

Naples, best place to retire (and live)



GUEST COMMENTARY
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Sorry, fellow Naples residents, but our secret is once again out of the bag.

The respected Kiplinger Letter has joined other objective observers in declaring our fair city one of the top 10 in which to retire.

Naples was recognized along with Lynchburg, Virginia; Billings, Montana; Greensboro, North Carolina; Omaha, Nebraska; Nashville, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; Seattle; Austin, Texas; Philadelphia; St. Petersburg, and Augusta, Georgia. (www.kiplinger.com/article/retirement/T006-C000-S002-naples-fla-city-for-retiring-in-good-health.html)

What distinguishes the Kiplinger commentary from others, however, is how it selected its best U.S. cities.

"What is the most important component of a happy retirement?" Kiplinger asked. "It's not financial security (although that's nice to have) or proximity to family and friends. It's good health."

And there it is. A happy retirement — a happy life, for that matter — depends on good health. As a physician

and a health care CEO, I could not agree more. That's why our mission at NCH is "to help everyone live a longer, happier and healthier life."

This past February, the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index ranked the Naples-Immokalee-Marco Island Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as the first among 190 MSAs, based on 35 survey questions asked of 500 people 350 days a year by landline phone, cell-phone and mail, in English and Spanish. The questions focused on five areas: purpose, social, financial, community and physical.

And once again, our area came out first.

Our healthy community unfortunately stands in contrast to our state.

On the one hand, Florida is now most likely the fastest-growing state in the union. Florida was second last year to North Dakota, which had benefited from the since-ended oil boom. Florida adds about 1,000 people per day thanks to our climate, lack of state income tax and low estate taxes. Florida is the third-largest state behind California and Texas. If Florida were a nation, we would be the 16th largest in the world.

But on the other hand, in terms of health, Florida still ranks in the third quartile for overall health by the 2015

Commonwealth Fund Health Scorecard, up from fourth quartile the year before, which is an improvement.

<http://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/health-system-scorecards>

This finding is consistent with the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index applied to states.

<http://www.well-beingindex.com/hawaii-reclaims-top-spot-in-u.s.-well-being>

Our state, like our community, should strive to become the healthiest and happiest state in the nation. With leadership and support, Florida could improve its residents' overall health much the way Iowa, Oregon, Hawaii, the Dallas-Fort Worth region and we in Southwest Florida are doing to embrace the Blue Zone Project to improve individual wellness.

Smart regions know that health and happiness are attributes good for all ages. Healthy habits begin even before birth, as our environment has a huge influence on everything we do. Health experts now realize that our ZIP code is even more important than our genetic code in influencing our health and well-being.

As we enjoy health and happiness, we also increase our ability to have higher educational levels, economic

well-being and greater productivity.

These three attributes contribute to a safer society, which in turn continues a virtuous cycle of prosperity and contentment.

Naples is a home-grown wellness model for the rest of Florida. And we in Naples have a responsibility to "polish" this health care gem of a community by maintaining a culture which is welcoming, supportive, healthy, happy, innovative and smart. And we should work to use the accolades that we receive not only to further improve ourselves, but to share the wellness measures that work with our neighbors around America and the world.

Being recognized as the healthiest and happiest place, as well as the best place to retire, is pretty amazing, especially when you consider that it wasn't long ago when our part of Southwest Florida was known as a small and sleepy fishing village.

As the saying goes: "We've come a long way, baby."

Our challenge now is to continue to build on our recognition and momentum so that everyone — in Naples and throughout our area — lives a longer, happier and healthier life.

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