

Strong economy relies on people's creativity, Richard Florida says

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NAPLES — Richard Florida left his mark in Naples.

The best-selling author gave hope to community and business leaders looking to build a new and better economy in Collier County.

He was the last speaker brought in for Project Innovation, a community-wide project launched by the Economic Development Council late last year to create an action plan to bring change to the local economy.

Before a crowd of about 450 at the Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club, Florida exuded his energy and passion for economic development.

He talked about what this area has going for it — and what it needs to work on.

“Think big. Think broadly,” said Florida, the author of “The Rise of the Creative Class” and several other books.

He worked the stage to bring home this message — that a strong economy relies on its people and their creativity, more than anything else.

“Every single human being is creative,” he said.

He emphasized the importance of what he calls “quality of place.” People want clean air, clean water, green space and to live in a place that’s beautiful and invests in its history, he said.

Collier County has a lot going for it in that area. And it’s an area community leaders have agreed to focus on as part of the action plan that’s developing through Project Innovation.

He talked about what else great communities have including safety, economic opportunity and jobs, leadership and open-mindedness for all groups.

He credited the community for its effort to come up with a shared vision for Collier County.

He talked about how this region is part of a mega center that stretches from Miami to Tampa and Orlando that has 15 million people and is one of the most productive in terms of economic output in the country.

He said the community needs to zone in on what he calls the three “T’s.” They are technology, talent and tolerance, meaning that this needs to be a place where anyone can feel comfortable.

He said what’s lacking is more creative jobs and people. The creative sector makes up less than 20 percent of the economy in the Naples area, below the national average, he said.

Peggy Wilson, a North Naples resident who owns her own advertising agency, was impressed with his talk and he felt Florida’s energy. She said he made improving the economy and building the creative sector seem doable.

“It’s nothing we can’t accomplish,” she said.

Though this was the last speaker for Project Innovation, it was the first Wilson had heard. She decided to come after hearing the buzz about his visit around town.

“I’m glad I found it, at least now,” she said. “We’re on board.”