This City

MAN OF THE YEAR

Florida Factor

He schmoozes, he scores. Richard Florida's first year in Toronto was a regular love riot

BY MIKE MINER

IF RICHARD FLORIDA WERE AN INFLUENTIAL '60S POP BAND, he would be The Beatles. Not because he enjoys wearing his acoustic Fender after a jam-packed day's work (although he does), and not because of his boyish good looks (he's not those, too). Florida would be The Beatles because from the second he arrived in his adoptive home to head up the University of Toronto's new Martin Prosperity Institute, Toronto has played the role of a miniskirt-wearing, party-throwing fanatic, swooning at his every utterance. Not since Prince took up residence on the Stiffle Path has a red carpet been so royally rolled out. And Florida's not even a rock star. He's an academic, an egghead, albeit an egghead with a fairly glamorous dance card that includes intimate get-togethers at Mayor Miller's house, cozy dinners with Frank Gehry, front-row seats at fashion weeks, shoulder-rubbing at TIFF® box seats at the ACC. The snobbery of urban living is even peeked upon among the sexy and sardanized revelers at the MuchMusic Video Awards. "Professor Florida, can you tell us your favourite Rihanna song?"—and was name-dropped by Dalton McGuinty in the middle of the provincial budget (the Premier hoped the F-word might help bolster the flagging economy). In short, if you didn't see Richard Florida in 2008, you weren't looking. Because man, did we make a fuss.

In many ways, Toronto's braincrash on Florida is understandable. Here we have a renowned city expert who made his name publishing books on the importance of thrumming, creative metropolitanities. His latest, What's Your City?, which came out last March, went so...
Richard Florida thinks he may have underestimated the fit between himself and his adoptive hometown. But did Toronto—in our desperate desire to feel important—do the opposite?

The city's world-class public art, its vibrant cultural scene, its diverse population, and its progressive attitude toward social issues make it a natural fit for Scottish-born artist Andy Hay, who has been living in the city for over a decade. Hay's work is characterized by its bold colors and dynamic forms, and he has been commissioned to create public art installations throughout the city.

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