

VALLEY NEWS

THE NEWS SOURCE OF THE UPPER VALLEY

Published 6/19/05

VALLEY NEWS HOME

SUBSCRIBE

ADVERTISE

CONTACT US

WEB EXTRAS

VALLEY CALENDAR

CLASSIFIED ADS

EMPLOYMENT ADS

ABOUT
THE UPPER VALLEY

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

AP WIRE

The Creative Economy

By Sarwar A. Kashmeri

For the Valley News

“Oh say! What is this thing called Light ...” the blind boy asks in the poem by the English poet Colley Cibber. Perhaps it is stretching a point, but sometimes I feel as if the phrase “Creative Economy” is as elusive a concept to me as light was to that poor lad.

Does CE refer to an economy sprinkled with artists and writers and such, or to an economy dominated by them? Does the phrase also include the creativity of engineers, business entrepreneurs and medical researchers? Is the presence of CE a necessary condition for an area to become economically self-sustaining? These thoughts have been rattling through my mind as I speak to residents of the Upper Valley, because the concept of a CE seems to be integral to the area's identity. This column is an opening salvo in my endeavor to add clarity to the concept of CE; a free-form discussion with a few Upper Valley residents to see what CE means to them.

“You cannot have a rigid definition for CE,” Charles Massey, executive director of the Newport Opera House says. “As soon as you define something, you could well be excluding the most important things.” The opera house is a part of the patchwork quilt “we call the Lake Sunapee area,” Massey says. “We have to acknowledge, respond to and encourage all the other squares, because the moment we don't, the squares will not remain connected and the quilt will fall apart.”

Gregg Fairbrothers is the executive director of the Dartmouth Entrepreneurial Network and deals with the commercialization of products of technological research. His role is not just to help start things but make them successful, and thereby continue the already significant contributions Dartmouth and Tuck (where he is adjunct professor of business administration) make to the Upper Valley's community.

“Whether it is true the CE drives economic development or not, the essential thing is that it is something we should have,” he says, “because CE is intrinsically good for people and the quality of life in the community.” It is also an asset of long standing in the Upper Valley according to Fairbrothers and he is convinced that if he started a company here he could make people take a cut “to come and work for me because so many people love to be in this environment.”

Warren Kimble, the famous folk artist and entrepreneur who has helped transform Brandon, Vt.'s economy through his retail enterprise, thinks of CE as a gathering or combining of the arts to enhance “not just the economy but the community or town or

city.” Creative to Kimble does not just mean artists painting pictures, it also means store windows decorated well, streetscapes illuminated and flowered, parks that bring people together in their own communities. “If you can get people to buy in their town, rather than go outside, then the economy will work for the town and make the town feel better about itself.”

I wondered what a banker's perspective might be and talked to Charles Petersen, president of First Community Bank in Woodstock about his concept of CE. Petersen thinks of the CE as consisting of the performing and creative arts: painting, sculpture, song writing, but not business entrepreneurs and engineers, because they belong to the regular economy. And “if you look at a town like Woodstock, that is where the CE pebble hits the pond and the ripples go out -- to the legal community, the accounting community and the hospitality business as people come to look or enjoy the arts.”

Beyond that, the CE engine drives a quality of life that feeds the housing market because you now have a place that is desirable to live. “I would have reservations about how vibrant and stable we would be without the CE,” he says.

A CE also creates an identity for an area. “Carmel, Calif., has a lot of painters, and people know they can go there and find a wide selection of paintings,” Petersen points out. “Concentration gives identity, creates a draw, and that leads to a more self-sustaining economy.”

From a banker's perspective, the CE can also be a challenging sector to deal with because it does not have significant capital or borrowing needs until it creates a critical mass such as Kimble's retail enterprise. But when that critical mass appears, as a lender, “one can listen to a proposition such as the couple that opened Cafe Provence in Brandon, or the setting up of galleries or craft shops. There is now a flow of prospective customers, and that makes bank lending an acceptable risk,” Petersen says; which, if you have tried to borrow money from a banker, is a pleasantly creative thing to hear.

Let me give the last word to James Sturm, founder of the Center for Cartoon Studies in White River Junction, who says that he is not certain what CE means, “but it sure comes in handy for fund raising.”

That is CE for some of the Upper Valley's denizens. How does this square with your views? As usual, your comments are most welcome.

Sarwar A. Kashmeri of Reading, Vt., advises corporations on communications and marketing strategy and is a fellow of the Foreign Policy Association. This twice-monthly column explores the Upper Valley's “business climate,” focusing on the issues and conditions affecting the region's economic health. Kashmeri can be reached at skashmeri@aol.com.

[Back to the story index](#)

[Valley News Home](#) [Subscribe](#) [Advertise](#) [Contact Us](#) [Web Extras](#) [Valley Calendar](#)
[Classified Ads](#) [Employment Ads](#) [The Upper Valley](#) [Associated Press](#)