

Step out with Blue Zones Project on National Walking Day

Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida celebrates National Walking Day Wednesday, April 5, with a 1-mile community walk. People across America are welcome to participate in the event sponsored by the American Heart Association.

According to the AHA, Americans are spending more time sitting in front of a screen and are becoming less active, which can increase the risk of heart disease, stroke and other diseases.

To combat these health issues, Blue Zones Project, a community-led well-being improvement initiative, is partnering with the city of Naples, area schools, and organizations in Naples, Bonita Springs and Estero to encourage

community members to walk for at least 30 minutes on April 5.

The official walk begins promptly at 5:30 p.m. at the Cambier Park bandshell, 755 Eighth Ave. S. in downtown Naples.

Since January, more than 400 individuals have committed to participate in regular walking groups, or Blue Zones Project "moais" (pronounced "mow-eyes"). Walking moais are small groups of people, many of whom don't know each other prior to joining, who walk together to stay active and build healthy social circles. Moai members in Naples will celebrate the culmination of their 10-week walking groups and join other community members in the 1-mile walk on National Walking Day.

"Our walking group has been meeting once a week, walking together for 30 minutes, and getting to know each other better," said Scott Burgess, CEO of David Lawrence Center. "We've had fun building stronger bonds among our employees, and we look forward to celebrating with the entire community on National Walking Day."

The 1-mile walk on National Walking Day will step out from the bandshell and head north on Eighth Street to showcase the recent redevelopment of Central Avenue, a partner project between Blue Zones Project and the city of Naples. Completed last fall, the project improved the walkability and bikeability of this central corridor, adding wider sidewalks

and a bike lane. Roundabouts also were added to improve traffic conditions and lower speeds for bicycle and pedestrian safety.

The walk will finish at the Garden of Hope and Courage on the NCH Healthcare System downtown campus. Upon arrival, participants will enjoy hors d'oeuvres and wine, as a daily glass with friends is also linked to a longer, healthier life. Information on how to join a walking moai will be available.

Participants will receive a Blue Zones Project T-shirt and are eligible to win a \$1,000 prize. To RSVP for the community walk, visit Blue Zones National Walking Day at www.eventbrite.com. ■



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