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VOL.2 WINTER 2013

IDEA CITY

THE CREATIVE CAMPAIGN TO
BUILD A **BOLD** NEW VISION
FOR WINNIPEG, PAGE 14



 The Chamber
The Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce

Winnipeg Free Press

THINK TANK

HOW TO BUILD A CREATIVE CITY

by Jennifer McFee

Talent, technology and tolerance.

For Richard Florida, those are the key ingredients in creative cities from Austin to Ottawa.

And since creativity drives economic growth, Florida stresses the importance of tapping into everyone's imaginative juices.

"First, a creative city places a priority on technology and innovation. We have to constantly be thinking about how we improve the status quo and develop the new technologies and business models that will drive our economic prosperity," says Florida, professor at the University of Toronto and NYU, senior editor at The Atlantic and founder of global advisory firm The Creative Class Group.

"Second, a creative city is driven by talent — talented people. The most valuable asset that a city has is its people. Finally, a creative city must be a place of social inclusion and tolerance. Economic prosperity relies on creativity. Creative workers with these talents need communities and organizations that are open to new ideas and different people."

As guest speaker at the Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce membership luncheon on Nov. 15, Florida planned to discuss what these concepts mean for Winnipeg.

"Creativity is our fundamental economic resource. It is the new economy and there's no turning back as we look to the future and how to grow our communities and improve the well-being of our citizens," he says. "Winnipeg has some terrific assets that can be the foundation for future economic growth. It's important that we discuss those assets and how to leverage them to drive towards an improved creative community and economic prosperity for everyone."

Building such a community is more about attracting and retaining people than it is about attracting businesses, he says.

"Our research indicates, more than ever before, that quality of place matters. Creative types seek communities that are open, diverse and thick with amenities," he says.

That mean cities have to focus on becoming more attractive to creative workers. That shift has happened in other cities, but it can take time to blossom.

"I think of a community like Nashville, which has transitioned from primarily a transportation and logistics centre into a place driven by music, education, health care and business services," he says.

"Nashville now has the greatest concentration of music workers in the U.S., more so than places like Los Angeles and New York. That said, it's important to remember that Nashville's transition did not happen overnight. It's taken a sustained collaboration and commitment among the public and the private sectors to ensure the economic progress."

With the recent economic downturn, the benefits of an economy driven by creativity and innovation have become more apparent.

"Cities and regions that are based on older industries have been hit hard by the economic recession and they've had a difficult time recovering. On the flip side, creative places like Austin, Boston, Toronto and Ottawa have done much better weathering the economic crisis," Florida says.

"In fact, many of these cities' economies have surpassed where they were before the recession. Likewise, the creative class, in general, has continued to thrive during this challenging economic period."

The award-winning author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Florida says that as we shift to a knowledge economy, businesses and communities are placing a greater value on creativity, and rightly so.

"If you think about it, for the first time in our human history, further economic development requires the further development and use of everyone's creative skills and capabilities." ■



“THE MOST VALUABLE ASSET THAT A CITY HAS IS ITS PEOPLE.”

Influential speaker Richard Florida brings his message to Winnipeg. Photo by Jamie Hogge