

In an ideas economy, cities must attract 'creative class'

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Spotlight

Richard Florida spoke Monday as part of the Alberta College of Art and Design's Stirring Culture series.

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Choosing where you live may be the most important decision you ever make.

That was the message Dr. Richard Florida, the author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* and *Who's Your City?*, delivered Monday in the final edition of Stirring Culture, the Alberta College of Art and Design's lecture series dedicated to devising a vision of what Calgary could become.

Speaking before a large crowd at Jack Singer Concert Hall, Florida disputed the notion espoused by many thinkers that the rise of the internet and other technological advancements have made place irrelevant.

"Place is now more important to our lives than it's ever been," Florida said.

Part of the reason place has achieved such a primary importance, Florida said, is because we're living in the midst of a profound transformation, which he wrote about in *The Rise of the Creative Class*, from being an industrial and manufacturing-based economy to an ideas economy.

According to Florida, 40 million to 50 million North Americans now work in the creative class, which includes business, arts, culture, innovation, technology, science and music. That's a dramatic departure from the 1950s, when most people worked in industrial and manufacturing jobs.

"The shift we are living through today -- from industrial to creative -- is bigger than the previous shift (from agricultural to industrial)," he said.

As a result of this idea-driven economy, the creative class tends to cluster in cities, or what Florida describes as population clusters in mega-regions, such as the Boston-New York-Washington corridor, or Toronto-Buffalo-Rochester (Florida recently joined the faculty at the University of Toronto).

"The places that are the winners are the ones that are the most open to the most different kinds of people," he said.

Florida was emphatic about the need to nurture and support the local arts community, which supplies energy, creative ideas and youth to cities, qualities that rank high in whether a city is able to attract the creative class.



CREDIT: Jenelle Schneider, Calgary Herald

Richard Florida talks about the cultural development of cities as part of ACAD's Stirring Culture series Monday at the Jack Singer Concert Hall.

One example he cited was Providence, R.I., where the mayor, Buddy Cianci, handed out \$1,000 grants to small local arts groups (along with a blessing), a policy of micro-financing arts policy that revitalized the city.

"I believe in sprinkling those (micro-financing) resources around, rather than launching mega-projects," Florida said.

Florida said that, according to an analysis of 2001 data (the 2006 data is just being released), Calgary ranked fairly high among Canadian cities in attracting the creative class.

"You're a very good talent magnet," he said. "Number two in the country."

Calgary also ranked high in cultural makeup and attracting high-tech firms.

"Compared to other similar sized cities, you would rank highly in North America," he said.

His one word of warning: not to rely too much on natural resources, and to reinvest them in the creativity of our people.

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