

AUTHOR FINDS MADISON IS A FINE PLACE TO LIVE WILLIAM R. WINEKE
bwineke@madison.com 608-252-6146

11 March 2008

The Capital Times & Wisconsin State Journal

© 2008 The Capital Times & Wisconsin State Journal. Provided by
ProQuest Information and Learning. All Rights Reserved.

What's the most important decision you're likely to make in your life?

Author Richard Florida suggests it's the decision you make about where to live.

And if you read his latest book, "Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life" (Basic Books: \$26.95), you will find Florida considers Madison to be a pretty fine choice for many people confronting that decision.

"The place we choose to live affects every aspect of our being," he wrote. "It can determine the income we earn, the people we meet, the friends we make, the partners we choose, and the options available to our children and families. People are not equally happy everywhere and some places do a better job of providing a high quality of life than others."

Who will find Madison to be among the best places in the country to live?

Believe it or not, young singles, defined by Florida as being 20 to 29, find Madison a good place, along with Portland, Ore., and Honolulu.

But young and mid-career professionals and retired people also rank the city high, Florida reports, as do "empty nesters."

Now why would young people want to stay in Madison? Florida gives some common-sense answers - and some suggestions that don't immediately come to mind.

The common-sense answer is that many young people like to stick around the city where they went to college.

The more surprising answer is that young people today like to gather in what author Ethan Watters calls an "urban tribe" where it is easy to make new friends and form new relationships.

The empty nesters, people whose children have grown but who aren't yet at retirement age, like Madison and cities such as Boulder and Fort Collins, Colo., "because they offer access to great health care, substantial amenities and diverse, intellectually stimulating communities," Florida writes.

Gays and lesbians find the city both affordable and open.

If you're considering moving, however, the most interesting part of Florida's book is a discussion of the varying personalities of various regions in the United States.

He says cities, like individuals, have five personality types: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism.

Madison is on the edge of the "extroverted" list, which includes Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans and much of the state of Florida. Madison also ranks high on being "agreeable."

If you want "neurotic," your best bet is New York, though Pittsburgh, Cleveland and West Virginia will also give you a run for your money.

Californians are "open to experience," probably because so many of them are from other areas of the country who were open to the experience of moving to California.

Does any of this mean anything?

Well, perhaps. Florida's reputation is based on writing about "the creative class" and his thesis is that "in terms of both sheer economic horsepower and cutting-edge innovation, today's global economy is powered by a surprisingly small number of places. What's more, the playing field shows no sign of leveling. The tallest spikes - the cities and regions that drive the world economy- are growing ever higher, while the valleys - the places that boast little, if any, economic activity - mostly languish."

Florida is professor of business and creativity at the Rotman School of Management in Toronto and previously wrote "The Rise of the Creative Class."