



Speaker on region's future: 'The best days are ahead of you'



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Tina Russell / Observer-Dispatch

Richard Florida, an economic development expert and author, speaks at the Stanley Center for the Arts in Utica Thursday, Sept. 12, 2013.

UTICA —

People complain about the Mohawk Valley, citing a lot of reasons to leave.

It's cold. It's rainy. There's nothing to do.

But Richard Florida, an urban theorist, believes the area has everything going for it to make it a boon to the state.

Community leaders, company owners, artists, techies and good old-fashioned people came out to see Florida pontificate on how to make a successful community amid harsh times. He also attempted to disprove common myths on success during his speech Thursday night at the Stanley Center for the Arts.

The speech was part of the corporate partners-sponsored Speakers Series, presented by the Community Foundation of Herkimer and Oneida Counties.

Florida's speech pointed out the tools to make cities such as Utica a destination, but it was evident that discussion amongst the attendees would get the ball rolling. This was most evident at the book-end moments of the show: Information tables set up for several auditioned

organizations to promote their ideas and the groups of people congregating in the aisles discussing the night's talk.

Statistics, advice, miniature history lessons and a few well-placed impressions came at the audience in a bit of a whirlwind of gestures and excitement on his economic and social theories, namely the creative class and the "great reset" of economies.

To make a creative class, you need three T's, which Florida said the Mohawk Valley has.

* Technology: He praised the potential \$45 billion investment in the nanotech center that will burgeon in Marcy, an agreement that is "mind boggling," he said.

* Talent, which is in the forms of starting businesses, restaurants and the other ventures of the 3,600 people in our area that Florida said makes up the creative class.

* Tolerance. He cited the study of the Mohawk Valley Resource Center for Refugees done by friend, pollster and area native John Zogby, saying 70 percent of people in the area think immigration is a benefit.

"My dad said this first and since I've heard it from a dozen great CEOs," Florida said. "The thing that makes a company great is the knowledge, the intelligence and the creativity of people who work here."

But it's the area's location that could be one of its biggest assets, he said.

The Mohawk Valley is at the crux of two megaregions: an area larger than a specific state or country that can feed off of many communities and their assets. We are between a megaregion comprising Boston, New York City and the East Coast, while being in the "Tor-Buff-Chester" megaregion ourselves, reaching from Toronto to Buffalo and around.

"The best days are ahead of you," said Florida, as he walked off the stage to an applauding crowd.

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