

ATTRACTING CREATIVE TALENT TO NOOSA

BY DIANE PRIESTLEY



RICHARD FLORIDA BELIEVES CREATIVE PEOPLE COME IN ALL COLOURS AND THAT THEY ARE THE KEY TO THE NEW ECONOMY

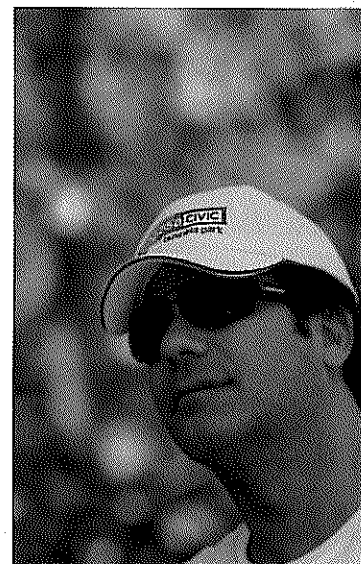
If he didn't already have a catchy name, Richard Florida could easily be dubbed Mr T. His celebrated theory of economic prosperity is based on Four T's. And it was his T for Tolerance that landed the personable American professor in Capital T Trouble when he flew into Noosa last November and media coverage played the gay card.

Not that he intended to create a stir by advocating painting the town pink. He simply asserts that to flourish, a community must embrace tolerance, inclusivity and diversity in its population base. He believes his other three T's are just as crucial: Talent, Territorial assets and Technology.

Florida's views are given substance by his impeccable credentials. With a PHD from New York's Columbia University, he is Director of the Prosperity Institute and Professor of Business and Creativity at the University of Toronto, a best-selling author and lauded as a leading public intellectual on economic competitiveness, demographic trends and cultural and technological innovation.

Pro-active business leader Mark Stockwell was so impressed with Florida's books he footed the bill for him and his wife Rana to make a dramatic visit to Noosa to undertake research and talk it up with a host of movers and shakers at a packed-out seminar at The J.

As developer of the thriving new Noosa Civic shopping complex and business park, Mark was motivated by a desire to give back to the community with a vision of strengthening Noosa's economic base. But more than a warm and fuzzy talk fest, he was determined to use



Florida's visit as a catalyst for something tangible.

He then assigned Libby Callister, Stockwell's Community Liaison Manager, to oversee an ambitious project over the next 12 months. They enlisted the support of Mayor Bob Abbott, the Noosa Shire Council and state government and together they came up with the brainchild of the Noosa Creative Alliance.

Libby outlines the three stages: Florida's Creative Class Group has been commissioned to write a research paper on Noosa, assessing the existing talent pool and measuring the other three T's; the second stage was to get Florida out here to liaise with stakeholders and the final stage will be the Creative Communities Leadership Program to kick off April 16 and 17 with a two-day seminar.

"We need to get 30 'catalysts' willing to donate about five hours a week to drive the programs that emerge from the seminar. The Creative Class Group will facilitate the process but the community and business leaders will drive it. The 30 volunteers will represent a broad cross-section of talent and all walks of life," explains Libby.

She says with the Super Council looming, there is an urgency to turbo charge Noosa and strengthen its economic base to ensure the laid-back tourist town is not overshadowed by the go-ahead energy of Maroochy and Caloundra.

One key challenge will be how to attract 'creative workers' to Noosa. Florida disputes the Build It And They Will Come approach. He claims that a region must deliberately create the right cultural environment to attract creative workers.

In his address at The J, he pointed out that the developed world is experiencing a shift from an industrial economy to a creative economy and that creative workers are vital in the same way blue-collar workers were vital to manufacturing in the 1950s.

Who are these creative workers or 'knowledge workers'? They include anyone who uses mental abilities: inventors, scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, technology experts, writers, artists,

This is the era of the Barefoot Executive who holds meetings on the beach wearing board shorts and a t-shirt!

"At the turn of last century, 50 per cent of people worked on farms. By 1950 the agricultural age had shifted to the industrial age. In 1980 only 5 to 10 per cent of people worked in creative industries but then an economic tsunami hit and today 40 per cent of the Australian workforce is employed in creative fields. We can expect to see 20 million new jobs in the creative sector over the next decade."

"For a community to create and attract talented people it needs to be open-minded and allow people to express themselves regardless of age, gender, race, sexual preference and lifestyle.

"The people who made America great were immigrants but America has forgotten who made it great and is closing its borders to migrants. Australia has an opportunity to prosper by being open-minded and welcoming."

Florida claims where you live is essential to happiness. He surveyed 28,000 people who ranked relationships, place and career as the three keys to a fulfilling life. "We take incredible joy from the place where we live. It must have great infrastructure, great opportunities and great leadership.

"Human beings on our own are not all that great. When human beings come together in supportive communities, it makes us better, smarter, more productive and able to find new ways of growing things, making things and doing things."

He believes that Noosa has an "incredible soul" that cares about the environment and people and has the potential to become a place where creative workers flourish. *bm*

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performers, filmmakers, designers, hairdressers, chefs; the list is endless.

"The real stuff of economic growth is human creativity and everyone is creative," says Florida. We must stoke the creative furnace that lies deep within every single human being"

"We are witnessing the rise of the creative class, which is changing the way we work.

BUSINESS OWNERS

Sellers market to disappear!

Quality businesses are still commanding a premium due to shortage of supply. However, indications are that Baby Boomer owners are planning to sell in increasing numbers and demand will meet supply in the next 1 - 3 years. Owners should clean up their business and prepare for sale in 2008 to achieve the existing premium prices. For further information see page 19 for our editorial

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