

## Attracting Talent - EDAWN's New Challenge

Given our success over the past few years in assisting the attraction of over 75 new companies, along with the recovery of our local economy, we are rapidly approaching the point where we will soon run out of available talent. At 6.7% our unemployment rate is currently half of what it was and will continue to drop. With the increased skill requirements of incoming employers, more and more in the fields requiring Science, Technology Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM), we can soon expect to see a shortage of talented employees, a very real obstacle to the revitalization of the Reno-Sparks economy. So how do we attract and retain the talent we need to take our economy and our community to the next level?

This talented workforce has been described by some as the "creative class". Richard Florida's use of census and economic data, presented in works such as *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2002), *Cities and the Creative Class* (2004), and *The Flight of the Creative Class* (2007), shows that "cities which attract and retain creative residents prosper, while those that do not stagnate." Sociologists and urban theorists have noted a gradual and broad shift of values. "Creative workers are looking for cultural, social, and technological climates in which they feel they can best "be themselves". They seek cities that better accommodate their cultural, creative, and technological needs."

If this is true, then one way we can attract the talent we need is to foster the "climate" these creative workers desire. Another term for this is "place" - the quality of "place" is one of the essentials needed to attract this talent: "the arts and culture; including architecture and reusing old buildings, outdoor recreation and parks, maybe most important is walkable, high density, mixed-use neighborhoods tied together by transit." If this is part of the solution, then we are on the right track. We have respectable arts and culture that continues to blossom with the infusion of Burning Man art and we have incredible outdoor recreation with a good mix of parks, especially along the river. We also have Mid-Town which is a great start as far as mixed-use neighborhoods and there has been progress made with the high-density old building reuse in our downtown.

While we have the basic foundations needed for "place" we must build on what we have if we are to attract talent and the creative class to the region. The one area that may need the most work, as we seek to create this place for the creative class, is our downtown. While on the right track, especially along start-up row and other pockets of creativity in our core, we still lack the street level culture, as Florida refers to, that includes, "a teeming blend of cafes, sidewalk musicians, and small galleries and bistros, where it is hard to draw the line between participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators".

We are clearly becoming a community where the creative class feels comfortable, even Richard Florida in his book, *Who is your City?* ranked Reno as a top 5 “Best City” for mid-career professionals. Now we must get out there and market our many strengths in a way that resonates with the creative class. This is different than our usual economic development marketing that focuses on business needs. This marketing effort is aimed at individuals, rather than companies, and is something new for EDAWN that will require support from the entire community.

There are several things you can do to help in this effort. First, support revitalization efforts; there is progress being made but our downtowns, both Reno and Sparks have a long way to go. Second, help us get the word out about the “new” creative class friendly Reno-Sparks. Third, embrace and support the University of Reno as “our” University; a college town feel is exactly what resonates with the creative class. Finally, invite a friend, relative or acquaintance to consider this region for a job change as more quality jobs become available. Nothing beats word of mouth.

Our community has already reached the “tipping point” of economic success, but we will fail to meet our potential if we are not successful in attracting the talent that will take us to the next level. This is a priority for EDAWN but we can’t succeed without your help.