

# THE CREATIVE CLASS

ORLANDO'S TS NURTURE ECONOMIC GROWTH By Jackie Kelvington



»» Tolerance. While that's not generally the first word that comes to mind when describing the Orlando region, maybe it should be.

According to a nationally known cultural and societal researcher, "tolerance," "open-mindedness" or "progressiveness" are among the best economic characteristics a community can have. And, says this noted researcher, the Orlando area is among the leaders nationwide in this category.

In his best-selling book, *The Rise of the Creative Class*, Carnegie Mellon Economic Development Professor Richard Florida talks about "high-tolerant" communities fostering strong economic

growth because they attract a young, skilled labor force. Florida goes on to say that the attraction of a core demographic and professional group of people, such as engineers, writers and designers — a group he has dubbed "the creative class" — is essential to any community's business development success. The cities with the greatest levels of success, he contends, are those that embrace his three Ts: technology, talent and tolerance.

Metro Orlando has not only come to embrace those Ts, but has begun to

leverage their strength.

Strong collaboration among the region's economic development organizations, local governments, educational institutions and business leaders has bolstered *technology* (the first "T") industry development here. Particular strengths include the areas of simulation, software development, photonics and digital media.

Such development has created more positive economic news for Metro Orlando, namely the broadening of its skilled *talent* (the second "T") pool and company base.

This is where the third "T," *tolerance*, comes in. The region has grown into a large melting pot where people from different backgrounds, cultures, countries, professions and ages have converged. Subsequently, Orlando has evolved as a desirable, trendy, opportunistic place to work and live. In Orlando's urban core, for example, projects are underway that are breathing new life into downtown. Condominiums, offices and retail outlets are sprouting up. Arts and culture offerings are on the rise. And, the growing reputations of local universities, community colleges and specialized trade schools are bringing young professionals into the community, and keeping them in the job market.

One thing is for sure ... corporate heads like their companies to be where the brain trust can be found. The clustering of innovative companies and creative individuals is happening in entrepreneurial locations. New markets are emerging as the "places to be." Metro Orlando is one of those places. x