

Technology, talent, tolerance are keys to economic engine

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Gov. Hickenlooper's table included Bryan Parises, Nan Hinton, Bob Lange, Rana Florida and keynote speaker Dr. Richard Florida.

Florida headlines Denver South Economic Development Partnership luncheon

By Jan Wondra

The May 3 Denver South Economic Development Partnership luncheon drew Gov. John Hickenlooper to introduce the speaker and attracted an enthusiastic, capacity crowd to the DTC Hyatt Regency ballroom. The governor came to provide the Colorado context for the event's

featured speaker, Dr. Richard Florida, senior editor of *The Atlantic*, and one of the world's leading public intellectuals on economic competitiveness, demographic trends, and cultural and technological innovation.



Dr. Richard Florida headlined the May 3 Denver South Economic Development Partnership luncheon. Photos by Jan Wondra

“We’re working not just to define Denver, but to define the state of Colorado in a more positive position,” said Gov. John Hickenlooper in his introductory remarks. “How do people perceive Colorado? We need to be not just as a destination for tourists, but for entrepreneurs. It helps to have rock ‘n’ roll, and the Scientific and Cultural Facilities District. It helps that our Museum of Nature and Science has more paid memberships than any other museum in the United States. It’s good that the DCPA is the second most visited performing arts center in America. But how do we keep the focus on entrepreneurs, on being a creative ecosystem that’s good for business growth? It’s education...we’re working on how to get those who fight reform to work together. We need a semblance of what we call ‘the grand bargain,’ and Dr. Florida can help us refocus our attention on the things that really matter.”

Florida is an economist who wrote the best seller, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, as well as his more recent book, *The Great Reset*.

“The key to economic growth lies not just in the ability to attract the creative class, but to translate that underlying advantage into creative economic outcomes in the form of new ideas,

new high-tech businesses and regional growth,” said Florida. “These things fit together like pieces of a puzzle. What drives our economy is not just the big business decisions, but the location and the decisions of thousands and thousands of people. In the past decade, we have gone through one of the most remarkably tumultuous times in history. If my theory was flawed, all of us would have been derailed; but political, economic and security traumas have not knocked us off this course. What we are living through today is something akin to the industrial revolution; we are shifting from an industrial economy to a social system that is a post industrial economy...a knowledge economy.

“The source of our economic growth is our creativity. Creativity stokes growth, and creativity requires diversity. Less than one in five Americans works in a blue-collar job touching products in a factory. Now we have a service class; 65 million people who take care of our aging parents, take care of our children, people who sell us things. They can barely make ends meet. We’ve got to make those service jobs better; make them living wage. We’ve got to forge a new social contract, just as the jobs that you couldn’t make a living doing before World War II became living wage jobs after the war, and that fueled an economic boom.

“People who lead companies, you’ve got to build a community, not just a company! Creativity isn’t limited only to those educated few. Arts and culture are not the byproducts of being rich! I grew up in a blue-collar family in New Jersey. I visited the factory my dad worked in in New Jersey, and one of the fellows told me; ‘Rich, it’s not the technology that makes this factory great; it’s the knowledge and intelligence of the men and women who work here.’ I remembered that. It’s the intelligence of all the workers, not just the leaders.

“You’re part of a mega region here,” he concluded. “What makes growth is what I call the three Ts: technology, talent and tolerance. You’ve got to attract the creative class and you’ve got to make those service jobs better.”

Primary sponsors for the event included Shea Properties, FirstBank, Bradbury Properties, Coventry Development Corp./RidgeGate, Centennial Airport, Merrick & Company and Wells Fargo. Colorado, and south Denver in particular, appears poised for our next stage.

“It’s the public-private partnership that is so unique to south Denver,” said Peter Culshaw, chair of the Denver South EDP Board of Directors.



Dr. Richard Florida talks with Dr. Claudia Folska, RTD Board of Directors, at the south Denver EDP luncheon.



Greg Kelly, Buz Koebel and Pat Mulhern of SPIMD at the south Denver EDP luncheon.



Dr. Richard Florida discusses economics with Gov. John Hickenlooper.