



MARION A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

The 12th certified Blue Zones Community® in the nation invests in well-being for a more livable, vibrant, and healthier future.





CONGRATS, MARION,
FOR PUTTING WELL-BEING
ON THE MAP!

We deserve a round of applause.
And maybe even a standing ovation.
Because we made it happen.

After launching Blue Zones Project®, our community saw a nearly **22 percent increase in the number of residents who eat healthfully since 2012**. This is thanks to a new urban agriculture ordinance, community gardens, and an edible orchard. Our community's resurgence, anchored in putting the well-being of our residents first, is happening.

Marion is the best place in Iowa to raise a family and grow a business. Here you can reach higher.

We did this together. By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone. Here's to making Marion one of the healthiest places in the nation, where residents are living better, together.

THE JOURNEY TO BECOME A BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

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A rural landscape in Iowa featuring a green field in the foreground, a large tree, and several buildings in the background.

PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP IN IOWA

A GREAT STATE

What does it take to become a healthier state? What does that mean for those who live and work there? These were the questions on the minds of community leaders in 2011 when Governor Terry Branstad challenged Iowa to become the healthiest state alongside the Healthiest State Initiative. An answer came with Blue Zones Project, a community-wide initiative that united civic leaders, businesses, restaurants, schools, grocers, families, and others in an effort to enhance the community landscape and improve the overall well-being of Iowans. With this vision as a foundation, the Blue Zones Project partnership is bringing value to communities statewide — with things like improved health, a strong economy, and happier, healthier, and highly productive residents who spend more time living well.

AN INNOVATIVE SPONSOR

Wellmark® Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® chose to invest in the lives of Iowans by bringing Blue Zones Project to the state for what would be the cornerstone of Iowa's Healthiest State Initiative.

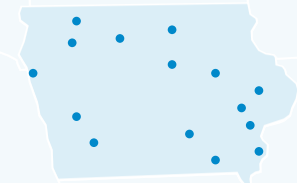
Wellmark knew that doing so would introduce an innovative approach that moves beyond diet and exercise regimens and applies the principles of behavioral economics to make healthier choices easier choices. The projected outcomes? Improved health and well-being for Iowans.

A Transformative Solution

Blue Zones Project helps transform U.S. communities like ours into Blue Zones Communities — areas where people live longer with a higher quality of life. The secrets to well-being and longevity are found in the Power 9® — nine common principles from the Blue Zones® longevity hotspots of the world. Blue Zones Communities are places where residents, employers, and others collaborate to create environments where healthy choices are easier for everyone.

The results?

Vibrant communities where residents are happier, healthier, and more engaged with each other. Iowa was among the first to embark on this journey to well-being. Fifteen communities and five years later, the results are undeniable.





IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGHER WELL-BEING, WE HAVE FOUND THAT PEOPLE LIVE LONGER, HAPPIER LIVES AND BUSINESS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES FLOURISH. A RELIABLE WELL-BEING METRIC PROVIDES COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS WITH THE DATA AND INSIGHTS THEY NEED TO HELP MAKE SUSTAINED TRANSFORMATION A REALITY. AFTER ALL, IF YOU CAN'T MEASURE IT, YOU CAN'T MANAGE IT.

Dan Buettner
New York Times best-selling author
National Geographic Fellow
Blue Zones founder

Measuring the Impact

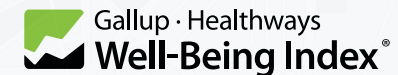
Change requires action. It isn't enough to do something one time; lasting change, which is a central tenet of Blue Zones Project, must be created from permanent and semi-permanent changes and alterations to the environment, policies, programs, and social networks. These actions allow healthy choices to become easy choices today and for many years to come.

From 2010 – 2015, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index®, Iowa has outpaced the nation in overall well-being, improving at twice the rate of the national average.



GALLUP-HEALTHWAYS WELL-BEING INDEX

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index is the most proven, mature, and comprehensive measure of well-being in the world. Measuring well-being gives policy, community, and business leaders the data to benchmark populations, understand gaps and opportunities, and then prioritize interventions to measurably improve well-being. Improving well-being has been shown to lower health care costs and increase worker productivity, in turn, enhancing organizational and community competitiveness.



15 Communities Commit to Well-Being

In October 2011, 84 Iowa communities submitted statements of interest to be selected for Blue Zones Project, and an elite 15 were chosen. Communities received support from national experts and thousands of community members.

Across the state, Blue Zones Project has seen:

520,000

Lives impacted by environmental changes designed to help people move naturally, eat wisely, develop the right outlook, and connect with others.

430,000+

Actions taken by individuals to improve well-being for themselves, their families, and friends.

610

Worksites, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants achieved Blue Zones Project designation.

21,164

(And counting) Actions taken by those organizations to make healthy choices easier, helping residents, employees, and patrons live longer, better lives.

180,245

Total feet of bike lanes, trails, and sidewalks built to encourage people to move more naturally.

142

Walking School Bus routes created to encourage students to move naturally.

15

All 15 communities passed new Complete Streets policies to enable safe access for all users — drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

”

IT'S CELEBRATING
WHAT THE PEOPLE
OF AMERICA ARE
NOW WAKING UP
TO, AND REALIZING
WHAT THEY WANT.
IT'S GOING TO
HAPPEN IN IOWA
FIRST.

Dan Burden
Walkability Expert
Blue Zones



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY?

Worksites, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants complete various **action items** on a **pledge** in order to earn their Blue Zones Project **designation**.



”

MARION HAS SHOWN A DEDICATION TO THE VISION OF HEALTHIER, LONGER LIVES THROUGH MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES EASIER FOR CITIZENS. I APPLAUD THEIR EFFORTS, PARTICULARLY THE SWIFT, POSITIVE PROGRESS TOWARD TOBACCO AND NICOTINE FREE PARKS.

Dan Buettner
New York Times best-selling author
National Geographic Fellow
Blue Zones founder

A photograph showing two men kneeling in a grassy field, planting a young tree. The man on the left is wearing a bright green shirt and blue jeans, while the man on the right is wearing a grey shirt, blue shorts, and a green and white cap. They are both focused on the tree, which is supported by a wire mesh cage and a wooden stake. The background features a vast green field under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. In the distance, some utility poles and a building are visible.

PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP IN MARION

As a pioneer in innovation, Marion is leading the way for a movement that is now more than 26 communities strong nationwide.

Our neighbors, teachers, and community leaders have made tremendous strides in optimizing the places where we all live, work, learn, and play.

”
INVOLVEMENT
WITH BLUE ZONES
PROJECT HAS LED
US TO CONSTANTLY
LOOK FOR WAYS TO
MAKE THE HEALTHY
CHOICE THE EASY
CHOICE IN MARION.
WE'RE SEEING
THIS FOCUS ON
HEALTH AND WELL-
BEING REFLECTED
THROUGHOUT THE
COMMUNITY.

Lon Pluckhahn
City Manager
Marion

Better Food Sprouts Better Nutrition in Marion

The number of Marion residents who report eating healthy has increased nearly 22 percent, from 58.8 percent in 2012 to 71.7 percent in 2015.

This highlights the impact of a new urban-agriculture ordinance, community gardens, and an edible orchard. With a 45 percent growth in the number of residents over the past 15 years, we're growing with a focus on well-being.

Healthy living is the backbone of our Blue Zones Community. Start your day outdoors by walking or riding a bike on the trail to Lowe Park. Kids play on the playground and learn in the discovery garden. People of all ages ease into a downward dog pose at a free Sunrise Yoga class. Others tend plots at the community garden.

As you stroll through our parks, you'll notice the grounds are free of tobacco litter and the air is free of smoke. This is due to a nicotine-free parks and trails ordinance that includes e-cigarettes and vaporizers. Since launching Blue Zones Project, smoking is trending down in our community. A year-over-year measure showed a **15 percent decline in smoking** from 12.2 percent in 2014 to less than 11 percent in 2015. Our city also passed an urban-agriculture ordinance to promote local food growth, active recreational work, and a healthy environment. A culture of well-being is central to building healthy habits for the rest of our lives.



Since 2014: A Community-wide Commitment to Blue Zones Project



38,000

Lives impacted

76%

Community awareness

38%

People engaged

7,963

Individuals pledged to support well-being

27,675

Well-being actions taken by individuals

40%

Believe Blue Zones Project® has made a positive impact on the community

61

Organizations implementing well-being principles

931

Changes made by organizations to support living longer better

32

Organizations completing the pledge

14

of Marion's worksites are Blue Zones Worksites®

66%

of Marion's locally owned restaurants are Blue Zones Restaurants®

46%

of Marion's public schools are Blue Zones Schools®

40%

of Marion's grocery stores are Blue Zones Grocery Stores®



SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones Project Highlight: Marion

Marion is making well-being a way of life. Hear from our leaders and neighbors about how an emphasis on well-being makes our community a better place to live.

Watch the video:

explore.bluezonesproject.com/Marion



Media Coverage Places Marion on National Stage

Blue Zones Project in Iowa has attracted local and national recognition, with more than 1,600 media stories to date.

Since the launch in 2012, Blue Zones Project® in Iowa has been heralded for innovative approaches to population health management in notable publications such as **O, The Oprah Magazine**.



Marion in the News

98

Total Mentions

7,114,498

Total Reach

\$18,352

Total Publicity Value*

* Publicity value calculated using Cisionpoint Media Monitoring service.



Marion Blue Zones Project leaders meet with Governor Branstad, May 2015

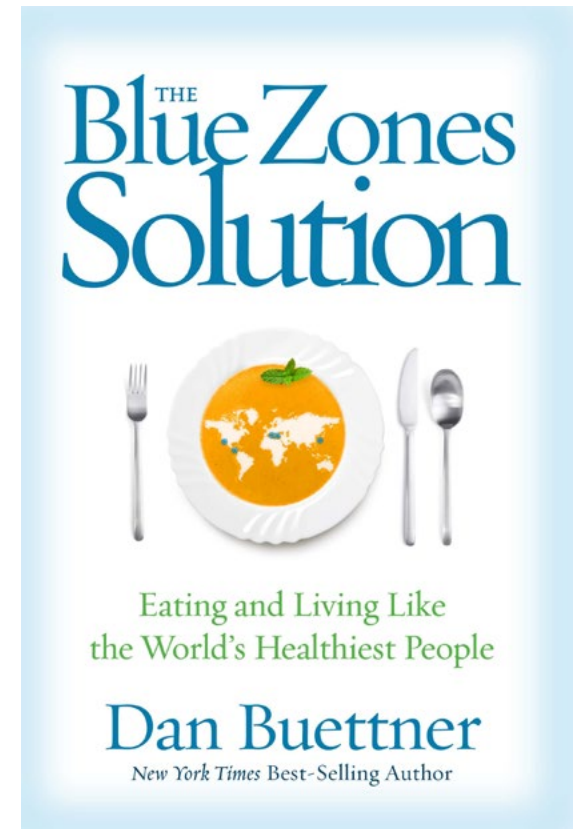
In the News

Marion goes blue, kicks off Blue Zones Project

KCRG
04.15.14

Marion; taking back our health

Marion Times
06.25.15



In addition to great media stories covering our efforts, the Blue Zones Project Iowa story is featured prominently in Dan Buettner's latest *New York Times* best-selling book, *The Blue Zones Solution: Eating and Living Like the World's Healthiest People*.



GUIDE TO THE POWER 9


The landscape for well-being in America cannot be improved without committed partnerships. That's why leaders across many sectors joined forces to take action and positively impact our residential and business communities. This broad, holistic approach is making healthy choices easier.

Using the secrets to longevity as our guide — [the Power 9](#) — businesses and residents have taken actions to make well-being a way of life.

THE POWER 9

P.19

Move Naturally

 Make daily physical activity an unavoidable part of your environment.

P.25

Right Outlook


 Know your purpose.

 Downshift: work less, slow down, and take vacations.

P.30

Eat Wisely

 Eat until 80 percent full.

 More veggies, less meat and processed food.

 Drink a glass of red wine each day.

P.37

Connect

 Create a healthy social network.

 Connect or reconnect with religion.

 Prioritize family.



Together, Marion residents are moving more, naturally. Since 2014, we've seen a 16 percent increase in people who feel active and productive every day.

We generally exercise too hard or not at all. However, the world's longest-lived people don't pump iron, run marathons, or join gyms. Instead, they live in environments that constantly nudge them to move naturally. They live in places where they can walk to the store, a friend's house, or places of worship. Their houses have stairs. They have gardens in their yards. It's not just about moving, it's about moving naturally.

**MOVING
NATURALLY**

WHY MOVEMENT MATTERS

About 69 percent of the American population can be classified as overweight or obese.²

Our children's life expectancy is projected to be shorter than that of their parents for the first time in history. Obesity is not just a health problem, it's an economic one, too. The estimated annual health care costs of obesity-related illness are a staggering \$190 billion, or nearly 21 percent of annual medical spending. Childhood obesity alone is responsible for \$14 billion in direct medical costs.³

The good news is there is a solution for this growing issue. **Increasing simple movements like standing, walking, stretching, and bending can help burn an extra 350 calories a day.** Studies show that just by making our communities more walkable, the prevalence of obesity can decrease by more than 10 percent.⁴ That adds up to even bigger possibilities like lowered incidences of heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues and increased productivity, vitality, and years of quality life.

How Moving Naturally Impacts Our Community

City planners, schools, worksites, and organizations across our community have come together to create environments and support programs that help Marion residents move naturally. Our city has emerged as a leader for street and community design that nudges people to healthier daily habits. Here are some reasons why:

187

Actions taken by organizations to move naturally

5,717

Actions taken by individuals to move naturally, like getting a bike or a dog to encourage regular movement

59

Walking Moai teams with 514 participants

3

Walking School Bus routes



WHAT'S A MOAI?

Moai is a concept from Okinawa, Japan, that roughly means coming together for a common purpose. When you find your Moai, you find your personal board of directors — a committed group of individuals supporting each other and working collectively to improve well-being, for life.

TRANSFORMING ENVIRONMENTS

A community resurgence, anchored in putting the well-being of our residents first, is happening in Marion. **Our community of more than 38,000 has grown by 45 percent in the past 15 years,** and it is investing in businesses and infrastructure to keep us connected.

In 2015, the Marion city council passed a Complete Streets policy that followed a Master Trails Plan already in place. Complete Streets policies ensure roads are safe for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Because of these plans, positive built-environment projects are popping up all over the city, with many new trails and sidewalks allowing people to move naturally.

Roundabout revolution. Marion recognizes the safety and efficiency roundabouts bring to communities and gives careful consideration when designing intersections. Marion is home to two full-size roundabouts along Tower Terrace Road and one mini-roundabout that replaced a dangerous intersection at 35th Street and 29th Avenue. Additionally, two full-size roundabouts are being constructed along Business Highway 151 as part of the Central Corridor Project. When complete, the roundabouts will help balance traffic along two parallel routes through historic Uptown Marion and create a more pedestrian-friendly atmosphere.

Our first bicycle boulevard. The bike boulevard is a mile-long stretch that connects riders from Tower Road to Boyson Road.

Imagine Art in the Alleys. Marion secured a \$350,000 Artplace America grant to implement the Imagine Art in the Alleys project — inspired by Blue Zones Project — to bring vitality, life, art, and people together to enhance social well-being. This \$1.2 million project will transform our community's alleyways through a combination of infrastructural improvements and the installation of creative projects. The result will be a safe, beautiful space to walk, bike, and gather.

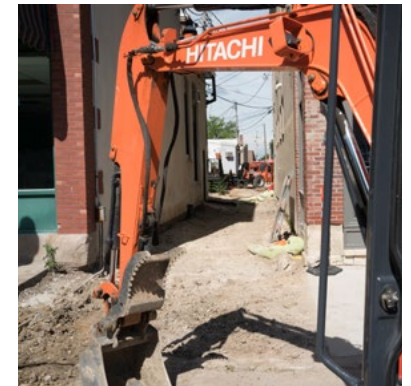
Step into Nature. We want Marion to be a place that provides the opportunity and inspiration to lead an active life, immersed in nature. For everyone. Every day. Through Centers for Disease Control and Prevention funding administered through the American Planning Association, Marion has been working with public health officials and community leaders to develop a policy document to address obesity. This puts Marion on a national stage with its four-pronged approach to active living, active transportation, biophilic design, and community interaction.

In the News

ImaginArt in the Alleys receives ArtPlace America Grant

Uptown Marion

06.25.14



ORGANIZATIONS MOVING NATURALLY

The health of our community is directly related to the health and vitality of our people.

Organizations across Marion have recognized their responsibility to create environments that support their employees and patrons in moving more.

Worksites

We spend about one third of our waking hours at work. Over the last 50 years, the percentage of jobs requiring moderate physical activity has fallen from 50 percent in 1960 to 20 percent today.⁹

This means four out of five jobs are sedentary or only require light activity. This decline in physical activity translates to Americans burning 120–140 fewer calories each day, which results in burning 12–15 fewer pounds each year.

As waistlines expand so do our medical costs. Annually, obesity-related illnesses cost more than \$190 billion in health care costs and \$153 billion in lost productivity, annually.³

With so much time spent at work, it's important that these environments are set up to help people move more. **Our community saw 14 worksites complete actions to help people move more, including adding standing desks, sharing walking routes, providing bicycle racks, and offering stretch breaks and fitness classes.**

These are small changes that lead to huge results for the average person over the course of a career.

”

I LIVE 20 MINUTES BY CAR FROM MY HOME TO WORK. ON MARION'S BIKE-TO-WORK DAY, I PARKED MY PICKUP AT THE MARION YMCA AND RODE MY BICYCLE TO WORK FROM THERE. IT WAS MY FIRST BIKE RIDE THIS YEAR. AT LUNCH I USUALLY TAKE A 45-MINUTE RIDE AROUND MARION, BIKE BACK TO MY TRUCK, AND RETURN TO WORK AFTER. NOW THESE RIDES HAVE BECOME HABIT. AT MARION PROCESS SOLUTIONS, WE ARE A BLUE ZONES WORKSITE, SO THIS KEEPS MY HEALTHY HABITS TOP OF MIND AND ALSO IS A BIG MOTIVATION.

Gary Albaugh
Marion Process Solutions

Schools

Every day, children are learning habits they will carry for the rest of their lives.

Establishing healthy habits like moving naturally is so important in the early stages of life. Physical activity and stretch breaks during the school day can improve grades, increase concentration, and improve math, reading, and writing test scores.¹⁰

Additionally, research shows that including 10-minute activity breaks on a daily basis can promote improvement across these areas by up to 20 percent.

Our community saw six schools complete actions to help students get moving, including adding three Walking School Buses, brain breaks, and additional recess and physical education time.

At Novak Elementary, students stay active during the day through several new initiatives intended to instill lifelong healthy habits at an early age: classroom brain breaks, school gardens, and a Walking School Bus. These initiatives are paying off. The percentage of 10-year-old girls in the Healthy Fitness Zone, a national standard for measurement, increased from 48 percent in December 2014 to 84 percent in June 2015; for 12-year-old boys, the percentage rose from 28 percent to 58 percent.

Restaurants and Grocery Stores

Grocery stores in Marion remind shoppers that parking further away is one way to easily add more activity in their day. Restaurants are installing bicycle racks to encourage people to consider active transportation to common destinations (and work up a healthy appetite, too). Small efforts like these make moving naturally easier than ever before in Marion.



WALKING HELPS KIDS

Children who walk to school are more alert and ready to learn, strengthen their social networks, and develop lifetime fitness habits.^{11, 12} A Walking School Bus allows a group of children to walk to school under the supervision of two or more adults.



RIGHT OUTLOOK

With more than 41,032 volunteer hours logged by 4,755 volunteers, volunteers in Marion added \$912,962 in value for the community.¹

Having the right outlook is a common thread in Blue Zones areas.

The longest-lived people have regular habits to shed stress. Okinawans take a few moments each day to remember their ancestors, Adventists pray, Ikarians take a nap, and Sardinians enjoy happy hour. **It doesn't matter what you do, just so long as it helps you keep the right outlook.**

Blue Zones centenarians also put an emphasis on connecting with their reason for being. Whether through family, career, or community, living with purpose pays off. **Blue Zones researchers have found that people who have a clear sense of purpose in life tend to live about seven years longer than those who don't.**²



WHY RIGHT OUTLOOK MATTERS

No matter where we live, stress and the pressures of daily life can weigh us down.

Practicing regular methods to downshift from everyday stress and understand our purpose can improve well-being. **Stress leads to chronic inflammation, which is tied to every major age-related disease.**

Research shows that those who connect with a sense of purpose and wake up to live with it each day outlive those who don't. In fact, those with a sense of purpose had a 15 percent lower rate of death than those who did not.¹³

How Right Outlook Impacts Our Community

Through volunteering, Purpose Workshops, and Purpose Moais, Marion supports individuals in helping them discover their innate gifts. We help our community members match their passions with volunteer opportunities to deepen their sense of purpose.

When reflecting on their life purpose, one-third of all Marion residents fall into the “thriving” category, which is up more than 22 percent — from 27 percent in 2014 to 33 percent in 2015 — according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. Impressively, nearly 84 percent of our community reports liking what they do every day.



THRIVING

Well-being that is strong, consistent, and progressing in a particular element.

STRUGGLING

Well-being that is moderate or inconsistent in a particular element.

SUFFERING

Well-being that is very low and at high risk in a particular element.





BY THE NUMBERS

64

Actions taken by organizations to build strong connections

6,440

Actions taken by individuals to practice having the right outlook, like designating a space at home for meditation or prayer, learning a new hobby, or discovering their purpose

4

Purpose Workshops with 192 participants

10

Purpose Moais with 90 participants

983

Volunteers with Blue Zones Project logging 2,957 hours

4,755

Volunteers in Marion logging 41,032 hours

OUTCOMES

With more than 41,032 volunteer hours logged by 4,755 volunteers, volunteers in Marion added \$912,962 in value to our community.

Additionally, 192 people sought to discover their gifts and deepen their sense of purpose through Purpose Workshops, and 90 people joined one of ten Purpose Moais.





WELL-BEING SAVES EVERYONE MONEY



THRIVE, DON'T SUFFER

For employees with the highest levels of well-being — those with the highest scores in the “thriving” category — the cost of lost productivity is only \$840 a year. Among the “suffering” employees — those with the lowest scores in the “thriving” category — the annual per-person cost of lost productivity due to sick days is \$28,800.



WHAT IS DISEASE BURDEN?

Disease-burden cost is how much money a person spends due to disease, including high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart disease, back pain, diabetes, depression/anxiety, and sleep apnea/insomnia.



IT PAYS TO BE BE HAPPY

Respondents in the “thriving” category averaged \$4,929 per person annually in disease burden cost versus \$6,763 a year for respondents in the struggling and suffering categories. For an organization with 1,000 workers, thriving employees would cost their employers \$1.8 million less every year. Furthermore, the average annual new disease-burden cost for people who are thriving is \$723, compared with \$1,488 for those who are struggling or suffering.

ORGANIZATIONS WITH THE RIGHT OUTLOOK

Organizations across Marion are creating environments and practices that encourage the right outlook. By keeping this top of mind throughout the community, everyone is enjoying more health and vitality.

Worksites

Fewer than 50 percent of Americans find meaning at work. Employers that invest in making work meaningful for their employees are more likely to see production rise and turnover decrease.¹⁴

Marion Process Solutions increased volunteerism and company giving by approximately 25 percent. Limolink established a community volunteer event called PedalPalooza. This 20-mile bike ride donates all proceeds to help feed children during the summer.

Actions Completed by 14 Worksites

- 1 Creating designated quiet spaces
- 2 Posting company mission
- 3 Encouraging volunteering
- 4 Offering Purpose Workshops

Schools

Mindfulness is paying attention to the here and now with kindness and curiosity.

Research suggests that teaching mindfulness skills to students increases attention and improves social skills while decreasing test anxiety. It also creates a sense of calm connection to nature, and it improves sleep. These skills allow children to better cope with the stress and noise in life.¹⁵

Our community saw five schools implement mindfulness programming to support our community's youngest minds. Research shows that students who participate in similar programs improved in the areas of empathy, perspective taking, optimism, emotional control, and mindfulness. They also were more likely to show improvements on trustworthiness, helpfulness, and sharing while showing less rule breaking and starting fewer fights than the control group.¹⁵

The entire student population at Marion High School volunteers in the community for one day each May.



”

FOR ME, IT WAS IMPORTANT TO GET TO KNOW [MY FRIENDS] IN MORE PERSONAL WAYS.

Alice Marks
Purpose Moai participant at
Summit Pointe Senior Living



The number of residents who report eating healthfully has increased nearly 22 percent with the help of a new urban-agriculture ordinance, community gardens, and an edible orchard.

Eating wisely is not a diet plan, it's a way of life in Blue Zones areas. Residents of Okinawa, Japan, have a smart strategy for maintaining a healthy weight.

Before meals they say "hara hachi bu," which means stop eating when you're 80 percent full. Studies show that cutting back on calories can lead to better health, longevity, and weight loss. Centenarians in Blue Zones areas eat a plant-packed diet with a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and beans. Rich in disease-fighting nutrients, fava beans, black beans, soy beans, and lentils are the cornerstone of their diets.

Don't diet; eat wisely.

EAT WISELY

WHY EATING WISELY MATTERS

It is estimated that by 2030, 86 percent of the American population will be overweight or obese if current eating habits and exercise habits remain the same.¹⁶

Food is fuel, and what we eat impacts our productivity, too. A 2012 study revealed that **unhealthy eating is related to a 66 percent increased risk of loss of productivity.** Health-related employee productivity loss accounts for 77 percent of all productivity loss and costs employers up to three times more in annual health care expenses.¹⁷

In addition to looking and feeling better, **the benefits of healthy eating are numerous. In the U.S. estimated savings are \$114.5 billion per year (in 2012 dollars) in medical savings, increased productivity, and reductions in heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporotic hip fractures.**¹⁸ Poor diet is a major risk factor for these five health conditions, all of which reduce life expectancy. By making subtle but substantial changes to our food options, we can be healthier.

How Eating Wisely Impacts Our Community

People make more than 200 food decisions every day.¹⁹ Blue Zones Project helps people choose wisely. Marion implemented small changes and defaults in restaurants, worksites, grocery stores, and schools. For example, restaurants created new, irresistible, good-for-you menu options. Grocery stores stocked their shelves with nutritious, tasty foods. Schools removed vending machines so kids aren't tempted by sugary snacks and sodas during the school day.

353 actions taken by organizations to support eating wisely

8,842 actions taken by individuals to eat wisely, like joining a Potluck Moai, adding healthy items to their grocery list, or growing a garden

29 cooking classes with 418 participants who are bringing healthier cooking home to their families

3 Plant-Based Potluck Moais with 41 participants

7 garden locations: 1 community garden with 7 beds that serve the local food pantry, 5 school gardens, and community gardens for rent that doubled in 2016 from 29 to 60.



BY THE NUMBERS

Since the early 1900s plate sizes have grown from

9.5 INCHES
TO
12.5 INCHES¹⁹

We've increased how much we eat by

27%¹⁹



In the News

Pounds of produce from Marion community garden aid food pantry

The Gazette
09.04.15

School garden teaches values of eating healthy

CBS2 Iowa
05.31.16

Community Gardens

With 60 garden plots springing up each season, Marion is literally growing well-being. The garden was established in March 2015 as a partnership between Blue Zones Project, Linn County Master Gardeners, the City of Marion, and the Churches of Marion Food Pantry. Volunteers are instrumental in maintaining the garden, which supplies fresh produce for the food pantry twice per week.

Schools are taking part, too, with two Blue Zones Schools featuring gardens tended by students. The produce is used in nutrition education and some makes its way onto plates in the lunchroom as salads, sides, and entrees.

An urban-agriculture ordinance allows beekeeping, urban chickens, rooftop gardens, farmers markets, and vertical gardens to help make fresh food available to residents.



Cristiane and Mayor Nicolas AbouAssaly hosted two plant-based cooking classes with 30 students attending each time. It was an opportunity for them to share their love of traditional Lebanese food and stories about their families and culture. They shared recipes for tabouli salad, hummus, lentil soup, Middle Eastern cabbage rolls, and more.



COMMUNITY GARDENS



PEAS IN A POD

People who garden tend to eat more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. In a survey of home and community gardeners in San Jose, California, participants doubled their vegetable intake and consumed the nationally recommended daily servings of vegetables. Another study from Denver, Colorado showed gardeners ate more fruits and vegetable than non-gardeners.²⁰



HOME IS WHERE THE GARDEN IS

An American Community Gardening Association report showed community gardens can increase home prices for residences near the garden as much as 9.4 percentage points within five years. The report also showed community gardens contribute to a reduction in violent and non-violent crime in the neighborhood and an overall increase in the feeling of safety.²¹



KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Schools are taking part, too, with gardens at all Blue Zones Schools tended by students. The produce is being used in nutrition education and some is even making its way onto plates in the lunchroom as salads, sides, and entrees.

Students who have access to school garden programs score significantly higher on science achievement tests than students who are taught by strictly traditional classroom methods.²²



BY THE NUMBERS

1,000 CALORIES

in a typical American entree in a restaurant.²³

2 EXTRA POUNDS

gained a year by eating one meal away from home a week.²⁴

5.5% INCREASE

in same-store sales at restaurants that increased their better-for-you/low-calorie servings between 2006 and 2011.²⁴

5.5% DECREASE

in sales at restaurants that did not increase their better-for-you/low-calorie servings.²⁴

ORGANIZATIONS EATING WISELY

Changes made to our restaurants, grocery stores, and schools can make a huge impact on the health and well-being of the community as a whole. By working together, we can make eating wisely second nature, not a chore.

Restaurants

Our community saw 10 restaurants complete actions to make healthy food choices easier

— things like offering half-size portions, creating new healthy entrees for adults and children, serving food on smaller plates, and serving healthier sides as the default option.

Blue Zones Restaurants have enjoyed noticeable business benefits. Napoli's added a Light and Fresh section to its menu, and items from this section now represent 20 percent of all orders. Ramsey's Metro Market has seen an increase in catering orders from Blue Zones Worksites.

Grocery Stores

Americans go to the grocery store more than twice a week. The actions we take to determine what we eat begin at the grocery store. More than 60 percent of the food we purchase is highly processed, fatty, salty, or sugary.²⁵ Many grocery stores currently lead people to unhealthy foods in the way they are designed, the deals they promote, and the packaging of the food they sell.²⁶ Our community is taking the lead in taking the grocery store back.

Our community saw two grocery stores complete actions to make healthy food choices easier – things like sharing healthy recipes, offering cooking classes, ensuring water is available in checkout lanes, offering healthy foods on end caps and in special displays, and offering a Blue Zones checkout lane full of healthy options.

In June 2014, Fareway added 16 feet of shelving for produce. A noticeable increase in display space draws attention to healthy offerings and increases the likelihood shoppers will make healthy choices.

In June 2014, Fareway added 16 feet of shelving for produce. A noticeable increase in display space draws attention to healthy offerings and increases the likelihood shoppers will make healthy choices.

80%

Increase in water sales since replacing sugary bevages with water in checkout-lane coolers at Hy-Vee



Worksites

Seventy percent of Americans eat at their desks several times a week, which can lead to distracted, disengaged, and mindless overeating.²⁷

In Marion, **14 worksites completed actions to make healthy food choices easier** — things like starting healthy potlucks and worksite gardens, improving cafeteria options, and adding healthy choices in vending machines.

Both Farmers State Bank and Marion Process Solutions updated their vending machines to ensure at least 50 percent of options are healthy items.

ESCO Group installed a water station to increase the availability of water while reducing plastic waste from water bottles. In just over one year 160,000 ounces of water were dispensed.



ONE OF THE BIG TAKEAWAYS FOR ME FROM BLUE ZONES PROJECT WAS THE CONCEPT OF HARA HACHI BU. OUR COMPANY HAD A KICKOFF FOR BLUE ZONES PROJECT AND WE HAD BRACELETS MADE WITH HARA HACHI BU ON THEM. I WEAR MINE EVERY DAY AS A REMINDER TO BE MINDFUL OF WHAT I EAT.

Chuck Sitter
Automation Team Leader
Limolink



Hara Hachi Bu is a 2,500 year-old Confucian mantra that reminds centenarians from Okinawa, Japan to eat mindfully and stop when 80 percent full.

Schools

With childhood obesity at 17 percent, there's never been a more important time to examine what students are eating at school.²⁸ The place they go to learn about history and science should be the place they go to learn about eating wisely as well.

Our community saw six schools complete actions to make healthy food choices easier for students — things like growing gardens and starting farm-to-school programs, stocking vending machines with healthier options or limiting access to them throughout the day, redesigning lunchrooms to nudge students toward healthier foods, and implementing new policies for celebrations and fundraising with food.

School food budgets are often a significant barrier to providing healthy and appealing school meals. Over the past two years, Linn-Mar Community Schools has increased its fruit and vegetable budget by more than 20 percent, demonstrating a strong commitment to keeping our kids healthy.

Marion High School, the first Blue Zones High School in the nation, added a salad bar as an option for students. Since the addition, 60 – 100 students choose this option daily.

Students who attend schools that sell foods with low nutrient density and sugar-sweetened beverages have lower intake of fruits, vegetables, and milk at lunch and higher daily percentages of calories from total fat and saturated fat.²⁹

Redesigning the school lunchroom is a simple and cost-effective way to nudge students into eating healthier without creating strict policies. Research by Brian Wansink of Cornell University found that **simple changes to the lunchroom design tripled salad sales, doubled fruit sales, doubled sales of healthy sandwiches, and reduced the purchase of ice cream.**¹⁹ By optimizing the school environment, students are nudged towards healthier choices.



”

ONE OF THE ORIGINAL FORCES THAT STARTED DRIVING US IN THIS DIRECTION WAS THE IDEA THAT WE NEED TO INCREASE THE AMOUNT OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES OUR YOUTH ARE EATING. PROVIDING PLACES FOR KIDS TO INTERACT WITH WHERE THEIR FOOD IS COMING FROM IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF IT.

Dustin Hinrichs
Trees Forever
Marion

CONNECT

Due to a new nicotine-free ordinance, people enjoy clean air as they gather in local parks; 425 people built strong relationships with new friends in Walking Moais.

The world's longest-lived people in Blue Zones areas have always understood the power of social connectedness and putting their families first.

In Okinawa, "Moais" — groups of about five people who commit to each other for their whole lives — provide social connection and emotional and sometimes financial support in times of need. Moai members have the security of knowing there is always someone there for them.

Putting family first and investing time with loved ones can add up to six years to your life.³⁰ Having a sense of belonging is an important part of enjoying a long and healthy life. It doesn't matter which faith you belong to, **studies have shown that people who belong to a place of worship and attend four times a month live four to fourteen years longer than those who don't.**³¹



WHY CONNECTION MATTERS

Our connections to friends, family, and those around us are very powerful. They have the ability to shape our lives in more ways than we realize. Research shows that even your friends' friends' friends — people you don't even know — have the ability to affect your health, happiness, and behaviors.³²

In the News



How Connectedness Impacts our Community

Spending time with people who positively influence one another is crucial. In Marion, we embraced the power of social connections to bring citizens together through groups, clubs, and faith-based organizations. Our community encourages social connections at our new community garden, nicotine-free parks, and along new walking trails.

Nicotine-free parks ordinance

The city council passed a nicotine-free parks ordinance, which is one of the first of its kind in Iowa. This policy prohibits smoking and the use of tobacco and nicotine products in parks, recreational facilities, and along trails. The results are a healthy outdoor atmosphere in which people can gather while our city is seen as a leader across the state and the U.S. in promoting the health of its citizens.

Sunrise Yoga

With the help of more than 18 guest instructors over two years, more than 30 free yoga classes were offered to the public at Lowe Park. Through this program, more than 1,270 people came together to downshift.



BY THE NUMBERS

64

Actions taken by organizations to build strong connections

5,135

Actions taken by individuals to connect, like designating regular family dinner nights, joining a Moai, or volunteering

58

Walking Moais with more than 514 participants

10

Purpose Moais with 90 participants

3

Plant-Based Potluck Moais with 41 participants



At 9:30 a.m. every Wednesday, the Summit Pointe Senior Living Walking Moai convenes. Resident Sandy Teggatz is the group coordinator and has been inspiring more people to join every week. The group has grown from eight to 14 walkers, and many proudly wear their Blue Zones Project t-shirts. Member Lucy Diesch says it's great to get involved with activities like a Moai because the members encourage each other and stay active together.



ORGANIZATIONS CONNECTING

There are many ways to promote connections in organizations throughout the community.

By providing these opportunities, everyone in the community feels like a part of something bigger.

Worksites

The digitalization of the work day has done wonders for productivity but not much for social connectivity.

Americans change jobs more often than ever before, and working from home or in isolated conditions can further a lack of socialization among coworkers and peers. **Our community saw 14 worksites complete actions to boost social connections for employees**, including things like “lunch with a co-worker” programs, flexible work schedules, offering strengths assessments, and implementing Moais.

Schools

Students will tell you that they’re connected with their classmates, but, they mean that they’re connected by their cell phones, which children receive on average at the age of six.³³

To bolster real, human interaction, Marion got students to plug in differently. Schools embraced connecting students to the world around them by establishing the **Legacy Project**, a program that encourages students to interact with and share stories with older adults.

Restaurants

Eating together fosters togetherness in all kinds of families, even those that are the size of whole communities.

There is no better opportunity to connect than around a dining table. Outdoor dining is available at Ramsey’s Wine Bistro, Cibo Fusion, La Cantina, Mandarin Spice, and Napoli’s Italian Restaurant which provides opportunities for people to connect more deeply with their neighbors and community while enjoying a healthy meal outside.



The Ringwald and Steffan families walk together to achieve improved well-being twice per week. Being in a Moai motivated the group to keep walking, even during cold winter months. The group ranges in age from eight to 43. Joy Ringwald, age 10, says, “It’s fun to do it. It’s not just to walk, it’s to be with friends.”



FRIENDS ALWAYS SHARE

Friends provide more than good times, memories, and companionship — they also share health habits and other traits with one another. Did you know that if your friends are smokers, unhappy, or obese, you're more likely to adopt these same traits? You are twice as likely to be overweight if your three closest friends are overweight,³⁴ and inversely, you are 20 percent more likely to succeed at new behaviors if you do them with a buddy.³⁵



GOOD FRIENDS AND FAMILY MAKE EVERYTHING BETTER



EAT TOGETHER BETTER

Adolescents who eat dinner with their family are 15 percent less likely to become obese. Additionally, a report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse points out that teens who eat dinner with their families more than three times a week are less likely to do poorly in school.³⁷



SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The amount of time you spend socializing each day has a direct impact on your well-being. To have a good day, a person needs around six hours of socializing. So, get socializing!³⁶



DON'T GO IT ALONE

It's getting harder to be connected. In 2004, 25 percent of Americans felt they had no one to confide in. A lack of social connectedness leaves people vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and other anti-social behaviors.³⁸ Social isolation and feelings of loneliness can increase the chance of premature death by 14 percent—nearly double the risk of premature death from obesity.³⁹



CONGRATS, MARION!

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

We did this together. By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone.

Here's to making Marion one of the healthiest cities in the nation, where residents are living better, together.

APPENDIX

Designated Organizations

Blue Zones Grocery Stores

Fareway

Hy-Vee

Blue Zones Schools

Echo Hill Elementary School

Indian Creek Elementary School

Linn Grove Elementary School

Marion High School

Novak Elementary School

Wilkins Elementary School

Blue Zones Restaurants

China King

Cibo Fusion

La Cantina

Mandarin Spice

MJ's Restaurant

Mr. Beans

Napoli's

Ramsey's Wine Bistro

The Kettel House Bakery and Café

Blue Zones Worksites

Berthel Fisher & Company

City of Marion

Culver's Lawn & Landscape, Inc.

ESCO Group

Farmers State Bank

Freund-Vector Corporation

Hills Bank Marion

Hy-Vee

Involta

Limolink

Marion Process Solutions

UICCU Marion

U.S. Cellular

YMCA – Marion & Camp Wapsie Branches

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