

**BLUE TIP:** I found that when you are depressed, that's when you do something for somebody else.

— Dan Buettner, *The Blue Zones, Second Edition: 9 Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*

# A VOICE FOR HEALTH

*Miss Florida International, who has local ties, will promote the Blue Zones Project*

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The Blue Zones Project has an ambassador — Miss International 2017 — who has ties to Southwest Florida.

Kelsey Craft, 26, who graduated last week from Nova Southeastern University in Fort Myers with a master's degree in medical science, was named Miss International in early August at the Annual Miss International Pageant in Charlestown, West Virginia.

Her platform for the next year will include spreading the word about the Blue Zones Project to a national and international audience. She learned about the Blue Zones healthy lifestyle initiative in 2016 when she was Miss Southwest Florida International and fulfilling her emergency medicine rotation at the NCH Healthcare System in 2016 to become a physician assistant.

She attended the ribbon cutting for the new pediatric emergency room at NCH North Naples Hospital, where there was a table promoting the project. NCH is the local sponsor for Southwest Florida's campaign to become a Blue Zones community.

"Having the honor of being Miss International 2017 affords me the opportunity to be a voice to a wide audience," she said in an email from Dallas, her schedule already packed with events in her new role. She's up for the task after also serving as Miss Florida International.

"I will use this title along with my education as a physician assistant and training as a Blue Zones Project ambassador to spread the importance of living a life based around the Blue Zones Project principles," she said. "International Pageants is very supportive of finding opportunities for me to speak to schools, worksites, and various community organizations across the country."

The Blue Zones is a wellness and longevity initiative underway in the region where businesses, government agencies, restaurants, grocery stores, churches, residential



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Kelsey Craft is an ambassador for the Blue Zones Project.

SUBMITTED

# Craft

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communities and other groups incorporate healthier options in daily practices so its audience base can make better choices

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

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 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, eating a plant-slant diet, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social network and putting loved ones first. A popular activity is to form walking groups, or walking moais, to use Blue Zones terminology.

“I have always lived an active life but by no means did I grow up living the Blue Zones way of life,” said Craft, who grew up in Longview, Washington. “Fortunately, I grew up in Washington state and our family activities were based on being outside — hiking the mountains, going on bike rides, and walking around our town lake. However, it was not until adulthood that I really started valuing the importance of a plant-based diet, taking personal time to downshift, and keeping good relationships with supportive family and friends.”

Craft moved to Fort Myers in 2015 for graduate school. That’s when she found taking part in a service-based pageant would help her connect to the community to



PAUL PRESTON PHOTOGRAPHY

Miss International 2017, Kelsey Craft, is crowned by Miss International 2016, Amanda Moreno. Craft’s platform for the next year will include spreading the word about the Blue Zones Project to a national and international audience.

give back, which led to her title as Miss Southwest Florida International and volunteered at local health fairs.

Dr. Allen Weiss, president and chief executive officer of NCH, doesn’t recall if he ever met Craft during her rotation at the hospital but said her involvement will be good to spread the word about the initiative.

“She’ll be a good role model,” he said.

The Miss International Pageant system is based in Roanoke, Virginia, and its mission is to showcase accomplishments of women aged 19 to 30. At the Miss International competition Aug. 5, Craft was one of nearly 50 contestants from around the world. There are four categories of competition, including the interview, fitness wear, fun fashion and evening gown.

Some of her favorite Power 9 principles are moving naturally, downshifting, and having purpose in life, Craft said.

“Moving naturally resonates with me because I love being ac-

tive,” she said. “I find it important to educate people that they don’t need to be a member of a gym to get moving.”

She loves the aspect of downshifting because she finds it challenging, to put aside life stresses and obligations to take time to pause.

“The Blue Zones Project really brought to my attention that I never take time to downshift and this inspired me to sign up for yoga for the first time,” she said. “I feel that trying new things can keep us young and healthy as well. My absolute favorite of the Power 9 is purpose. I attended a purpose workshop a few months ago and enjoyed every minute. I believe that helping people find their reason for waking up in the morning can have monumental effects on the well-being of entire communities.”

Craft divides her time between Fort Myers and Dunedin. Outside of her community involvement, she is learning how to play the harmonica and plans to visit all 50 states by the time she is 30.