

## Sean Maher: Boulder gets it right with dominance in tech, talent

By Sean Maher, For the Camera

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Since publishing his best-selling book on the creative class 10 years ago, Richard Florida has become the most sought-after expert on economic development in the country -- and with good reason.

While met with skepticism at the time, his theories and predictions have proven to be valid.

A few months ago, he published "The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited." In this new book, Florida builds on his original case that creativity is now the "fundamental driver of our economy." To prove it, he analyzed 350 metro areas using a series of creative metrics to rank the top cities in the nation.

Florida again proves his case and it is good news for us. As you have probably heard by now, Boulder came No. 1 on the list followed by San Francisco and Boston. Seattle, San Diego and Ann Arbor tied for fourth. It is impressive that a community of 100,000 people beat out some of the premier cities in the nation to top such a prestigious list.

However, when you look at the criteria, it is clear why Boulder did so well. Florida and his research team use the "3 Ts of economic development" to rank cities, and Boulder was the only place to rank in the top 10 metro areas in all three categories.

First is technology.

Boulder ranks first in the nation for the number of scientists and engineers per capita. No surprise given the huge influence of the federal labs, the University of Colorado and the hundreds of tech companies around town. From one-person start-ups to giants such as Google, Microsoft and IBM, Boulder is a major player in tech.

Another great measure of technology strength is venture capital funding. Boulder companies dominate funding in Colorado and our city is ranked third nationally behind San Francisco and Silicon Valley for venture funding per capita.

The next "T" in Florida's book is for talent.

Again, Boulder excels. Almost 58 percent of adults in Boulder hold a bachelor's degree or higher. That is more than double the national average of 28 percent and more than 20 points higher than the rest of Colorado.

And brains are not the only measure of talent. Boulder is a global destination for cycling, running and triathlon. At the recent London Olympics, 11 athletes from our town competed. That places Boulder second only to San Diego, which sent 15 Olympians to London. Figure in the population difference and do the math. Boulder comes out ahead as the American center for endurance sports.

Florida's third "T" is tolerance, which he measures by racial diversity, integration, acceptance of gay lifestyles and the "Bohemian Factor."

Together all of these indicators reflect a community's openness to new ideas and creativity. Boulder ranked ninth out of 350 in the Tolerance Index. This surprised me a bit since this town is certainly not very diverse. Apparently we make up for it with our progressive culture and high number of artistic residents.

We also rank high on the list of gay friendly communities. In his book, "50 Fabulous Gay Friendly Places to Live," Gregory Kompes ranks Boulder in the top 10 just behind West Hollywood and San Francisco.

Boulder's dominance in tech and talent along with our creative and tolerant culture make our city a poster child for a strong and sustainable economy. And the numbers prove it.

Just look at our employment, commercial vacancy, tax revenues and home values compared to anywhere else in the country. We should be thankful for the university, the federal labs and the thousands of entrepreneurs who have chosen Boulder to pursue their dreams.

We also need to give a nod to the folks who picked this incredibly beautiful spot at the foot of the Flatirons back in 1859 for a mining supply camp. Little did they know what they were starting!

Pick up this newspaper any day of the week and you will read about disagreements and division in our community on what should be done to keep it the amazing place that it is. In a city filled with creative, independent thinkers, those disagreements will never go away and that is probably a good thing.

In the end, Boulder usually gets it right.

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