

Strategist suggests state stay attractive to business

# Think young, think Arizona

By Ioanna Morfessis  
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**R**eturning to Arizona after a six-year absence is both a familiar homecoming and a discovery of a new world! More than 650,000 people were added to the state's population between 1998 and 2002, and an even greater surge in new residents is expected as the nation's economy continues to improve.

While growth continues to be the most powerful influence in Arizona's economy, another equally potent force that affects us all is: the aging of America.

This is evidenced in projections for Arizona's population growth, with an expected decrease in the "X" and "Cusper" generations, ages 25 to 34 and 35 to 44, respectively.

In fact, by the year 2010, Arizona is projected to have 125,000 fewer young people between the ages of 25 to 44 than live here today—a trend that will threaten our future.

As the economy recovers, the ability to attract talented workers once again will be the most critical factor driving the creation of jobs and private capital investment.

Arizona's employers now draw from the talent pool of those 25 to 44, the very age group expected to decline by the end of this decade. Their future competitiveness could be thwarted.

Keeping our existing companies, fueling start-up enterprises and attracting outside firms to locate here require an abundance of talented, young and technologically savvy workers.

Arizona, therefore, needs to be zealous about becoming the best place for children, youth and families.

This zeal should drive every policymaking and spending deliberation in local and state governments, in every community and economic development agenda, and in all institutional and philanthropic funding decisions.

The demographically driven shortage of young talent has individuals, families and employers placing a premium on places that have had the foresight to develop, attract and retain young people.

Scores of cities nationwide are working vigorously to be more attractive to children, youth and families.

Beginning in 2000, the Greater Baltimore region was one of the first markets in the United States to plan for this eventuality.

Cities such as Cincinnati, Denver, Atlanta, Orlando and Las Vegas, among others, also have been aggressive in creating community lifestyles and amenities that most appeal to youth.

Based on research with groups of Gen Yers (15 to 24) and Gen Xers in large cities around the nation, they expect specific product offerings in the places where they live:

- Conspicuously safe cities that offer a broad range of affordable housing and abundant blue and green spaces.

- Accessible transportation providing ease of access to work, shopping and recreational/entertainment amenities.

- Quality K-12 public school sys-



**About the author**

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impact through marketing, development and growth strategies. She was the founding president and CEO of both the Greater Baltimore Alliance and the Greater Phoenix Economic Council.

tion and resurgence of Phoenix's historic Roosevelt neighborhood as an arts district, with its Greenwich Village-esque studios, galleries and lofts, are creating more appeal for the creative class. These young, hip professionals are re-energizing cities and are highly sought after by traditional and innovative companies alike.

- Many new foundations in our state, including the Rodel Charitable Foundation, the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, the Stardust Foundation and the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust, bring the wealth of incredibly generous benefactors to benefit the people of Arizona, especially our children.

All of these endeavors, including the work of Michael Crow, the president of Arizona State University, Children's Action Alliance, Greater Phoenix Leadership, Translational Genomics Research Institute (TGen) and many other groups, address various aspects of the environment essential to the development of youth.

More needs to be done on a systemic basis to safeguard our future generations and ameliorate the demographic forces that imperil Arizona's potential.

Perhaps a place to begin is to assess the appeal and promise of our product offerings and build from there.

As a repatriated Arizonan, I am more optimistic than ever about Arizona's future. The spirited determination that brought us to our present will drive us to create the best possible future for our families, ourselves and others.

In this quest, Arizona must stand out and above all other places in our nation as the most splendid location for the fulfillment of our future citizens, workers and leaders.

tems graduating students who are accepted to the best colleges and universities.

- Welcoming environments that value diversity, where young people feel they belong and where gender, racial, ethnic, religious and lifestyle differences are highly respected and celebrated.

Urban centers around the United States are mobilizing their business, civic, educational and public institutions to foster cultures, programs and amenities that strengthen this "checklist of product offerings." Of particular importance are the metrics various communities have adopted to assess their progress.

Arizona is on the right track with many initiatives under way:

- Gov. Janet Napolitano's ardent leadership has focused on many fronts, including strategies to benefit children. Among them is her determination to improve the plight of children requiring services from the Child Protective Services Agency. A responsive and responsible Legislature must do even more to help bring these plans to fruition.

- The work of the Maricopa Regional County Arts and Culture Task Force, combined with the revitaliza-

