

**“Drink without getting drunk. Love without suffering jealousy. Eat without overindulging. Never argue. And once in a while, with great discretion, misbehave.” — Dan Buettner, author of “Thrive: Finding Happiness the Blue Zones Way”**



Blue Zones co-founder and best-selling author Dan Buettner asks members of the audience to participate during his presentation on how to live a longer, healthier and happier life at FGCU's Alico Arena in Fort Myers on Monday. Buettner, also a National Geographic Fellow, discovered the five places in the world — dubbed Blue Zones — where people live the longest, healthiest lives. PHOTOS BY NICOLE RAUCHEISEN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

# FGCU: Blue Zones Project founder talks happiness

Liz Freeman Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

Naples is the happiest place in the United States, where residents have a strong sense of purpose, the founder of the Blue Zones Project said Monday at an event at Florida Gulf Coast University.

“When it comes to purpose and passion, and demonstrating the soul of the Blue Zones Project, this is the No. 1 spot,” Dan Buettner said to more than 1,600 people who filled FGCU's Alico Arena to hear him speak. “I couldn't be prouder.”

A National Geographic explorer who founded the Blue Zones Project based on his findings of where people worldwide enjoy the greatest longevity and often live to 100, Buettner last visited Southwest Florida in November 2015.

That's when the region officially kicked off the health and wellness initiative. The philosophy is that making policy and practical changes at businesses, government offices, schools, restaurants and elsewhere that promote healthier choices in daily life will become habit.

The NCH Healthcare System has been sponsoring the Blue Zones Project for the past three years. NCH president and chief executive officer Dr. Allen Weiss had been talking about it for a year or longer before leading the campaign that will span eight to 10 years.

Attendance Monday for Buettner's event exceeded the launch turnout in 2015 of 1,200 at North Collier Regional Park. Attendees Monday were given a free Blue Zones Project T-shirt, which is becoming commonplace around town.

“I'm amazed at how well this whole thing has gone,” Weiss said Monday about the community's interest in the Blue Zones.

In March, Naples was named the healthiest city in the U.S. for the third year in a row by Gallup-Sharecare, based on a survey of 186 cities.

“I would like to think we are contributing to that very real satisfaction,”

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Members of the audience stand after a series of questions from Dan Buettner classified them as the happiest people during his presentation at FGCU's Alico Arena in Fort Myers on Monday.

ONLINE SEE MORE PHOTOS FROM BUETTNER'S APPEARANCE AT NAPLESNEWS.COM

# Blue Zones

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Buettner said.

To date, about 140 local businesses and other entities have gained Blue Zones recognition by promoting a healthier culture, and more are working on it.

Buettner spoke about the “the Power Nine” principles, or lifestyle traits that are shared by people who live long and healthy lives, and he spoke about the secrets of happiness, which are detailed in his book that came out last October, “The Blue Zones of Happiness.”

Key elements of happiness are having life satisfaction, daily emotions and sense of purpose, he said.

Three of the happiest places in the world are Singapore, Denmark and Costa Rica, he said.

Singapore has economic stability, where residents enjoy their quality of life, it is safe and clean, and it rewards people for taking care of their elderly relatives, all of which adds up to a better quality of life.

Purpose, he said, is how often you use your strengths to do what you do best, he said.

In Denmark, people are tolerant of others in their lifestyles, and they trust their fellow residents, he said. The Danes have free health care and can attend universities at no charge. About 18 percent of Americans worry about what they will do if they get sick, he said.

“The Danes don’t have to worry about that,” he said.

People in Denmark work in jobs that they value; 85 percent of the workers in Denmark report they love their jobs.

“They take jobs that appeal to their passions,” he said.

A third place where happiness is off the charts is in Costa Rica, where education and universal health care are valued. About 97 percent of children can read, and mobile health ambassadors visit people in their homes to assess their health and get them into early treatment for illnesses, he said.

Good health and happiness go hand in hand, where the pursuit of happiness is good for your body and soul.

“The happiest people in the world are social seven to eight hours a day,” he

said.

In the U.S., Americans are hooked on their mobile devices and spend an average of 4.4 hours a day watching television.

“We are going the wrong way,” he said. “Last year our happiness went down.”

Having a good social network adds to improved health, and having three to five people in your life whom you can count on and can call after a bad day is important, he said. Having a best friend at your job also helps.

Other ways to happiness include learning how to meditate, being financially secure and having a front porch at your home that helps you connect with neighbors.

“Financial security is three times as powerful as consumption,” he said.

That means that saving a bonus from work will go further for happiness. But if spending a bonus is a must, purchasing an experience, like going on a trip and sharing memories, goes further for happiness than buying something, he said.

After speaking to the crowd at FGCU, Buettner led a group on a walk on campus in recognition of National Walking Day.

Areas of the world where populations enjoy great longevity include Okinawa, Japan; Ikaria, Greece; and Sardinia, Italy.

The “Power Nine” principals of longevity 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 at worksites, which gets people active and engaging with one another.

He teamed up with Healthways, a health consulting firm, in 2009 to develop and launch a detailed program to help guide communities to better health and wellness practices. The Blue Zones Project now works with Sharecare, a digital health company in Atlanta.

Early adopters of the Blue Zones Project include Albert Lea, Minnesota; and Spencer and Waterloo, Iowa, along with other cities in Iowa. In addition, projects are underway in Hawaii, Oklahoma, Oregon and Wisconsin. All told, 42 communities in nine states have launched Blue Zones Projects.