

Guest commentary: 'Creative class' will be key to future economic growth

By BETH SKOTZKE / Events and communications manager, Economic Development Council of Collier County

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One of the nation's foremost experts in economy building says that a community seeking a strong and healthy commerce must tap into the creativity of all its members. Author and adviser Richard Florida will bring his message to Naples on May 20 when he addresses community and business leaders at a program entitled "It Pays to Be Creative," part of the ongoing Project Innovation sponsored by the Economic Development Council of Collier County.

Florida is founder of the Creative Class Group, an advisory services firm charting new trends in business and community. Florida says that the creative class — the 40 million workers in classic knowledge-based professions and innovative, research positions — is the core force of economic growth in our future economy, and will account for more than 10 million new U.S. jobs over the next decade.

A director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and professor of Business and Creativity at the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, Florida's books include "The Rise of the Creative Class," which describes and analyzes his research in this field.

"Recession is the mother of invention," he says.

According to Florida, the creative class has two parts. The creative professionals are those classic knowledge-based workers in health care, business and finance, the legal sector and education. The super-creative core consists of scientists, engineers, innovators and researchers as well as artists, designers, writers and musicians.

Even though the creative class represents only about one-third of the work force, its members earn more than half of all wages and salaries in the United States — as much as the manufacturing and service sectors combined. In addition, the creative class controls nearly 70 percent, almost \$500 billion, of the discretionary income (buying power) in the United States.

Cultivating this creative class will become even more important as the manufacturing sector continues to decline in terms of employment and the service sector struggles with lower-paying, lower-skilled jobs. According to Florida, there are three basic T's of economic development:

n Talent: The driving force behind any economic strategy is talented people. We live in a more mobile age than ever before. People, especially top creative talent, move around a lot. A community's ability to attract and retain them is the defining issue of the creative age.

n Technology: Technology and innovation are critical components of the ability to drive economic growth. To be successful, communities and organizations must have the avenues for transferring research, ideas and innovation into marketable and sustainable products. Universities are paramount to this and provide a key hub of the creative age.

n Tolerance: Economic prosperity relies on cultural, entrepreneurial, civic, scientific and artistic creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities, organizations and peers that are open to new ideas and different people. Places receptive to immigration, alternative lifestyles and new ideas on social status and power structures will benefit significantly in the creative age.

Some researchers and economic-development practitioners have offered a fourth T — territory assets. More than ever before, place matters. Territory assets are the natural, built and psychological setting of the community. It is the distinct "vibe" that makes communities unique from one another. People want to live in communities that are

unique and inspiring to them.

Florida believes government can better encourage creativity by investing in science and technology. Government also must embrace strategies to better train, educate and prepare the work force as well as setting the climate for tolerance. With open minds and borders, the United States could attract many brilliant immigrant entrepreneurs much as it did during World War II.

Florida will present these and other thoughts for building a strong economy.

Project Innovation's mission is "action to power our local economy." Project Innovation has two simple goals: first, to create a shared vision and action plan for a strong and innovative economy using the power of the entire community, and second, to stimulate innovation among businesses, schools, government and the community.

The program will be held at the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club. Registration begins at 5 p.m. with the program running from 5:30 p.m. to 9 p.m. Advance registration is required. For more information or to register, contact the EDC at (239) 263-8989, ext. 105, or visit www.eNaplesFlorida.com.

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