August 2013 Man of the Month: Richard Florida

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In 2011, the Baby Boomer generation began turning 65, and today it is projected that 40 million Americans fit within that age bracket. The population of 65 and older shows no signs of slowing down and is projected to continue to increase, doubling by 2050. As a result, many towns and cities are beginning to change and adapt to accommodate aging populations. Disruptive Women recently sat down with our August 2013 Man of the Month, Richard Florida, Professor, University of Toronto & NYU and Senior Editor and *The Atlantic Cities,* the world's leading media site devoted to cities and urban affairs, to chat about what to expect in town near you.

Could you tell us how cities, which tend focus on attracting a younger generation, can create a community that's attractive to both young professionals and the over 65 group who hope to age in place in the long term?

The most successful cities will ensure that they are rich in options that will attract and retain residents of all ages. Economic changes are forcing cities to adopt new ways of living that emphasize mixed uses, walkability, and abundant transit options – all of which are important to young and old alike. While many retirees and empty nesters are still drawn to condo communities in warmer, drier climes such as those in Florida and Arizona, many are also attracted to college towns because of their cultural amenities, or to urban centers, where they can get around more easily. The "college town" model of livability and vitality may offer a model for other cities to follow. As a recent *New York Times* article noted, seniors favor cities like college towns because their diverse economies offer opportunities for potential part-time jobs and accessible recreation venues.

Long-term care is quickly becoming a bigger issue for aging Americans. How can cities, in your opinion, better equip their environments for aging in place and for the citizens who require long-term assistance?

Livability is critically important for healthy aging. Writing recently for the AARP, Nancy LeaMond noted, "a community that is friendly for an 80 year-old can be friendly for an 8 year-old—and everyone else in between." That's a critically important point to note. We have to physically create (and retrofit) cities and communities that can help facilitate easier aging for a large growing number of Americans. This may include more access to more green space and parks, better sidewalks and curbs, and "senior-friendly" public transit.

In a recent article you talked about how cities like Detroit and Cleveland are cheaper and attractive for retirees. For these places, which are really changing and growing, is the process of attracting new residents without displacing the original citizens different than that for a city like Washington or Boston?

It is absolutely critical to maintain a balanced sense of diversity and tolerance, regardless of the type of community or city. As the great Jane Jacobs once said, "when a place gets boring [it loses its diversity or authenticity], even the rich people leave." That is to say, maintaining a diverse and tolerant community with different cultures, income-levels, and beliefs is absolutely important to long-term sustainability. For places like Detroit and Cleveland, this means embracing new residents but protecting the authenticity and character that makes those communities unique.

In your book, *Who's Your City*, you rank the best places for retirees 65 and older. Tell us about the rankings.

My colleague Kevin Stolarik and I developed rankings for all age demographic groups, including retirees 65 and older. We examined an array of factors: the share of people in a particular age group; local economic conditions; amenities such as arts and culture, restaurants and green spaces; crime rate; access to and cost of high-quality health-care; and weather conditions. We also looked at all U.S. metropolitan areas: large, medium and small.

The best large cities and metros for retirees age 65 and over were San Francisco, New York, Boston, San Jose, and Miami among large metros. Among medium-sized cities, Stamford, Palm Bay, Sarasota, Honolulu, and Ventura, California rank highest. Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, Trenton, Port St. Lucie and Naples, Florida were the best smaller cities for retirees.