

# BLUE ZONES PROJECT BRINGS LIFESTYLE GURU

Liz Freeman Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

**D**on't try to blame bad genes for ill health around Dr. Hans Diehl, one of the nation's foremost lifestyle physicians, who will be speaking in Naples this month.

He won't buy the bad genes argument, and he is armed with evidence that diet and personal choice are main culprits of heart disease, diabetes, obesity and the like.

The founder of a food and lifestyle program called the Coronary Health Improvement Program, Diehl will be speaking about the connection between diet and disease at the NCH Downtown Baker Hospital on Friday, Jan. 26.

For more information about his speaking engagement, from noon to 1 p.m. at the NCH Telford Center, call 239-624-2312 or RSVP at <https://drdiehl.eventbrite.com>. The address for the Telford center is 318 Seventh St. N.

Diehl's visit is sponsored by the Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida, which has a philosophical core about lifestyle and longevity that is similar to what Diehl has been advocating through his research and writings about lifestyle choices and disease.

The Blue Zones Project is a program that aims to help communities come together and consciously make changes in daily activities and surroundings to improve health and longevity. NCH introduced the Blue Zones Project to the region in 2015 and is underwriting the cost locally for the first eight to 10 years.

The Blue Zones project is 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.

The philosophy is that over time, healthier choices will become the easier choice, and each incremental step can improve health and well-be-



Dr. Hans Diehl, left, joins medical guru Dr. Dean Ornish and his wife, Anne, at the American College of Lifestyle Medicine's 2016 conference at the Naples Grande Resort. LANCE SHEARER/SPECIAL TO THE NAPLES DAILY NEWS

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ing. Offering fresh fruit and bottled water instead of soft drinks and candy bars in employee break rooms is one example.

Diehl said Dr. Allen Weiss, the president and chief executive director of the hospital system, is forward-thinking in initiating the Blue Zones project in the community.

“This is most unusual for a hospital to sponsor the Blue Zones Project, because it undermines their economic health,” he said.

Diehl will talk about “what you put on the end of the fork” as a major driver for individual health, along with how food manufacturers are experts at manipulating cravings with salt and sugar content.

“Over 50 percent of our calories come from processed foods,” he said in a telephone interview from Loma Linda, California, where he is a clinical professor of

preventive medicine at Loma Linda University. “Only 14 percent of the calories we eat come from foods that are grown, fruits, vegetables and whole grains.”

The CHIP entails participants attending a series of 18 educational sessions over three months to learn about lifestyle and dietary changes to reduce weight, high blood pressure, bad cholesterol numbers and diabetes. Sticking with the program can lower heart disease and stroke risks, and other chronic health conditions, he said.

Diehl said 85,000 people in the United States have gone through CHIP. Locally, the greater Naples YMCA began hosting CHIP sessions in 2015.

Outcomes with CHIP have been published in more than 31 scientific articles, including the American Journal of Cardiology.

Diehl has published several books on lifestyle matters and diet to improve health. His book “Health Power,” co-authored with Dr. Aileen Ludington, has been published in 16 languages and sold more than 1.5 million copies.