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Make Capital Region that desirable 'place'

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In my last column, I wrote about how Generations X and Y think about the concept of "work," and the ever-changing environment that may not require employees to be in the office every day from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. — or to be there at all.

Now, more than ever, the concepts of people and place are key to understanding why some states — such as New York — experience a loss of intellectual capital when its college graduates and twenty-, thirty- and forty-somethings move out of state.

In this age of globalization, one would think where you live doesn't matter. Anyone can telecommute to a Silicon Valley or Tech Valley job from a ski slope in Utah, a beach in Hawaii, or a loft in New York City. You can innovate from San Diego or Seattle.

Best-selling author and urban theorist Richard Florida, in his new book, "Who's Your City?: How the Creative Economy Is Making Where to Live the Most Important Decision of Your Life," suggests that despite technology and globalization, the dictatorship of location is not over, and place is not only important, it's more important than ever.

"Globalization is not flattening the world; on the contrary, the world is spiky," he writes. "'Place' is becoming more relevant to the global economy and our individual lives. The choice of where to live, therefore, is not an arbitrary one. It is arguably the most important decision we make, as important as choosing a spouse or a career. In fact, 'place' exerts powerful influence over the jobs and careers we have access to, the people we meet and our 'mating markets,' and our ability to lead happy and fulfilled lives."

"Who's Your City?" provides the first-ever rankings of cities by "life stage," rating the best places for singles, young families and empty-nesters. The book shows readers how to choose where to live, and what those choices mean for their lives, happiness and communities.

College students and Gen X and Y are making decisions about where to live every day. For many years, the ongoing discussion has been about "brain-drain" and the best way to attract and retain college graduates and young professionals. The answer has largely been to create jobs, specifically jobs in the tech sector.

While this is a good first step, the key to attraction and retention is investment in a creative economy and quality of life. Although people can work anywhere, they can't live just anywhere.

To be able to attract the nation's top young innovators in any field, the Capital Region needs to market itself as a "place" where arts and culture thrive, a "place" with several different housing options, a "place" where entrepreneurs have the tools and capital necessary to create new social enterprises, and a "place" where the community is diverse and welcoming to inclusion and involvement.

I know that I — and many others — have said this before, but we have not had a serious community discussion on why we should invest in a creative economy and in place-making.

This fall, Florida can help us begin such a discussion.

On Sept. 24, The Stakeholders, the Center for Economic Growth and presenting sponsor General Electric Co. will host Florida at a forum at the Palace Theatre for a discussion on how we might build these concepts around our most precious but declining asset: our cities.

For my next few columns I will be in search of young people who want to share their stories of why they live or work in a particular city. If you would like to share your story, e-mail me at CEO@TheStakeholders.org.

NextGen Workbytes is written locally by and for Gen Xers learning the realities of the workplace. Catherine Hedgeman, an Albany attorney, is principal in the Law Office of Catherine M. Hedgeman and is involved with a local young professionals' group.