



MASON CITY A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

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





CONGRATS, MASON CITY,
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 **2 percent overall improvement in well-being, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index®**. Although it might sound small, that number comes with a big impact. Every percent improvement in well-being leads to significant decreases in the likelihood of our residents incurring health care costs, hospital admissions, and emergency room visits. At the same time, Well-Being Index results show we're exercising more and obesity rates are declining.

Mason City has always been a great place to live, work, and visit. And it's only getting better.

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 Mason City one of the healthiest cities 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.

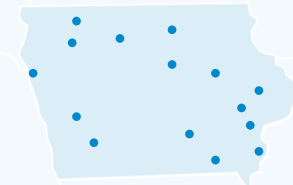
Wellmark knew that doing so would introduce an innovative approach that moves beyond diet and exercise regimens and applies the principles of behavioral economics to make healthier choices easier choices. The projected outcomes? Improved health and well-being for Iowans.

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

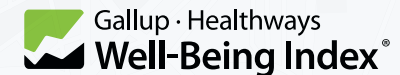
Change requires action. It isn't enough to do something one time; lasting change, which is a central tenet of Blue Zones Project, must be created from permanent and semi-permanent changes and alterations to the environment, policies, programs, and social networks. These actions allow healthy choices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



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MASON CITY IS THE CONSUMMATE EXAMPLE THAT AN AMERICAN CITY, GIVEN THE RIGHT TOOLS, CAN DRAMATICALLY INCREASE ITS OWN QUALITY OF LIFE BY TAKING AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH TO WELL-BEING IMPROVEMENT.

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



**PUTTING WELL-BEING
ON THE MAP IN
MASON CITY**

As a pioneer in innovation, Mason City 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.



THE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE RESULTED IN A SIGNIFICANT CULTURE CHANGE ACROSS OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY, AND BLUE ZONES PROJECT HAS BEEN A DRIVING FORCE IN OUR RIVER CITY RENAISSANCE.

Eric Bookmeyer
Mayor
Mason City

Well-being Is on the Up and Up in Mason City

In Mason City, we have seen a 2 percent improvement in well-being since a baseline Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index measurement was taken in 2012.

Additionally, data shows that regular exercise has steadily trended up, while obesity rates are down. It's no coincidence that these numbers have improved while our city has been making strong investments in infrastructure for bicyclists and pedestrians. Simultaneously, **we passed a Complete Streets policy and an active transportation plan that commits \$1.8 million to fund recommended projects.** Our worksites, schools, and residents are implementing changes, too. For example, our worksites are making natural movement a way of life by hosting stretch breaks, mapping out walking loops, offering standing desks, and promoting healthy incentives and benefits.

According to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, nearly half of all Mason City residents stated that Blue Zones Project has made a positive impact on the community.



In our community, you can ride your bike downtown easily thanks to a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. Bike lanes and sharrows keep you safe while drivers know that cyclists have rights to roadways too. You can securely park your bike at a bike rack, and wayfinding signage exists to guide you around town.

At many of our worksites, break rooms feature vending machines with healthy snacks and water-filling stations. Stretch breaks are built into the day, and adjustable workstations alleviate the common problem of too much sitting during the day. With **39 Blue Zones Worksites® throughout Mason City, a solid foundation is underway for sustaining well-being improvement.**

Our schools are promoting health, well-being, and physical activity, too. Our schools embraced a new kind of fundraiser — a walkathon — to encourage movement and avoid sales of unhealthy foods. Over the past four years, students have raised \$100,000 with this new fundraiser. Students are rewarded with innovative prizes rather than unhealthy snacks. They celebrate birthdays with books, an announcement, or special activities.

In Mason City, a foundation of well-being makes it easy to make healthy choices. It's another benefit of being a Blue Zones Community.

A Community-wide Commitment to Blue Zones Project



28,079

Lives impacted

83%

Community awareness

40%

People engaged

8,790

Individuals pledged to support well-being

21,878

Well-being actions taken by individuals

49%

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

85

Organizations that have implemented well-being principles

1,567

Changes made by organizations to support living longer, better

53

Organizations that have completed the pledge

39

The number of Mason City's worksites that are Blue Zones Worksites

27%

The percentage of Mason City's locally owned restaurants that are Blue Zones Restaurants®

63%

The percentage of Mason City's public schools that are Blue Zones Schools®

33%

The percentage of Mason City's grocery stores that are Blue Zones Grocery Stores®



SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones Project Highlight: Mason City, Iowa

Mason City 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/Mason City](http://explore.bluezonesproject.com/Mason%20City)



Mason City in the News

300+

Total Mentions

Media Coverage Places Mason City 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**.

The Des Moines Register



ALPHAMEDIA
LIVE. LOCAL. MASON CITY



THANK YOU

Thank You, POET Biorefining! POET Biorefining - Hanlontown, in partnership with Alpha Media, has provided 30,000 60 second radio ads to spread the word and support Blue Zones Project.

In the News

Momentum keeps building for M.C. Blue Zones Project

Globe Gazette

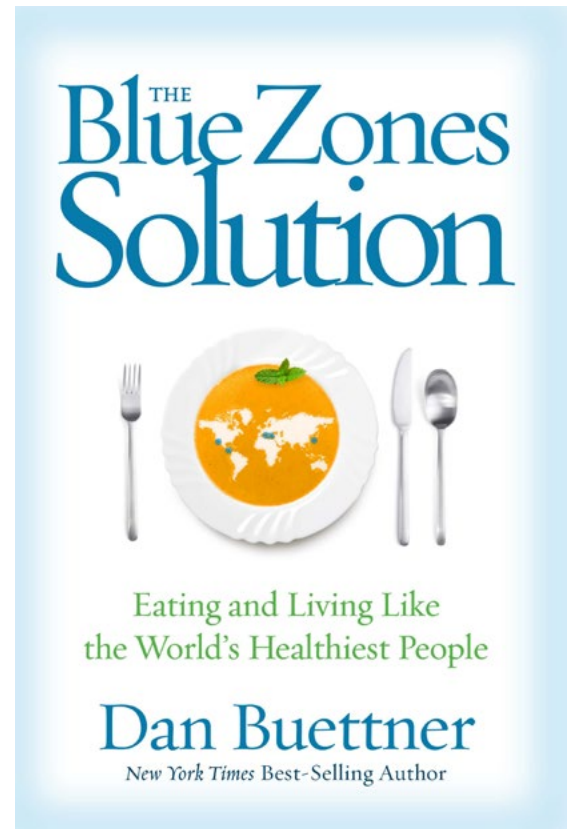
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Mason City recognized during Blue Zones Summit

Globe Gazette

05.13.15



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*.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pouring water from a white watering can onto a young green plant in a garden. The background is a blurred garden with other plants and a trellis structure.

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.26

Right Outlook


 Know your purpose.

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

P.31

Eat Wisely

 Eat until 80 percent full.

 More veggies, less meat and processed food.

 Drink a glass of red wine each day.

P.39

Connect

 Create a healthy social network.

 Connect or reconnect with religion.

 Prioritize family.



Together, Mason City residents are moving more and moving naturally. Since launching Blue Zones Project, Mason City has seen a steady increase in exercise levels.

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 Mason City 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:

377

Actions taken by organizations to move naturally

4,421

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

25

Walking Moai teams

110

Walking Moai participants

4

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.

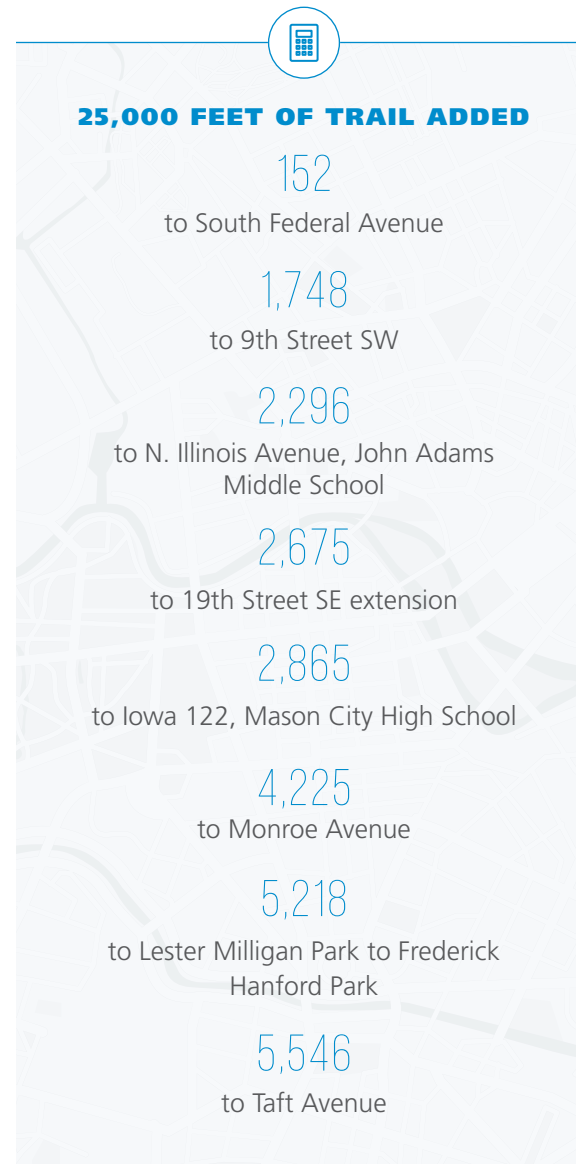
TRANSFORMING ENVIRONMENTS

A community resurgence, anchored in putting the well-being of residents first, is happening in Mason City.

Our City Council committed \$1.8 million for the execution of the “Activating Mason City” plan that funds a Complete Streets policy and a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan for five years. Complete Streets policies ensure roads are safe for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. Positive built-environment projects are popping up all across the city with new trails and sidewalks to encourage our residents to move naturally.

A pavement-marking program that will create bike lanes, shared lane markings, and street crossing markings was allocated \$150,000. Pavement markers enhance the safety of pedestrians and cyclists by alerting drivers to the presence of pedestrians and helping those pedestrians feel safer when they choose to walk or bike to the places they live, work, and play.

Trail expansion of 25,000 feet. By connecting worksites and residents to retail businesses, residents can more easily and safely travel by foot or bike. By designing a community where it’s easy to move, Mason City is supporting well-being as a way of life.



In The News

Master biking and walking trail plan a boon for the city

Globe Gazette
05.16.13

ORGANIZATIONS MOVING NATURALLY

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

Organizations across Mason City 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 39 worksites complete actions to help people move more, including providing bike racks, posting walking routes, and offering stretch breaks and fitness classes.** These are small changes that can lead to huge results for the average person over the course of a career.

Metalcraft implemented stretching breaks for its employees during regular break times while the City of Mason City and NSB employees took creative steps to move naturally each day.



WORKSITES ARE MOVING

Since a new trail extension was added near Metalcraft, bicycle ridership to work has increased 5 percent.



MY FAVORITE PART OF WORKING ON OUR BLUE ZONES WORKSITE DESIGNATION IS OUR MONTHLY FITBIT CONTEST. WE ALL SET OUR OWN GOALS, SO WE AREN'T IN DIRECT COMPETITION, BUT IT IS FUN TO GET THE UPDATES AT OUR WEEKLY STAFF MEETING. NOW I MAKE WALKING LOOPS WHILE WAITING FOR MY COFFEE TO BREW.

Robin Anderson
President and CEO
Mason City Chamber of
Commerce

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 ten-minute activity breaks on a daily basis can promote improvement across these areas by up to 20 percent.

Our community saw five schools complete actions to help get students moving, including adding Walking School Buses, brain breaks, and recess before lunch.

In 2013, the Mason City School District held its first annual walk-a-thon fundraiser. Rather than selling food to raise money, students collected donations to earn time walking outdoors. The healthy fundraiser was organized across all grade levels, and schools kept 100 percent of funds raised. Students were taught lessons about eating healthy foods and being active. Over the past four years, **students have raised \$100,000 with this new fundraiser.**

In The News

Elementary, intermediate kids gear up for walkathon

Globe Gazette

04.19.13

Blue Zones designated April as "Town in Tennies"

Globe Gazette

03.28.15



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 an adult.

Restaurants and Grocery Stores

Grocery stores in Mason City remind shoppers that parking further away is one way to easily add more activity into their day. Restaurants are participating in promotions such as Ticket to Ride where people are encouraged 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 Mason City.

SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones Worksites: Metalcraft – Mason City, Iowa

Watch the video:

explore.bluezonesproject.com/MasonCity



Blue Zones Worksite: City Hall, Mason City, Iowa

Watch the video:

explore.bluezonesproject.com/MasonCity



Walk-A-Thon: Healthy Fundraising in Mason City, Iowa

Watch the video:

explore.bluezonesproject.com/MasonCity





RIGHT OUTLOOK

27,000+

volunteer hours have been logged by more than 750 volunteers in Mason City since 2012. Together we've added \$600,750 in value for Mason City.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 without.¹³



How Right Outlook Impacts Our Community

Through volunteering, Purpose Workshops, and Purpose Moais, our community helps individuals discover their innate gifts. We help people match their passion and commitment with opportunities to deepen their sense of purpose.

Mason City is thriving. Since 2012, our residents' outlook has been on the rise. According to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, 54 percent of all residents fall into the "thriving" category when reflecting on their life evaluation, up nearly seven points since 2012.



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

166

Actions taken by organizations to build strong connections

5,938

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

11

Purpose Workshops with 375 participants

2

Purpose Moais with 11 participants

750

Volunteers in Mason City logging 27,000 hours

OUTCOMES

Our community is getting happier. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index shows that 90.1 percent of people in Mason City are happy on any given day, up nearly three points since 2012.

Since 2012, more than 750 individuals have logged 27,000 volunteer hours, adding \$600,750 in value for Mason City.¹

Blue Zones Project was the lead partner in the formation of a community volunteer center. Mason City Volunteer Center helps residents find volunteer opportunities and report their volunteer hours. In 2015, its first year of operation, 172 volunteers registered with the database and assisted 33 member non-profits in cultivating volunteers, matching unique skills and talents to volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, more than 375 people sought to discover their gifts and deepen their sense of purpose through Purpose Workshops and the creation of two Purpose Moais with 22 participants.



”

I GATHERED WITH A GROUP OF WOMEN IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD AND FORMED A PURPOSE MOAI. AFTER MEETING FOR 10 WEEKS TO FOLLOW LESSONS OUTLINED IN THE BOOKLET, WE DECIDED TO CONTINUE MEETING REGULARLY. WE KEEP ONE ANOTHER DIRECTED EACH TO OUR OWN UNIQUE PURPOSE, ONE THAT COMBINES OUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS, PASSIONS AND VALUES.

THIS PAST FALL I FOUND MYSELF STRUGGLING TO ENERGIZE AND FIND JOY IN MY HOME AND WORK LIFE. WITH THE SUPPORT OF FAMILY AND FRIENDS I RISKED CHANGES THAT HELPED ME TO BETTER PURSUE MY PASSIONS.

Laura Bernemann
Resident
Mason City



ORGANIZATIONS WITH THE RIGHT OUTLOOK

Organizations across Mason City 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 who invest in making work meaningful for their employees are more likely to see production rise and turnover decrease.¹⁴

Actions Completed by 39 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

Mason City schools implemented mindfulness programming to support the 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



EAT WISELY

Well-being is growing in community gardens across Mason City, with two gardens producing 15,000 pounds of produce since 2013 for gardeners and those in need.

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.



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. Mason City 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 turn off vending machines during school hours so kids aren't tempted by sugary snacks and sodas during the school day.

A district-wide policy promotes healthy birthday celebrations by eliminating treats and celebrating with books, an announcement, or special activities.

318 actions taken by organizations to support eating wisely

5,027 actions taken by individuals to eat wisely, like joining a Plant-Based Potluck Moai, adding healthy items to their grocery list, or growing a garden

12 cooking classes with 400+ participants bringing healthier cooking home to their families

2 Plant-Based Potluck Moais with 24 participants

2 community gardens



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



”

WE ENJOY IT. IT'S A BIG FAMILY EVENT FOR US. WE COME OUT HERE TOGETHER AND HANG OUT. IT'S TEACHING MY CHILDREN HOW TO GARDEN AND HAVE FAMILY TIME, TOO. SO THAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME.

Chrystina Davis
Community Gardener
Mason City

Community Gardens

With two community gardens with 53 plots springing up each season, Mason City is literally growing well-being. Gardeners have grown more than 15,000 pounds of produce since 2013. Extra produce from gardens throughout the community is often donated to the Hawkeye Harvest Food Bank to increase access to healthy, fresh, local produce.

A 2015 survey of local gardeners found:

93%

Surveyed are motivated to garden to have access to fresh food

33%

Donated all or some of their produce to a food bank or community kitchen

80%

Shared with family and friends

In the News

Community gardens provide many benefits in addition to great food

Globe Gazette

04.30.13

”

WHEN I AM FRUSTRATED OR HAVING A BAD DAY, I JUST GO OUT TO THE GARDEN AND SIT AND EVERYTHING SEEMS BETTER.

Don Bonner
Community Gardener
Mason City



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 our Blue Zones Schools tended by students. The produce is being used in nutrition education. 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

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 eight 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.



BY THE NUMBERS

1,000 CALORIES

in a typical American entree in a restaurant.²⁴

2 EXTRA POUNDS

gained a year by eating one meal away from home a week.²⁵

5.5% INCREASE

in same-store sales at restaurants that increased their better-for-you/low-calorie servings between 2006 and 2011.²⁵

5.5% DECREASE

in sales at restaurants that did not increase their better-for-you/low-calorie servings.²⁵



”

MY GOAL IN DESIGNING THE MENU AT 1910 GRILLE WAS TO PROVIDE THE COMMUNITY WITH UNIQUE, GREAT-TASTING FOOD THAT WAS BEAUTIFULLY PRESENTED. BY USING FRESH, NUTRIENT-RICH INGREDIENTS, WE HAVE ALSO BEEN ABLE TO OFFER HEALTHIER CUISINE WITHOUT COMPROMISING QUALITY OR FLAVOR. WHAT AN HONOR IT IS TO BE RECOGNIZED AS THE FIRST BLUE ZONES RESTAURANT IN MASON CITY. WE FEEL VERY FORTUNATE.

Kurt Nyguard
Executive Chef
1910 Grille



WE WANT TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR OUR CUSTOMERS TO ADOPT HEALTHIER LIFESTYLES. A FEW OF THE CHANGES INCLUDE PROVIDING HEALTHY RECIPES AND PUTTING EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS THROUGHOUT THE GROCERY STORE. WE WANT TO MAKE THE HEALTHY CHOICE THE EASY CHOICE.

Stephanie Wharton
Dietitian R.D. L.D.
Hy-Vee East

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. Many grocery stores are currently designed to 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 variety of locally grown produce.

60%

Of the food we purchase is highly processed, fatty, salty, or sugary²⁷

Two local Hy-Vee stores saw produce and water sales increase as a result of healthy food and water promotions. Our community's residents can make the healthy choice more easily because our Mason City stores offer healthy options.

Two local Hy-Vee sales since 2012:

41%

Increase in water sales

22%

Increase in produce sales

94%

Increase in Health Market sales



Worksites

Studies show that seventy percent of Americans eat at their desks several times a week, which can lead to distracted, disengaged, and mindless overeating.²⁸

Mercy Medical Center removed the fryer from the cafeteria, added healthy vending machines, added smaller plates in their cafeteria, developed walking routes, added bike racks, and now have a full time wellness position on staff and an overall wellness strategy. The wellness committee at Metalcraft developed a healthy snack area for employees. Smithfield Foods added fruit and vegetable options to the cafeteria and healthy choices to the vending machines.

Poet Biorefining stocks its employee vending machine with only healthy options, and subsidizes the cost so each item is just \$.25. Fresh fruit in every break room is free for the taking, and a fitness center is free for use by employees. After making its campus completely tobacco free, Poet saw a 90 percent reduction in smoking.

SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones Grocery Store Successes in Iowa

Watch the video:
explore.bluezonesproject.com/MasonCity



Actions Completed by 39 Worksites

- 1 Healthy potlucks and worksite gardens
- 2 Improved cafeteria options
- 3 Healthier vending machine choices
- 4 Established wellness committees



Schools

With childhood obesity at 17 percent, there's never been a more important time to examine what students are eating at school.²⁹

The place they go to learn about history and science should be the place they go to learn about eating wisely as well.

Students who attend schools that sell foods with low nutrient density and sugar-sweetened beverages have a lower intake of fruits, vegetables, and milk at lunch and higher daily percentages of calories from total fat and saturated fat.³⁰

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 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.

All second graders in Mason City participated in the Pick a Better Snack program, developed by the Iowa Nutrition Network. Once each month starting in October, staff from the Cerro Gordo Extension office introduced healthy foods to the students in the classroom. Within these 30-minute sessions, students had the opportunity to try various fruits and vegetables, learn about good nutrition, and participate in fun activities that encourage healthy lifestyles.

Actions Completed by Schools

- 1 School gardens
- 2 Reduced vending machine availability during school hours
- 3 Healthy celebrations and non-food fundraisers



CONNECT

More than 200 residents built strong relationships with new friends and neighbors in Walking Moai groups.

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.³¹ 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 14 years longer than those who don't.**³²

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.³³



How Connectedness Impacts our Community

Spending time with people who positively influence one another is crucial. In Mason City, we embraced the power of social connections to bring citizens together through groups, clubs, and faith-based organizations.

Mason City also encourages social connections throughout the community with our new community gardens, at outdoor dining locations, and along new trails. Outdoor dining promotes an active streetscape, economic and social vitality, and pedestrian- and retail-friendly activity.



VOLUNTEER FEVER

Mason City Volunteer Center helps residents find volunteer opportunities, matching unique skills and talents to volunteer opportunities. Volunteering allows residents to give back while building lasting connections in the community.



DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR WORKSITE HEALTH IN A BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT IS ENLIGHTENING. WE ARE VERY EXCITED TO HAVE CREATED AN ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE TO EXCEL WITH THEIR OWN HEALTH. AND WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING HOW OUR COMMUNITY GROWS IN IMPROVING OUR WELL-BEING FOR YEARS TO COME.

Steve Fekkether
Secretary and Treasurer
Edwards-Brandt & Associates



TICKET TO RIDE

In 2016, Blue Zones Project launched the Ticket to Ride campaign to encourage community members to bike or walk to their favorite Blue Zones Restaurant to receive a discount on healthy dishes. During its inaugural year, the Ticket to Ride restaurant promotion positively impacted 215 customers, engaged all seven Blue Zones Restaurants, and reminded Mason City residents to consider active transportation options.

ORGANIZATIONS ARE 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 39 worksites complete actions to help employees boost social connections, including things like “lunch with a co-worker” programs, flexible work schedules, offering strengths assessments, and implementing Moais.



BY THE NUMBERS

141

Actions taken by organizations to build strong connections

4,322

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

25

Walking Moais with more than 200 participants

2

Purpose Moais with 22 participants

2

Plant-Based Potluck Moais with 24 participants

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 at the age of six, on average.³⁴

To bolster real, human interaction, Mason City 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.

SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones Project Iowa Walking Moai

Watch the video:

explore.bluezonesproject.com/MasonCity



THANK YOU

Thank you to the Jan Again Foundation which supports our focus on purpose and overall well-being.



”

I DON'T THINK PEOPLE REALIZE A LOT OF THE TREASURES WE HAVE. GOING AT A SLOWER PACE, YOU CAN ACTUALLY SEE THE ARCHITECTURE, THE NATURE, AND STUFF WE HAVE GOING FOR US.

Pam Hildenbrand
Walking Moai Member
Mason City

CONGRATS, MASON CITY!

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 Mason City one of the healthiest cities in the nation, where residents are living better, together.



THANK YOU!

Thank you to our Power 9 Board and Advisory Committee that have been consistent in their support of improving well-being in our community.

Power 9 Board

Robin Anderson
Dalena Barz
Ina Cavin
Liz Conley
Angela Determan
John Groninga
Kelly Hansen
Kelli Huinker
Mike Penca
Tim Putnam
Gary Pyle
Mary Schissel
Steve Schurtz
Shelly Schmit
Brent Trout
Angela Westphal

Advisory Committee

Chad Schreck
Wally Smeby
Steve Schulz
Dan Varnum

Thank you to our local partners for supporting Blue Zones Project in Mason City.

Cerro Gordo County
Good Shepherd
Jan Again Foundation
Mercy – North Iowa
Overhead Door of Mason City/Mid-West Roofing
Principal Financial Group

Thank you to our long-term champions.

Cerro Gordo County Department of Public Health
Cerro Gordo ISU Extension & Outreach
Hy-Vee East
Hy-Vee West
Hy-Vee Drugstore
Mason City Family YMCA

And, a special thanks to our City Council who continues to see the importance of Blue Zones Project in our community.

APPENDIX

Designated Organizations

Blue Zones Grocery Stores

Hy-Vee East

Hy-Vee West

Blue Zones Schools

Harding Elementary School

Hoover Elementary School

Jefferson Elementary School

Lincoln Intermediate School

Roosevelt Elementary School

Blue Zones Restaurants

1910 Grille

Hy-Vee East

Hy-Vee West

Lorados

Pastimes Gardens

River City Bar & Grille

State Street Deli

The Hungry Mind

Blue Zones Worksites

Accelerated Rehabilitation Centers

Cargill Kitchen Solutions

Cerro Gordo County Health Department

City of Mason City

Community National Bank

Culligan

Curries

Dental Center of North Iowa

Edwards-Brandt & Associates, Inc.

First Citizens

Four Oaks/Mason City

Harding Elementary

Henkel Construction Company

Hoover Elementary

Hy-Vee Drugstore

Hy-Vee East

Hy-Vee West

IOOF Home

Jefferson Elementary School

John Adams Middle School

Kaplan University — Mason City

Lincoln Intermediate

Mason City Alternative School

Mason City Chamber of Commerce

Mason City Community School Administration Building

Mason City Family YMCA

Mason City High School

Mercy Medical Center — North Iowa

Metalcraft, Inc.

Midwest Roofing Co./Overhead Door Co. of Mason City

NSB BANK EAST

NSB Bank

North Iowa Area Community College

North Iowa Community Credit Union

North Iowa Community Credit Union - West Branch

Pepsi Beverages Company

Principal Financial Group — Mason City

Roosevelt Elementary School

Smithfield Foods

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