

BLUE TIP: “Many age-related diseases are caused by an immune system out of balance. Excessive or unnecessary inflammation accelerates heart disease, bone loss.”

— Dan Buettner, *The Blue Zone: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*

HOMING IN ON HEALTHY

Chamber, 2 other organizations have joined the Blue Zones campaign

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Staff members of the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce are often in the spotlight representing the community to outsiders and businesses.

It's important to be on board with the community initiative, the Blue Zones Project, to help residents be healthier and for the community to look better.

The chamber is one of three new organizations to gain Blue Zones Project recognition, which involves taking steps to incorporate health and wellness practices in daily activities.

The other two organizations are Women of the (239) and Island Coast Dentistry. They join more than 58 companies that are engaged in the project to promote longevity.

The 10-member chamber staff began working on the Blue Zones recognition a while ago and today embraces walking groups after work, has changed out candy-based snacks for healthier options, volunteers at events together, and plans to do some potluck gatherings, Amanda Beights, vice president of Leadership Collier, said.

Overall, it was pretty easy to achieve the recognition and is worthwhile, particularly because it promotes team-building relationships, she said.

Some people may see the Blue Zones Project in Southwest Florida as a fad but she doesn't.

“I honestly don't think of it as a fad,” Beights said. “It is naturally aligned with our community and it gives us direction.”

The Blue Zones Project was introduced to the region in 2015 based on the world travels of Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle traits and live to 100 or older. He wrote a New York Times bestseller about the nine principles of longevity.

The “Power Nine” include moving naturally by being physically active, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social



SUBMITTED FROM THE BLUE ZONES PROJECT

The Naples Chamber of Commerce celebrates its Blue Zones recognition. From left to right, they are Susan Kuhar, Bethany Sawyer, Krista Patrick, Jackie Woodring, Michael Dalby, Madeline Young, Amanda Beights, Diana Gomez and Kristi Bartlett.

network and putting loved ones first. A popular activity is to form walking groups, or walking moais, to use Blue Zones terminology.

Beights serves on one of the local Blue Zones committees and Michael Dalby, the chamber's president and chief executive officer, serves on the project's steering committee.

The walking group is a way for co-workers to get to know each other outside of the work place, Dalby said in a news release.

“While our office is relatively small, we rarely have time to talk about things other than work,” Dalby said. “The walking moai has brought us together and helped us be healthier, more collegial, and more thoughtful as a team.”

Other Blue Zones principles include participating in a religious community, limiting alcohol consumption, eating a plant-slant diet and stopping to eat when you are 80 percent full.

Project consultants work with com-

munities to identify strengths and gaps, and offers tools and resources so employers, schools, restaurants, grocery stores and other entities can take various steps to make healthier choices.

The NCH Healthcare System is underwriting the Blue Zones initiative in Collier and south Lee counties over the next 8 years, to make health-focused changes in workplaces, schools, government entities, restaurants, grocery stores and physical settings. The belief is that the healthier choices become ingrained and become a way of life.

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.

At Island Coast Dentistry, the half dozen employees and dentist, Dr. Jeffrey Skupny, decided to embrace the Blue Zones project because dental

health affects the whole body, Jackie Maya, the front office manager, said.

A couple of the hygienists attended a Blue Zones meeting and came back excited by it, Mayo said. Staff members read the book and everyone discussed how to take part.

“We started the process last summer,” she said.

Today they walk together on Fridays at Coastland Center mall when the practice is closed, they volunteer together, have healthier food brought in for lunches and get together for a glass of wine after hours.

“We try to establish relationships,” she said. “We decided as a whole, this is something we could all benefit from.”

Women of the (239) is an organization of 150 women from all over Naples who support women as they seek meaningful relationships and enriched individual purpose, and engage in community outreach. The website is www.womenofthe239.com.