk and Derrick Club spearheaded the creation of the *Energy from the Heartland* mural. Located at 400 S. Commerce Street, on the corner of Waterman and Commerce just south of the INTRUST Bank Arena. The mural celebrates the history, workers, and economic impact of the oil and gas industry in Kansas.

Inaugurated in January 2026, *Energy from the Heartland* holds significant historical value as the first public artwork in Wichita dedicated specifically to the Kansas oil and natural gas industry.

To learn more, follow the QR code to explore our sponsors, discover additional information about the oil and gas industry, and learn more about the Wichita Desk and Derrick Club.