

The Utica Phoenix

Exclusive Interview with Richard Florida

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One-on-One with Richard Florida

by Mallory Moyer

The Utica Phoenix newspaper has obtained an exclusive personal interview with Richard Florida, the world's leading urbanist. Richard Florida has been named by MIT technology as one of the world's most influential thinkers as well as one of TIME magazine's most influential twitter feeds. He is currently Director of the Martin Property Institute at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, Global Research Professor at New York University, and the founder of the Creative Class Group, consulting companies and institutions worldwide as to how to bolster their prosperity and well being through utilizing society's creative talent. The Utica Phoenix is proud to have obtained this exciting in-depth interview with Mr. Florida, world-renown leader and global influencer.

Richard Florida

Professor, University of Toronto & NYU

Senior Editor, The Atlantic

Q. You have consulted with so many different clients – organizations, cities, businesses – what is your secret to priming your clients for success in your vision?

A. I really focus on my research speaking and inspiring. That's what I truly love, helping people understand the broad shifts in our economy.

Q. Your article "How the Crash Will Reshape America" (The Atlantic, March 2009) proposed some really intriguing ideas for economic solvency taken from the hindsight of our financial crisis – such as banks requiring houses they are forced to take over be rented out rather than bought, allowing for an easier mobility of its residents. You noted how this proposal though clashes with the longstanding 'American Dream' of home ownership.

A. Yes, with the Reset of the economy, we are starting to define wealth and success differently, and develop new approaches to consumption. Things that have always signified wealth and security—home ownership, new cars, luxury goods—have become a burden for many people, and have been replaced by more experiential consumption—travel and recreation, self-improvement, and so on. With this, we are absolutely seeing a new definition of the American Dream. As a recent study from the MacArthur Foundation found that a majority of Americans (3 out of 5) today view renting as a viable path to achieving their version of the American dream.

Q. Do you see possibility for a change in our traditional American values – do you ever envision a less materialistic society being a reality? Essentially home ownership is all about wealth, or the appearance of wealth and the sense of security. Do you foresee generations to come adopting

less status-symbol values? Even as creativity is embraced, it still seems wealth is as well. Will wealth ever not be the American Dream?

A. Yes, we're already starting to do this and it's critical to our growth and prosperity. As I wrote in *The Atlantic*, "A home of one's own has been the emblem of prosperity and stability for a very long time." The idea is rich with psychological and cultural significance, but we have to come to an economic junction where we must re-examine even our most cherished beliefs. We can begin by updating our definition of the "American Dream." This is being embodied in the "rise of the renter," as well as a fast-growing sharing economy.

Q. What is your favorite book?

A. I have two: Jane Jacobs' "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" and Joseph Schumpeter's "Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy."

Q. I consider my husband one of those creative "rock star" types as a highly talented Software Engineer who just received his degree in Product Development. We have moved back to the Utica region and he will be working in a great, supportive environment at the locally owned and operated Black River Systems company. However, when it comes to the creative class being valued on the whole (for those who are not familiar – the creative class meaning those who are tech-savvy, those who are armed with lots of empirical knowledge and "culturally unconventional" people such as gay people, artists, and musicians) I would say our region tends to be more conservative, and certainly not very gay-friendly. How does a region like ours attract and appreciate the creative class with bigotry and discrimination still prevalent?

A. You identified a key issue, facing many regions. For a place to harness creativity it has to be open to the creativity of all. Not just techies, but every one. My mantra is simple: "every single human being is creative." Bigotry and discrimination stymie creativity. Creativity does not recognize nor does it tolerate the social categories of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and others we have imposed on ourselves. That's why I say communities need to do all 3Ts to prosper – technology, talent and tolerance. Openness is key to economic growth, not an add-on or afterthought. A third to half of all startups in the Silicon Valley has an immigrant – someone not born in the United States on their founding team. A commitment to openness as part and parcel of economic development is especially needed in older, more established communities where the social structures may be more closed or where naysayers and "squelchers" abound. Luckily for Utica, the recent survey from the Community Foundation and John Zogby indicates that the community is open to building an even more inclusive community and culture. More than 74% of greater Utica residents (80% of the city) want the area to grow its immigrant population because it bodes well for the future. The key for Utica will be to build on this foundation and ensure all residents feel welcomed, regardless of race, sexual orientation, religion, gender, etc.