

“When you get into your 60s and above, you want to think about exercise differently. It’s not just about, you know, cardiovascular or lifting weights. It’s also about avoiding accidents.” - Dan Buettner, author of “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest”



Beyond expectations

Blue Zones co-founder Dan Buettner returns to Southwest Florida for talk, walk and tastings

Dan Buettner, author of “Blue Zones,” will talk about living a longer, healthier, happier life at 6 p.m. Monday at FGCU’s Alico Arena.

KINFAY MOROTI/NEWS-PRESS.COM

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When Blue Zones co-founder and best-selling author Dan Buettner visits Southwest Florida next week, he’ll be encouraged by what Collier and south Lee leaders and citizens have accomplished in the past 2½ years.

Buettner will share worldly tales on how to live a longer, healthier, happier life at 6 p.m. Monday, April 16, at FGCU’s Alico Arena. The free event will include plant-based food tastings from Chartwells catering, Blue Zones Project T-shirts, drawings for copies of Buettner’s book and prizes to Blue Zones Project-

If you go

What: National Walking Day; visit by Blue Zones founder Dan Buettner

Where: Alico Arena.

When: Monday, April 16, 6 p.m.

Notable: To RSVP, visit wellbeingSWFL.eventbrite.com

approved restaurants.

There also is an optional walk around FGCU’s campus. After all, April 16 is National Walking Day.

“It’s far exceeded expectations,” Buettner said of the buy-in by Naples’ leaders and citizens. “This is a whole experience.

“I’ve cycled around the world, and those bike rides are epic. But the exploration of the future, to add to our body of knowledge on bettering the human condition, that’s what’s memorable. Then to see it put into work in America, it’s a triumph of a career for me.”

There now are 26 cities around the

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Buettner

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U.S. who have signed up for Buettner's class. In 2005, his National Geographic cover story "Secrets of Living Longer" was the magazine's top-selling issue. He also has three national best-sellers on Blue Zones, which are areas of the world where people live the longest. Those include Okinawa, Japan; Ikaria, Greece; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; and Loma Linda, California.

Further research by Buettner and his staff led to nine principles on why people live longer. Those include:

- Move naturally.
- Make vegetables and fruits the focus of your diet.
- Eat until you're 80 percent full.
- Down shift to create less stress in your life.
- Put family first.
- Belong to a faith-based community.
- Know your sense of purpose.
- Surround yourself with friends who have like-minded ideas on health.
- Have a glass of wine — or two — while chatting with friends.

In Naples, 26 work sites, 19 restaurants, 14 schools, 14 country clubs, eight churches and a total of 147 entities have been Blue Zones certified.

"The number of people interested in Blue Zones has grown exponentially," Buettner said. "It goes from Fort Worth (Texas) to Hawaii, Oregon and Wisconsin. We're all learning and coming together to share best practices and celebrate good health.

"I also want to visit (President and CEO of the NCH Healthcare System) Dr. (Allen) Weiss because he's been such a great collaborative partner."

Challenge of sustainability

Even a Blue Zone isn't immune to society's vices.

On a recent trip, Buettner, who's also a National Geographic Fellow, went to Okinawa, Japan, for a magazine piece.

"We gathered recipes from the 1970s," Buettner said. "Stir fries. Homemade tofu, julienne carrots, daikon, bit-



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ter melon.

"The plate looked like a compost pile. But it had five times the nutrients as a burger and five times the volume. Calorically cheap and nutrient dense.

"It was such a rush."

Then Buettner saw the other side in Okinawa. Obesity.

In the Okinawan islands, in Japan's extreme southwest, they have more than 2½ times the national average of people over 100 years old and an extraordinary number of people who enjoy excellent health well into their 80s.

But the next generation is the fattest in Japan and prone to a range of obesity-related illnesses that could kill them in middle age.

Buettner said much of this is blamed on Okinawans literally getting a taste of Western culture.

In 1963, Okinawa got the first fast-food outlet in Japan. It still has more fast-food outlets per head than anywhere else in the country.

The "Okinawan Crisis" is this: Young people abandon fish and soy products for meat and fast food.

"Okinawans now are some of the most obese," Buettner said. "It's the scourges of the West — freeways, junk food and the standard American diet."

He compared it to opioids.

"You eat that burger and it feels good and it tastes good and you actually get an endorphin rush," he said. "It's like Percocet. It's good in the short run but not good in the medium and it'll kill you in the long term."

In correlating fast food and lack of exercise with mental and behavioral health issues, Buettner points to Greece,

which has one-10th of the dementia issues that the U.S. has. "It's no more of a fact of a plant-based diet and every time you go to a friend's, you're nudged into physical activity every 20 minutes."

Buettner also noted that marketing has focused more on health care than nutrition.

What also encouraged him in his new research on the happiest places to live is that 80 percent of the happiest lived the longest. A person who feels better smiles more? Makes sense, right.

"There's a correlation," he said. "We know people who eat five to six servings of vegetables a day are happier. Having a good, healthy social network helps happiness.

"And so does recreation and physical activity. You really do become the company you keep."