

## Jeanna Mastrodicasa: Who's your city?

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Are we an open community? Do we maximize regional innovation and economic growth? Why have you chosen to live here in Gainesville?



Sun file photo

In these stressful times, let's focus on the positive reasons of why you chose to live where you do.

Economist Richard Florida's recent best-seller, "Who's Your City? How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life," argues that despite the Thomas Friedman concept that the world is flat — that anybody can telecommute from anywhere in the world — our individual happiness depends on where we choose to live.

On Sunday, November 9 from 2-4 p.m. at the downtown Alachua County Library, I will be moderating a discussion of community members to talk about this book and why they have selected here to live. All are invited to read the book and to participate to represent a diverse set of viewpoints.

"Who's Your City?" is a relatively easy read and explains what 30,000 people from all walks of life told Florida about what really matters to them; and that the most important decision we make is where we choose to live!

The Place and Happiness Survey showed that there are five categories:

- (1) Aesthetics such as physical beauty, amenities and cultural offerings.
- (2) Basic services such as schools, health care and affordable housing.
- (3) Openness and tolerance of diversity.
- (4) Community leadership.
- (5) Physical and economic security.

What does this mean to your life in the local community? What does Gainesville have to offer? Share your opinions at the book discussion.

Florida's research is about the role of the creative community in economic development, and this book continues that discussion.

He cites economist Jane Jacobs's premise that cities are the true primary drivers of economic development, and the community and location matters.

Gainesville is frequently described as a creative community as described by our leaders due to our university, artistic, and technological influences. Florida states that creativity doesn't care about ethnicity, disability, rich or poor, gay or straight, single or married; entrepreneurship flourishes in places with the most diversity because people can express themselves and build their companies in the manner as they choose. Florida says that he is convinced that the "clustering of open-to-experience personalities is a driving factor in regional innovation and economic growth."

Are we an open community? Do we maximize regional innovation and economic growth?

There will be at least two more discussions about "Who's Your City?" in the near future; at the November workshop of the Gainesville City Commission on Monday, November 10 from 1 to 3 p.m. at City Hall; and in early 2009 on the University of Florida campus, conducted by Dean Lucinda Lavelli, of the College of Fine Arts, and Dean Christopher Silver, of the College of Design, Construction, and Planning.

I encourage you to reach out to your community groups to consider doing your own book discussion; sharing your points of view on why you have chosen this area to live and work.

The Alachua County Library District and the UF Libraries have copies of the book and are sponsoring these efforts as well. Let's move forward as a community to focus on economic development and building the right community to support it.

Jeanna Mastrodicasa is a Gainesville City Commissioner.

