

Cafe of Life in Bonita joins health initiative

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Café of Life in Bonita Springs is among the latest entities in Southwest Florida to gain recognition from the Blue Zones Project.

The nonprofit organization that was founded in 1998 as a place for coffee and evolved to provide meals to the needy joined the health and wellness initiative of the Blue Zones with a ceremony Aug. 15.

“Café of Life and Blue Zones Project partnering together seemed like a natu-

ral fit since much of what the Café does is centered on providing supplemental nutrition,” Jeff Nichols, director of the organization, said in a news release. “By becoming a Blue Zones Project recognized organization we are now more focused on providing healthy nutritional alternatives.”

Café of Life added bicycle racks at its office at 10540 Childers Street for clients and volunteers to use instead of a car; it hosts nutritional classes and it offers volunteer opportunities.

To date, more than 187 entities have

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Cafe of Life volunteers and employees gather to celebrate achievement of becoming a Blue Zones Project organization. SUBMITTED

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joined the Blue Zones Project to promote better health and longevity.

In Collier and south Lee counties, various businesses, government entities, residential communities, churches and other entities are embracing the initiative that the NCH Healthcare System introduced to the region in 2015.

It involves helping businesses and other groups adopt healthier practices, such as promoting walking breaks at work and offering nutritious snacks instead of donuts at meetings. The belief is the changes will

become permanent habits and improve overall health.

The Blue Zones is based on the 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 and developed a program blueprint for how to adopt the principles.

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, putting loved ones first and others.

The Blue Zones contracts with health consultants, currently the digital-based ShareCare, to work in communities to help companies, government agencies, residential communities incorporate Blue Zones practices.

Some of the incentives for pursuing the Blue Zones include reduced health insurance costs, improved employee retention and productivity, and reduced absenteeism.

Café of Life serves lunch on week days to help meet the needs of the less fortunate who live in the Bonita Springs community while preserving their dignity. Clients are 90 percent working poor Hispanic fam-

ilies and the remaining 10 percent are homeless. The meals are cooked by volunteers at their homes and include a casserole, vegetable, and salad. There also is a pastry table with cookies. The permanent serving location is Leitner Neighborhood Park.

In addition, Café of Life provides supplemental groceries so clients can prepare meals at home, and there are gently used clothing and miscellaneous personal goods for needy families.

For more information, go to, <http://www.cafeoflife.org>.

For more information about the Blue Zones, go to <https://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com>.