

Roger and me

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Richard Florida, the renowned American scholar and best-selling author, had his eye on working in Toronto for several years.

His work on the identification of "the creative class" launched an intellectual revolution on understanding the economic engines of the world's top-tier cities.

Last week, it was announced that he has been appointed academic director of the newly established Centre for Jurisdictional Advantage and Prosperity at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management.

"This is really about Roger Martin. There is no other person like him in academic life," Prof. Florida, 49, says of the dean of Rotman. "He's the real strategic thinker on this."

The Centre for Jurisdictional Advantage and Prosperity is Mr. Martin's brainchild. The research institution will take a holistic and integrative approach to the study of how jurisdictions, including provinces and areas that encompass cities across national borders, become magnets for companies and for the people who provide the diverse talent needed for prosperity.

"I made a very pragmatic decision to go to the best place to do my research," Prof. Florida says, adding that what distinguishes the research centre is its placement within a business school.

"Most of the places that have studied the idea of place have been in urban planning programs. I am an urban planner, so I respect it. I have been in public policy schools.

"But all of my life, I've wished to ... understand the role of location in business. A business will see a location as a market and as a source of talent, but I think that getting the mix between business, government and the individual location decision is really critical.

"So, what I see Roger and the Rotman School giving me is an enormous array of economists, financial specialists, accounting professors, organizational strategists, organizational behaviour scholars and marketing scholars; and we can now, for the first time, combine our knowledge and insights around this idea of place and location."

Seven years ago, Mr. Martin was introduced to Prof. Florida by Heather Monroe-Blum.

She was then a professor at Rotman and currently principal and vice-chancellor of McGill University in Montreal. It was before his breakthrough book *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* was published in 2002.

"Heather showed me an article he had written," Mr. Martin explains. "And I thought, 'Wow, this guy is thinking in very complementary ways to what we are doing.'"

The two met, and soon Mr. Martin was issuing speaking invitations to Prof. Florida, who visited several times. "We kept in touch and we were dreaming about being able to do something," Mr. Martin says.

That almost happened three years ago, when Prof. Florida was close to accepting a position at Rotman. "I really had my eye on Toronto," says Prof. Florida on the phone from his home in Washington D.C., where he has been the Hirst Professor of Public Policy at George Mason University for the past three years.

"I was at a dinner in Winnipeg, and I said I was considering moving to Toronto, and someone said, 'Well, when George Bush is president, you should stay in the U.S. We really need you there.' And I thought, 'Well, I'll take a flyer and come to Washington and see what I could do.'"

"During that whole time, Roger and I were talking at a distance, thinking about it, and last fall, he called me and he said, 'I have this really great idea. Would you be interested?' And I said, 'If you have the idea, I'm definitely interested.'"

The Centre for Jurisdictional Advantage and Prosperity is a \$120-million project, made possible by a \$50-million donation to Rotman from the Province of Ontario. The federal government contributed an additional \$10-million. The balance will be raised from the private sector.

"[Premier Dalton] McGuinty is the heroic figure," Mr. Martin says.

"Toronto and Ontario are at an inflection point, to strive for greatness as one of the globe's magnet cities or to be a really good second-tier city. It has a chance to be a global destination city. Richard Florida has no affiliation with Canada, but if people like that say, 'I want to be there,' that shows that we can be that."

"I am blown away," says Prof. Florida in his high-energy rapid-fire delivery.

"I'm a person who has 'made do' in research with very limited resources, and that's been good, because I am frugal and efficient ... [but] it's fantastic to have resources to do this research on Toronto and Ontario, on North America and the world, on how place and jurisdictional advantage, on how geography, really matter. This is a subject people have talked about, but I don't think any one has had the resources to dig into it."

Prof. Florida and his wife, Rana, who runs the global think tank he founded, Creative Class Group, have bought a house in Rosedale, an affluent midtown neighbourhood in Toronto. The couple, who celebrate their first wedding anniversary this month, will move at the end of August.

"I think Toronto is really a global centre in North America, and I think what it does for me is force me to be more of a global scholar. I've really been defined as an American scholar, even though my work has been picked up all over the world. But I have been a U.S.-based scholar.

"This move will not only make me consider Canada, which I love, but it will encourage me to look at the world because I am outside of the United States. My work will be pushed in another direction, and I relish that."

He has always loved Toronto for its arts, safety, diversity and openness.

"It has a stable community and has not experienced some of the more devastating problems of U.S. cities. My work is inspired by Toronto," explains the scholar who taught for nearly two decades at Carnegie Mellon University and has been a visiting professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

"I have written with Toronto and other great communities like San Francisco and London in the back of my mind for nearly two decades."

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