

COMMENTARY

Kevin Riley: Young, creative types could be most powerful people in town

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By Kevin Riley

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If you looked behind the scenes last week, you could see that the DaytonCREATE initiative is getting traction.

The initiative was launched last year with the help of economist and best-selling author Richard Florida. He urges communities that want to thrive economically to recruit and cultivate a "creative class" — artists, musicians, engineers and high-tech workers, all people who think and create for a living.

A number of projects have grown out of the work of Dayton's creative "catalysts." For example:

- Film Dayton, created to support and grow a regional film industry, will partner with HBO Films to premiere an award-winning documentary here about Dayton native Sister Dorothy Stang. "They Killed Sister Dorothy" examines the murder of the 73-year-old Catholic nun, who advocated for the poor of Brazil and was trying to preserve the rain forest there.
- One of the public meetings on the Greater Dayton Downtown Plan took place at c{space, a 5,000-square-foot gathering spot at 20 N. Jefferson St. C{space grew out of the catalysts' effort to promote street-level art, music and independent business downtown. A similar project in Providence, Rhode Island, is about 20 years old, and the fallout is credited with adding to that city's vitality.

Watch a 4-minute video of graffiti artists painting the interior of c{space, 20 N. Jefferson St.

- Updayton, another of the DaytonCREATE groups, hosted a session at an Oregon District bar that drew about 50 young professionals. The group talked about the importance of entertainment and nightlife to attracting the "creative class." This session

was one of several "Pints and Perspective" gatherings the group is conducting in advance of its Young Creatives Summit on April 18.

We have something important going on here.

At the Oregon District session, the participants' passion and interest were impressive. The meeting was informal and just barely moderated. But people grabbed the microphone and spoke candidly. And they weren't intimidated by Dayton's current economic problems or how hard it might be to make new things happen or to change things.

Updayton's survey of about 500 young professionals shows that most of them are satisfied living in Dayton, although only 30 percent say it is a "better than average" place for young people. Seventy percent say they are satisfied with their job, but they are worried about new job opportunities (something they also consider very important).

And one worrisome trend, according to the research: many expect to move away from Dayton.

It's telling that the creative catalysts have gotten the attention of Gov. Ted Strickland; the state, not just Dayton, is trying to court young talent. The catalysts have invited him and other community leaders to their summit.

And it's also telling that leaders of the new downtown initiative have come to this group for input.

As you sat at that Oregon District bar, it became clear that these people have power — maybe much more than they realize. The community's many stakeholders need them, and no one stakeholder — not governments, businesses or colleges — can address their needs on their own.

The region's young creatives can mold plans for downtown, riverfront development and other plans. They can demand regional cooperation for the greater good. After all, they are the people the region is supposed to be building for.

So let's give them that power. And let's urge them to put it to use.

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