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National Walking Day is an initiative of the American Heart Association to encourage people to engage in healthier habits.

BLUE ZONES PROJECT SPONSORING GROUP WALK

LIZ FREEMAN
LIZ.FREEMAN@NAPLESNEWS.COM;
239-263-4778

Some people need a kick start to begin a walking routine to improve their health.

Help is on the way: Mark April 5 on your calendar and sign up for the Blue Zones Project's group walk on that day as part of a celebration of National Walking Day. A reservation is required. The event is limited to the first 600 people who sign up.

Go to <http://bluezonesnationalwalkingday.eventbrite.com> to sign up.

The local Blue Zones Project, an initiative to help the community get healthier and boost longevity, is sponsoring the walk that will begin promptly at 5:30 p.m. in Cambier Park, 755 8th Ave. S. near the bandshell. The walk is for 30 minutes to the NCH Downtown Baker Hospital.

"It's about a mile," Kate Walter, a spokeswoman for the Blue Zones Project, said.

The route is 8th Street north to the hospital with a short stop on Central Avenue to showcase the redevelopment of Central Avenue with roundabouts to slow vehicle traffic and with a walking and bicycling lane to promote alternative modes of getting around. The City of Naples completed the project last fall.

The Blue Zones Project supports redevelopment campaigns in communities that support neighborhoods where people can move naturally for exercise, socialize and connect with neighbors.

The end point of the walk is NCH's Garden of Hope and Courage, where attendees will enjoy hors d'oeuvres and wine, which dovetails into another Blue Zones Project principle that a daily glass of wine and socializing is good for one's soul (and longevity).

Walkers also will receive a Blue Zones Project T-shirt, now becoming a familiar site on healthy-looking people around town with its trademark blue background and white lettering.

Attendees can learn about joining a walking group, called a Moai in Blue Zones' parlance. The word comes from Okinawa, Japan, and means "meeting with a common purpose," where coming together for walks help people connect.

Attendees will be entered into a drawing for a two-night stay at Bellasera Resort at 221 9th St S., she said.

"They were kind enough to donate it," Walter said.

As of earlier this week, about 225 people were signed up for the walk and there's space for a total of 600, she said.

Two community leaders taking part include Dr. Allen Weiss, the chief executive officer and president of NCH, who introduced the Blue Zones Project to the community in 2015, and Naples Mayor Bill Barnett.

The City of Naples became a Blue Zones worksite last fall, where the city supported changes to its culture to promote healthier options for its 400 employees, from work stations to promoting healthier

snacks and break-time activities.

The Blue Zones project is a wellness and longevity initiative underway where businesses, government agencies, restaurants, grocery stores, churches, residential communities and other groups incorporate healthier options in daily practices.

The philosophy is that over time, healthier choices will become the easier choice, and each incremental step can improve health and well-being. Offering fresh fruit and bottled water instead of soft drinks and candy bars in employee breakrooms is one example.

The Blue Zones project was started in 2010 by a former National Geographic explorer, Dan Buettner, who recognized from his travels how people in certain parts of the world had great longevity because their lifestyle, and those habits became the basis for his "Power Nine" principles detailed in his book, *The Blue Zones*, which became a New York Times bestseller.

Southwest Florida is one of 37 communities nationwide that is either working toward recognition as a Blue Zones

community or has achieved it by widespread adoption of the underlying principles.

The David Lawrence Center, a nonprofit mental health center based on Golden Gate Parkway, has a walking group that meets once a week and it is working toward certification as Blue Zones Project workplace, which means it has incorporated healthier worksite practices for employees.

"Our walking group has been meeting once a week, walking together for 30 minutes, and getting to know each other better," Scott Burgess, chief executive officer of David Lawrence, said.

"We've had fun building stronger bonds among our employees, and we look forward to celebrating with the entire community on National Walking Day."

SCOTT BURGESS
CEO, DAVID LAWRENCE

National Walking Day is an initiative of the American Heart Association to encourage people to engage in healthier habits, including eating smarter by shunning junk food, opting for fresh fruits and vegetables, and being well by getting a good night's sleep and having social connections.

For more information about National Walking Day, go to www.heart.org.