

## Authenticity key to Halifax's future success

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Business guru says city must play to its strengths



Author and professor Richard Florida makes the keynote speech at a Greater Halifax Partnership dinner Wednesday evening. (TED PRITCHARD / Staff)

When Richard Florida talks about what makes a city work, the world listens.

The author and professor at University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management has been called "the Bono of urban philosophers."

He spoke to The Chronicle Herald's John DeMont by email before making the keynote speech at a Greater Halifax Partnership dinner Wednesday.

**CH:** In Who's Your City, you ranked Halifax pretty low in terms of good places to live. Has that view changed?

**FLORIDA:** Halifax has made great strides in improving its quality of place. I believe we are really seeing the community bloom into a vibrant creative centre.

The key for Halifax will be remaining unique and authentic to its character.

As I've written many times before, different types of people will be attracted to communities and regions for different reasons. For some, they may choose Halifax for its economic opportunity, while others may make a selection because Halifax provides access to outdoors, urban amenities — restaurants, nightlife, arts and culture — or good schools.

Whatever the reason, authenticity plays an overarching role. Creative workers — the innovative engine to our future economic prosperity — select communities that have all the features of a complete, authentic community.

**CH:** How does Halifax rank in terms of fostering the creative class? (Florida's latest book is *The Rise of the Creative Class Revisited*, an updated edition of his earlier bestseller.)

**FLORIDA:** Talent, technology, tolerance and territory assets represent what I call the 4Ts of economic development. The 4Ts approach represents a comprehensive strategy for Halifax, like other regions, to encourage creativity and innovation in order to compete and prosper in the creative age.

Halifax performs reasonably strong on this framework.

**Talent** — The driving force behind any effective 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 top talent is the defining issue of the creative age. In Halifax, more than 69,000 workers make up the creative class.

**Technology** — Technology and innovation are critical components of a community or organization's 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 institution of the creative age.

**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 views on social status and power structures will benefit significantly in the creative age. Some people complain that tolerance is too benign of a term. Among all 35 Canadian regions, Halifax ranks 12th on our tolerance measures.

**Territory Assets** — More than ever before, place matters. Territory assets are the natural, built and psychological settings of the community. It is the distinct "vibe" that makes communities unique from one another. People want to live in communities that are sustainable, unique and inspiring to them.

**CH:** In The Great Reset, you talk about the big changes and opportunities flowing from the recent economic crash. How can Halifax benefit from the recent downturn?

**FLORIDA:** Periods of crisis and creative destruction such as the current one are when new categories of jobs are created as old categories of jobs are destroyed.

The key to a sustained recovery is to turn as many of these, as well as existing lower-paying jobs, into better, family-supporting jobs.

For Canada, this is critically important: more than 7.7 million Canadian workers already do this kind of work, or 46 per cent of the workforce. In Halifax, more than 108,000 workers, almost 52 per cent of the workforce, are employed in the service sector. There are many companies out there that are already starting to think about upgrading these jobs.

We have to look to these examples as models for the way to upgrade these jobs through improving “social intelligence skills,” which has the largest effect on wages. Much more than being friendly or outgoing, it includes the ability to help develop people, to organize them around goals, to recruit and lead teams and mobilize the right people for a project — the cornerstones of leadership and effective management that add to organizational productivity.

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## **About the Author**

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