

Six books that provide insights into creating healthy communities

The Arizona Republic
Oct. 28, 2007 12:00 AM

As a business and economic-development executive, Ioanna Morfessis has spent 25 years helping business, institutions and communities create and execute change and growth strategies. She was the founding president and CEO of the Greater Phoenix Economic Council and the Economic Alliance of Greater Baltimore. Her Phoenix-based consulting practice, IO.INC, works with companies, communities, non-profits and entrepreneurs in the areas of strategic planning, growth and change management.

We asked Morfessis, who has a doctorate in public administration and economics from Arizona State University, to recommend several books that would help readers get a clearer picture of the relationship among key factors that contribute to healthy communities. Economies are dynamic and organic, and their vitality depends upon many factors, including innovation, entrepreneurship, technology, and the well-being of the people and businesses that drive their growth.

The Death and Life of Great American Cities
By Jane Jacobs
Vintage Books, 1961

Cities and the Wealth of Nations
By Jane Jacobs
Random House, 1984

Nearly 50 years ago, Jane Jacobs proffered new ways of looking at what makes for great communities. She first advanced the notion that cities are where people best live their lives, raise their families, work and play. In the second book, Jacobs asserted that it is the city, and not the nation-state, that is the central player in the world economy. Jacobs's prescience is germane to our world today: It is imperative that we strengthen our cities as competitive, economic engines and as magnets for talented and skilled workers and entrepreneurs.

WIKINOMICS: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything
By Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams
Portfolio, a division of the Penguin Group Inc., 2006

The global proliferation of social-networking technologies, or "mass collaboration," is rapidly and irrevocably changing how people connect, how business is performed and how consumer decisions are made. This book will help broaden our understanding of the direct and speedy impact that a disparate group of individuals scattered around the world can have on the lives and livelihoods of people anywhere, including Phoenix. Understanding that there no longer is a U.S.-only exclusive right to success and well-being will greatly enable us to appreciate and embrace the need to be concerned about how we stack up against the rest of the world.

The Entrepreneurial Imperative: How America's Economic Miracle Will Reshape the World (and Change Your Life)

By Carl J. Schramm

Harpers Collins, 2006

The basic premise of this best-seller is that entrepreneurship is central to maintaining our leadership position in the world. From the individual who starts a business to the innovator in a major corporation or university, entrepreneurship leads to economic competitiveness and success. Arizona's economy benefits substantially both from small-business formation and innovation emanating from such institutions as TGen, ASU and the University of Arizona. Private capital investment, business start-ups and patents issued are important indicators of robust economies and are must-have standards for measuring the economic vitality of Arizona.

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder

By Richard Louv

Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2006

Richard Louv asserts that a "nature-deficit disorder" has emerged in our technology-rich world due to rapid urbanization and increasing isolation from nature. An intriguing premise of this book is a call to create the "zoopolis" by bringing back nature and wildlife into our cities and suburbs. As we continue to grow, it is essential that we, at the same time, remain connected to and preserve the very qualities that brought many of us here to begin with. How we reintroduce and respect nature in our rapidly urbanizing community will be a significant indicator of just how much we value both our natural heritage and our future well-being.

The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century

By Thomas Friedman

Farrar, Straus, Reese and Giroux, 2005

Thomas Friedman's book provides a very real picture of just how the world has "flattened" because of the explosive growth and ready access of technology across the world. Friedman's account of "Global 3.0," the current and quickly evolving era of global business and trade, is an acute reminder of the intense competition that the U.S. confronts on a daily basis. We now compete on a scale that has been unprecedented. To survive in the globalized economy, we must move toward a more integrated and knowledge-based economy, one that offers earnings opportunities that will enable individuals to attain a good quality of life and higher standard of living. High-quality education at all levels is essential to achieving this status for all Arizonans.

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