

Tectonic arts shift needed: expert

By Chris Traber

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It takes more than government bailouts and balanced budgets for the economic recovery to take hold.

Rather, investment in the arts and our own creativity can help navigate the road back to prosperity, renowned economist Richard Florida told attendees of the inaugural Arts Exposed conference at Seneca College in Markham Friday.

"Yes, we need great technology and science and management, but arts and culture are critically important for a better human experience," Mr. Florida said. "That's the primary fuel. If you want to grow a community, you must invest in human capital. That's the opportunity here in York Region."

An economic recovery requires a significant repositioning of attitude that encourages and nurtures inventiveness.

"We think that by moving money around, we create real value," he said. "No. The bottom line of the equation is that we all share creativity. It makes us human. Creativity needs to be stoked, harnessed and unleashed."

That is part of a massive societal "tectonic shift", he said. About one-third of the workforce is involved in the creative sector. A community offering a range of cultural and artistic venues and outlets is a magnet for like-minded, productive and fulfilled neighbours.

To attract and keep people, you must have arts and culture in the community, he said. "That's good for the soul and the economy."

York Region has the opportunity to be an arts and culture role model for the world, Mr. Florida said.

As keynote and kick-off speaker of the two-day symposium on the influence of arts and culture on our society, the international authority on arts and urban renewal suggested York Region has the necessary alchemy to become an archetype society.

The region prides itself on diversity and embraces enterprise, individualism and creativity; the keys to societal success and personal harmony, he said.

Author of the critically acclaimed *The Rise of the Creative Class* and a professor of public policy at Washington, D.C.'s George Mason University, Mr. Florida said the composition of the audience was a clue to how York can achieve world-class status.

The numerous and local elected officials, artists, educators, students and cultural agency administrators in



Fostering arts, culture. Dr. Richard Florida is one of the world's leading public intellectuals and author of the international bestseller, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. He took part in the Arts Exposed conference, being held today and Saturday in Markham at Seneca College. *Staff photo/Sjoerd Witteveen*

attendance are the elements necessary for growth and prosperity, he noted.

Citing how his father's gift of a guitar swayed him from a potential drift to drugs and crime as a youth, the arts saved his life. Similarly, communities investing in creativity, survive and thrive. What we do, who we're with and where we live is the triangle of happiness, he said.

York is proud of its history and gives creative licence to its residents, he said.

"You won't be a world-class region by making the trains go faster," he said. "You need a place where arts and enterprise work together by investing in arts and culture and open mindedness."

The foundations of Mr. Florida's message are in place in York, the region's arts council chairperson Judi McIntyre said.

The event is an important forum at which administrators can show support for the arts, learn what works and take ideas back to municipalities, King Township Mayor Steve Pellegrini said.

Aurora is rekindling its arts and culture centre, Mayor Geoff Dawe said.

"I'm interested in new ideas. More exposure means more interest and more people getting involved," the mayor said.

Aurora Councillor John Abel also sought ideas.

"We're keying on how to blend heritage into arts and culture," he said. "We have a rich heritage and many of our historical artifacts are sitting idle. We're looking at ways to re-introduce them because arts and culture is the fabric of communities."

Markham Mayor Frank Scarpitti agreed.

"We're lucky in that you can experience the cultures of the world without leaving the community," he said. "The lifestyle it creates is special. Arts Exposed is a wonderful opportunity to share what's going on in the region and how we can do more."

For information, visit artsexposed.ca

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