



Each person should find their dream in Barrie, Florida says



Sharon Bamford photo
Dr. Richard Florida was in town this week October

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municipality can spark the creativity of its community, as well as attract the entrepreneurial "creative class," by investing in projects that offer a sense of style, place and opportunity for self-expression, Dr. Richard Florida told municipal and community leaders Monday night.

Invited to speak by the Greater Barrie Chamber of Commerce, the University Partnership Centre at Georgian College, Downtown Barrie and the city, Florida is a leading economist and director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and professor at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto.

In a lecture that lasted more than an hour and based on the current best-seller *Who's Your City?*, Florida stressed that place is one of three critical decisions individuals make; the others are what to do and who to do it with.

"One piece of advice to Barrie, you have to be the kind of place in which each person can find their dream. We need to be able to find our dream and self-express," he said, noting that with technology, the most creative and the most entrepreneurial can locate anywhere in the wired world.

"Place is the basic social and economic organizing unit of our time," he explained. "What drives economic growth are not companies that do things more efficiently; the real key is to create new things, new work and new kinds of jobs. That comes from people living in a community. When we build these cities, we make each other more productive."

Florida studied the most productive urban corridors and the most productive communities within them. Through his examination, he identified several key attributes to communities that attract innovative people: they are diverse and inclusive, they value arts and culture, they offer experience and opportunity for self-expression.

"Creativity is the source of economic growth. It requires diversity," he said, adding every person is creative and they must be encouraged to express it. When a community does that, it creates a milieu where people mix their ideas and new things conceived and new companies created.

Barrie, he noted, has a wide range of restaurants in its city core; the chef index, he noted, shows the city is open to new ideas and experiences. It encourages individuals to experiment.

"What the company was to my dad's time, place is to our time," he said, noting that his Italian immigrant father worked for years, before and after serving in the Second World War, at the same company. His father recognized the people there were what made the company successful.

The same can be said for communities today, he stressed.

As part of the economic metropolis of Buff-Tor-chester (which includes Buffalo, Rochester and runs up through southern Ontario to as far east as Montreal), Barrie can make itself a rising star in that galaxy by investing in the things that make it unique: respecting and revitalizing old buildings, preserving its natural beauty and enhancing creativity by being more inclusive and offering opportunities for self-expression.

"Things that make people happy and stimulate economy (are key). They want to be where they can meet each other, make friends and connect – whether cycling, skiing, skating, playing Frisbee or having a coffee. They want to feel energy. They want arts and culture," he explained, adding that goes beyond the symphonies, operas and ballets.

"They want festivals, street-level scenes, animated city streets. If they can't plan for a night out, they want to be able to plug in where they can. They can find the historic architecture.

"(Barrie) has it all. You're close to the mega city, Toronto. You have affordable housing. You have a mix of housing types. You're on the edge of a rural area and have suburban houses, mixed neighbourhoods and a downtown.

"Don't knock the history down," he said, but instead come up with a new use.