

A model of health



DAVID ALBERS/STAFF (2)

East Naples resident Gloria Jackson, 84, wades out of the Gulf of Mexico after a swim as one of her health-conscious habits Friday in Naples.

■ At 84, East Naples woman's routine built on healthy habits

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Gloria Jackson checks the knots she put in her bathing suit straps before a beach walk and swim in the Gulf of Mexico.

It's a fix against stretched-out straps in a favorite suit, the one piece with black and white spots and skirt. At 84, she doesn't mind knots in her bathing suit straps.

A native of Peru, Jackson is religious about her exercise schedule that begins at 5 a.m. She walks her neighborhood in East Naples for an hour and pops a "Body Electric" tape from the '80s exercise series in her player. She walks 10 miles a day.

"For me, it's not exercise. It's fun," Jackson said, her salt-and-pepper hair cropped short. "I need to move."

She swims year-round in the Gulf — three days a week — water temperature in winter be damned. She takes only cold showers.

"You have to go in quickly," she said. "You go run and jump in and wave your arms around. Everybody makes fun of me."

Some see her routines as kooky, particularly her mid-day meal of peanuts and wine. It takes nearly two hours



Jackson pours herself 4 ounces of red wine as part of a lunchtime ritual Tuesday in her East Naples home.

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Gloria Jackson

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HEALTH

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to finish a small bowl of peanuts and four ounces of Chilean red wine.

"My doctor said it sounds crazy but it is working for you," she said. "Keep doing it."

All of Jackson's habits reflect longevity principles promoted by Dan Buettner, the founder of the Blue Zones Project and former National Geographic explorer. In his 2008 New York Times best-seller, *The Blue Zones*, he talks about common behaviors of people he met around the world who live to 100 or older.

The principles include moving naturally to stay fit, eating a plant-slant diet, taking time to downshift, staying connected to others and putting family first.

A campaign is underway to help Southwest Florida residents, businesses, schools and other groups adopt Blue Zones' habits. A dozen communities around the United States have



DAVID ALBERS/STAFF

Naples resident Gloria Jackson, 84, right, sorts mail with mailroom clerk Debbie Forges as part of Jackson's volunteer work at NCH Baker Hospital Downtown.

taken the leap.

Jackson's deceased husband, Charlie Jackson, an American she agreed to marry after one date, didn't share her rigid health habits. He was a meat-and-potatoes guy.

"He thought I was kind of crazy," she said.

That is true, their eldest daughter, Mia Jackson, said.

Her mother doesn't eat meat or processed food, and meticulously prepares

breakfast every morning of fresh fruit with Greek yogurt and flaxseed. Dinner is fresh vegetables and brown rice.

"I remember he would always ask her, 'Why are you eating that way?'" Mia Jackson, 50, said.

NAPLES BY WAY OF PERU

Jackson was born in Arequipa, Peru, and raised in Lima. She attended a German-run high school

and earned a liberal arts degree. She traveled by herself in the U.S. and Europe for several years, unheard of for a young woman in the 1950s.

She met her husband in 1965, an American research economist sent to Peru to help companies get developed.

At their first dinner, he told her about growing up in Springfield, Missouri, about his GI Bill to attend Stanford University in Palo Alto, California. She thought he was nice.

"Two hours later he asked, 'Would you marry me?'" Jackson said. "I said, 'Can I answer you tomorrow?'"

He called 9 a.m. sharp. "What is your answer?" "Why not," she said. "Let's give it a try."

She was 33 years old. He was 16 years her senior.

Jackson's love of the beach brought them to Naples in 1990. They had spent 16 years in Peru to be near her family and eight years in Missouri to be near his family. Their four children were nearly grown.

Jackson's routine today is clockwork. She's up at 4:30 a.m. for her one hour or longer walk.

She volunteers two days a week at NCH Baker Downtown Hospital, where she greets visitors in the lobby and delivers the mail that arrives twice daily.

"I ask her who winds you up in the morning?" Paul Plageman, 80, another volunteer, said. "She just keeps going. She comes in the morning like a little spark."

The peanuts-and-wine thing has been going on for years, her daughter said. Her mother shells the unsalted peanuts and adds unsalted sunflower seeds and soy nuts. She uses a small glass bowl to determine the amount.

"It's very complex," her daughter said.

THE ROUTINE TODAY

Jackson swims midmorning in the Gulf on days she's not volunteering. In the afternoon, she knits booties and caps she donates for newborns at NCH North Naples Hospital. Even then doesn't sit. She paces her

living room.

Her daughter buys her mother's clothes for her, size 00, or a children's size 12.

Jackson is 4' 11" but used to be an inch taller when she was younger.

"I don't seem to be shrinking too much," she said.

She always uses the stairs to deliver mail in the six-story hospital. Sometimes she runs into Dr. Allen Weiss, NCH chief executive officer and president.

"I think they are the only two who take the stairs to the sixth floor," said Mia Jackson, her daughter and an NCH employee.

Weiss introduced the Blue Zones Project to Southwest Florida, and NCH is underwriting the local initiative over the next eight to 10 years.

Jackson has only heard bits and pieces about the Blue Zones project. That's amusing to her daughter, who said she could be a program poster child.

"She's been doing those (habits) since she was 17," she said.