

# Creativity the key to Durham's future, says professor

## The art of Transition attracts 400 local community leaders

**DURHAM** -- Durham Region is on the cusp of a brave new world where citizens celebrate the region's diversity, innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration.

That was the message delivered by Dr. Richard Florida, keynote speaker at The Art of Transition, hosted by the Region of Durham's economic development and tourism department, Nov. 12 at the Ajax Convention Centre. The event was host to more than 400 business leaders, politicians, educators, non-profit executives, artists and concerned citizens.

Dr. Florida is director of the Martin Prosperity Institute and professor of business and creativity at the Rotman School of Management, University of Toronto. Previously, Dr. Florida held professorships at Carnegie Mellon University, a visiting professor at Harvard and MIT, and a visiting fellow of the Brookings Institution. He earned his bachelor of arts degree from Rutgers College and his Ph.D from Columbia University. He is author of the best-selling book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*.

Manufacturing jobs that have dominated the local economy for decades are leaving because "sadly, for many communities, all of that stuff that was used to create wealth (raw materials and a large labour force) was easy to copy and cheaper to do elsewhere," he said.

"We are living through the greatest economic transformation in modern history. That's what this crisis is about," Dr. Florida said.

The solution, he said, is to figure out a new way to grow and prosper through Durham's people. This can be accomplished through the creative sector of the economy, jobs in science, technology, engineering, arts, cul-



RON PIETRONIRO / METROLAND

AJAX -- The Region of Durham held The Art of Transition Symposium at the Ajax Convention Centre on Nov. 12. Wayne Conrad, the founder of Omachron Science Inc., was part of the Creativity Now panel during the symposium.

ture, music, design, law, intellect.

"It's no longer their arms and backs, it's their brains, their heads," Dr. Florida said.



DR. RICHARD FLORIDA

At the turn of the last century, more than 50 per cent of our population worked on farms, 80 per cent lived in rural communities with the remaining 20 per cent living in urban settings.

"Less than five per cent of all our people worked in what I have come to call the creative sector of the economy," Dr. Florida said.

In the 1950s, 50 per cent of the population worked in factories, 50 per cent also lived in urban areas. At the time, less than 10 per cent worked in the creative sector of the economy.

"Today, the creative sector of the econ-

omy composes 30 per cent of the workforce in the United States and 33 per cent of the workforce in Canada," Dr. Florida said. "In Ontario today, two million people work in the creative class. That's 500,000 more than work in and around manufacturing."

In Durham Region, 50,000 people work in the creative sector of the economy while 45,000 people work in manufacturing.

"The shift we are going through today, what the crisis really represents, is the shift from an industrial economy to a new kind of economy," Dr. Florida said.

The challenge, Dr. Florida said, is to harness the creative energy of all members of the Region for sustainability in the emerging creative economy.

"Economic development is about building sustainable communities. No one leader can do that. No MP, MPP, mayor or councillor can do that. In fact,

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not even a team of them can do that," he said.

"It is amazing how much energy there is in Durham Region. We can deal with economic crises and thrive and prosper," he added.

Dr. Florida's formula for a creative community is summed up in what he calls the Ts. They are:

- Technology in research and development. "If you don't have universities and a science base you can't get anywhere," he said.
- Talent. "You have to have people."
- Tolerance. "A community that welcomes everybody, a place that grabs people and welcomes them."

- Territory assets. Those things in a community that make them welcoming, such as parks, bike paths, theatres, museums, etc.

Dr. Florida said in the United States, unemployment is above 10 per cent. In September, unemployment rates in Durham Region were 9.6 per cent. Unemployment rates for the creative class have never been above five per cent.

"We have to harness the creative class, knowledge, intelligence and the creativity of people who work," Dr. Florida said.

Following Dr. Florida's presentation, two panel discussions took place about creative economic strategies occurring locally and in places around the world.

Wayne Conrad, chief scientist at Omachron Science Inc. said the key is to think of the future.

"We used to look where the puck was. Now we have to look to where the puck is heading," he said.

-- with files from Heather McMillan