

**“The people you surround yourself with influence your behaviors, so choose friends who have healthy habits.” - Dan Buettner, author of “The Blue Zones of Happiness: Lessons from the World’s Happiest People”**



Hodges University celebrates earning Blue Zones Project recognition. BLUE ZONES PROJECT

# Blue Zones Project nears 200 organizations in SW Florida

**Liz Freeman** | Naples Daily News  
USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The Blue Zones Project has added several more organizations to its growing list of supporters and is nearing the home stretch toward 200 entities on board.

Del Webb Naples homeowners' association in Ave Maria has gained recognition from the health and longevity initiative after taking steps to spur better health habits of its residents.

Hodges University and Literacy Volunteers of Collier County also have gained Blue Zones recognition.

They join the more than 190 local companies, organizations, civic groups, restaurants and others that have taken action or adopted policies that promote healthier choices in daily activities for employees or members.

For instance, the Del Webb homeowners' associa-

tion for the 55 and older residential community in Ave Maria has installed bicycle racks around the community to promote bicycling over driving, and members have planted a community garden to grow fresh produce. At association meetings and gatherings, healthier snack items are offered.

“As a leader in active adult lifestyle communities, Del Webb understands how important healthy, social living is to our residents,” Josh Graeve, vice president of sales, said in a news release. “We are excited to now have Del Webb Naples participate in the Blue Zones Project. It is the perfect match for the life improvement our residents seek.”

The Blue Zones project was introduced to Southwest Florida in 2015 based on the travels of National Geographic explorer Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle

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## Blue Zones

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traits and live to age 100 or older. He wrote a New York Times best-seller 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 at worksites, which gets people active and engaging with one another.

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 the Blue Zones for a year or longer before leading and launching the local campaign that will span eight to 10 years.

Hodges University in North Naples and Fort Myers, with a combined 1,600 students and 262 faculty and employees, has become Blue Zones-recognized, in large part at the urging of the School of Health Sciences, said Dr. John Meyer, president of Hodges.

"Our faculty and staff have very enthusiastically embraced this initiative to the point that we have announced a 30,000-mile challenge," he said. "In 2020, Hodges University will celebrate its 30th anniversary, so an especially healthy and meaningful way to do that is to have all of us at Hodges log the number of miles we walk each month, with the goal of reaching 30,000 miles."

Meyer said joining the Blue Zones Project is a way for the university to encourage healthier habits and lifestyle changes.

Hodges is encouraging students and faculty to use the stairs as opposed to elevators, has designated remote parking spots as Blue Zones parking to encourage more walking, and has hosted plant-based cooking classes.

Literacy Volunteers of Collier County has joined the Blue Zones Project to carve a path for people to be exposed to the wellness initiative who might not otherwise be exposed to it, said Christopher Nind, executive director of the nonprofit organization that has been tu-

toring adults and families to improve their English.

This past year, 907 adults and pre-school children were served by nearly 300 volunteers.

"We wanted our staff, members, volunteers and students to be aware that even small steps toward a healthy goal can make a significant difference in their lives," Nind said. "This fundamental principle and philosophy falls in line with our adult and children's literacy programs."



Literacy Volunteers of Collier County celebrates its Blue Zones Project recognition. BLUE ZONES PROJECT



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