

Blue Zones

'It is health that's real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.' – Mahatma Gandhi



The cooking class group poses for a photo after a recent session. SPECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Unity Church improves well-being through Mediterranean cooking classes

Chante Pemberton
Special to the Naples Daily News

Research has shown that steps taken by faith-based groups to encourage healthy eating has a positive effect on their members.

Unity Church in Naples, one of Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida's first Faith-Based Recognized organizations, has taken a big step with their Mediterranean cooking classes held the second Friday of each month.

"The food I teach others to make tastes delicious, is healthy, and is so simple to make" says Juliana Grazioso Saitta, Unity member and cooking class instructor. "I am so grateful to have the opportunity to pass on my knowledge of Mediterranean Diet cooking to others so that they can have fun cooking and lead healthier lives at the same time."

In fact, the Mediterranean Diet, a diet featuring olive oil, fruits, herbs, nuts, beans and whole grains has been consistently associated with lower cardiovascular risk, and is ranked the No.1 overall best diet according to U.S. News & World Report.

Juliana was born and raised in Sicily where the abundance of fruit and olive trees, vegetable gardens, and vineyards formed the basis of her love of Mediterranean food and a healthy lifestyle.

"Growing up, we cooked only what was in season and had a small wood burning stove where we would roast the fresh vegetables we picked that day," said Juliana. "I also remember going out to the olive groves and picking the olives with my mom and dad with which we would later make the most delicious extra virgin olive oil."

Members of Juliana's cooking class are pleasantly surprised by what they can make with so many different foods.

"I never knew you could make such an amazing salad with blood oranges," said Janis Thompson who attends the cooking classes. "And mustard greens? I didn't even know those existed, nevertheless how good they taste!"

Whether it's a hearty bowl of lentil soup, salmon carpaccio, endive and arugula salad, or freshly made pesto, members of Juliana's class know they are in for a tasty treat.

"Don't you just love the smell of that fresh garlic and parsley," she said displaying the jar of pesto she just made to her class. "And don't throw away the parsley stalks that we didn't use. I'll show you how to freeze these

so you can use them in a soup later."

The cooking classes at Unity combine three of the Blue Zones Power 9 principles that are proven to help people live the healthiest and longest around the world. These include Right Tribe, Belong, and Plant Slant. And, for the 80% Rule, well let's say some are still working on that when it comes time to eat. "The food is so tasty, I just have to go for seconds," said Janice.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

If you are part of a faith-based organization and would like to become Blue Zones Project Recognized, reach out to Chante Pemberton at Chante.Pemberton@ShareCare.com

Live Longer, Better Presentation

Unfamiliar with what Blue Zones Project is all about? Want to find out how you and/or your organization can get involved in this community-wide project? Attend a Live Longer, Better presentation! For more information, call 239-624-2312.

Date: Tuesday, Nov. 19

Time: 9-10 a.m.

Location: FineMark Bank, 10010 Coconut Rd, Estero

RSVP: <https://livelongerbetternov.eventbrite.com>

Purpose Workshop

These two-hour interactive workshops will help you define your unique gifts and talents and how to better use them in both your personal and professional life. By the end of the workshop you will craft a Purpose Statement and begin living a more purposeful life! For more information, call 239-624-2312.

Date: Thursday, Nov. 7

Time: 10 a.m.-noon

Location: Marco Island City Hall, Conference Room

RSVP: <https://bzppurposewsnov.eventbrite.com>

Engagement Committee Meetings

Interested in getting your neighbors, friends, co-workers, family to adopt healthier lifestyles and live longer? Join the Engagement Committee to help spread the word about Blue Zones Project best practices to individuals. Help with Purpose Workshop, Walking Moais, Cooking Demonstrations and other well-being activities. For more information contact 239-624-2312.

Immokalee/Ave Maria

Date: First Thursday of each month

Time: 9-10:30 a.m.

Location: Career Resource Center, 750 S 5th St, Immokalee

Bonita Springs/Estero

Date: First Tuesday of each month

Time: 9-10:30 a.m.

Location: Shangri-La Springs, 27750 Old 41 Rd., Bonita Springs

Collier County

Date: Second Wednesday of each month

Time: 8:30-9:30 a.m.

Location: NCH North, Brookdale Boardroom, 11190 Health Park Blvd., Naples

Southwest Florida Food Policy Summit

Hear from the Southwest Florida Regional Planning Council, UF IFAS, FGCU, Florida Food Policy Council and a nationally renowned food policy consultant Monday, Nov. 18 from 8:30 a.m.-noon at Artichoke and Company, 11920 Saradrienne Lane, Bonita Springs, FL 34135. To register, visit: <https://swflfpsummit.eventbrite.com>

Tobacco Free Collier Committee Meetings

If you're passionate about tobacco cessation and want to help future generations live healthier lives, consider joining the Tobacco Policy Committee. We work with City and County government to help affect new and change existing tobacco policies.

Thursday, Nov. 21, at 4 p.m. at the Florida Department of Health in Collier County, 3339 Tamiami Trail East, Naples, FL 34112 room 206. For information: call 239-252-6852.