

Increasing 'creative class' is crucial to building Fort Worth economy, author says

By SANDRA BAKER

sabaker@star-telegram.com



Author Richard Florida, speaking at a business luncheon Tuesday, called Fort Worth a "magnificent city" but said it will take growing the city's "creative class" to grow the local economy.

"Our economy is undergoing a massive transformation, and it's not surprising that the financial bubble burst," Florida said. "When we really look around at what creates wealth in this community, in this Metroplex, and this state, this country and continent, it's human beings, our people and our creativity."

Florida, an economist whose latest book, *Who's Your City?*, argues that one of the biggest life decisions people make is choosing where to live, spoke before a sold-out crowd at the 127th annual meeting of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce. The Gideon Toal architecture and engineering firm received the chamber's Spirit of Enterprise Award.

Florida said he once accepted the conventional assumption that the best way to build an economy was to create jobs by attracting companies. But in these economic times, he said, communities need to "reset" and focus instead on building the creative class — professionals, scientists, entrepreneurs and artists — that drives economic growth.

More than 20 million jobs have been added in the creative segment since 1980, and Florida said he expects 10 million more jobs in the next decade. Fort Worth has about 200,000 workers in the creative class and the Metroplex about 750,000, he said.

Among the benefits of this creative class is a much lower unemployment rate, he said.

"The key driver of economic wealth in our country is unleashing this creative energy, creating new companies, new ways of doing things, new technologies, new forms of designs," he said.

SANDRA BAKER, 817-390-7727