

Downtown going from working class to creative class

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Downtown Elgin just got a little cooler.

I'm not talking about the plummeting temperatures.



I'm talking about the recent influx of cool people who now work in downtown Elgin.

A few weeks ago, an engineering firm called CSI Technologies moved into the amazing third-floor loft space of 1 Douglas Ave. This firm brought 25 new employees into the downtown's workday population.

At first glance, 25 people may not seem like a big deal. But, that's the potential for 25 more lattes per day for Ravenheart Coffee and Elgin Books & Coffee. And 25 more sandwiches for Quiznos and Al's Cafe. And 25 more cocktails for Martini Room and Gasthaus Zur Linde.

But more important than the number of people is the type of people that CSI Technologies brought to downtown. These people are part of what best-selling author Richard Florida has branded as the "creative class."

The creative class is made up of creative professionals whose work is based on ideas and innovation. Engineers, architects, Web developers, graphic designers, consultants, lawyers, filmmakers, artists, writers, professors ... these are all part of the creative class.

Creative class professionals, in general, are more apt to engage and influence their community. The employees at CSI Technologies have proven this to be true. They're hanging out at the coffee shops. They're meeting their neighbors for drinks after work.

They're working out at The Centre of Elgin on their lunch breaks. They're already actively shaping the culture of downtown Elgin.

Urban downtowns, especially those in the midst of revitalization, have long been incubators for idea-oriented and entrepreneurial businesses. Downtowns provide a distinct sense of place and community. Affordable and unique office space also provides the spark a start-up needs to turn ideas into a successful business.

There is a strategic movement across the country to attract the creative class for its impressive ability to transform the culture and economy of a city.

It may surprise you to know that the college towns of East Lansing, Mich., and Madison, Wis., have some of the highest concentrations of creative class professionals in the nation.

The proposed ArtSpace project of affordable live/work space for artists in downtown has incredible potential to put Elgin in the running to become one of these creative centers.

When all these pieces come together, we will have the solid ability to recruit and retain the retail, restaurant, cultural and entertainment opportunities people are asking for.

Welcome, CSI Technologies. Thank you for choosing downtown Elgin, for bringing us one step closer to becoming an alive and thriving downtown, and for making us a little cooler.

What's Up Downtown Elgin