



Kevin Riley: Creative Region Initiative wants people to stay in Dayton

By Kevin Riley

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When you listen to the "catalysts" for the Creative Region Initiative, you need to check your cynicism at the door. It's out of place in the face of their enthusiasm.

I found myself nodding my head in agreement as representatives of the nearly three dozen catalysts talked with pride and energy about the effort started by the Southwestern Ohio Council for Higher Education.

The Creative Region Initiative was launched with the help of Richard Florida, an economist and best-selling author, who urges communities to develop a creative class of artists and engineers, musicians and high-tech workers — people who think and create for a living — in order to thrive economically.

Dayton's catalysts (the term Florida uses) are engineering five projects:

- An incubator for artists, helping them connect to each other and audiences.
- A community pride campaign.
- A film initiative to promote filmmaking and filmmakers.
- An event to pair "right-brain" and "left-brain" workers in teams that will compete next year to literally walk on water.
- A Young Creatives Summit to help professionals connect to each other.

Though the effort is just getting off the ground, it's being well received.

The experience of one catalyst, Scott Murphy, a young engineer at Wright-Patterson's Air Force Research Laboratories, is an example of why this effort matters.

A native of Columbus, Murphy is working on planning the Young Creatives Summit. He talks with passion about keeping more college graduates in the region, noting that his story is illustrative of efforts that can make a difference.

He came to the University of Dayton to pursue an engineering degree. After landing a "co-op" job at Wright-Patt, he stayed to work at the base after graduating in 2001. He's a propulsion engineer for the X-51, one of the Air Force's cutting-edge programs. The magnet for him was a great work environment and a meaningful relationship with a mentor.

"If young people are proud and interested in their community, they are more likely to stay," he said. "I'm not sure our students always give our region a fair shake."

Murphy cited Dayton City Commissioner Matt Joseph's efforts with "Summer in the City," a program designed to show off the region to college-age summer interns, as an example of what helps keep and attract young professionals.

I'd offer some firsthand history to show how correct Murphy might be.

As a UD student, I landed a part-time job at the newspaper. Upon graduation, I had a job offer at the Dayton Daily News — and an offer in South Carolina. I had friends graduating and leaving the region.

It was one of the first big life decisions I would make, and I felt enormous pressure to leave Dayton. Getting up the Monday morning after graduation, and going to the same place I'd been working for nearly a year, didn't make for a great story over a beer at Flanagan's Pub — a consideration that was of course much more important than it should have been.

I stayed. Why?

Because, as Murphy would argue, I was already connected to Dayton. I worked around people who were looking out for me. I knew my way around town, and had things I liked to do here. I had mentors, and I still had friends in school here.

I'm betting Murphy's story and mine are like many of yours.

The Creative Region Initiative is about things big and small. But it's mostly about keeping this a good place to be, and making it even better for those who will shape this region's future.

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How to go

What: A meeting for volunteers interested in helping with the Young Creatives Summit.

When: 5:30 p.m., May 22

Where: Cannery Art and Design Center, 434 E. Third St.

More info: Daytoncreate.org