

Naples is top in the nation for well-being

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Naples has hit a home run again.

For the third year in a row, Naples has the highest overall well-being, with residents being happy and feeling good about their lives, based on a survey of 186 metropolitan areas in the United States.

It's the first time in the 10 years since Gallup-Sharecare began its well-being survey that the same community has held the top ranking for three years in a row.

"It's a really, really big deal," Naples Mayor Bill Barnett said. "This is a great place to be. I am thrilled with this."

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Well-being

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The Gallup-Sharecare well-being index is calculated on a scale of 0 to 100, with 100 the highest score. The survey is based on telephone interviews with 337,690 adults across the U.S. and uses two-year rolling averages from 2016 and 2017.

Naples earned an overall well-being score of 67.6 and improved from last year's 66.3, which is in contrast to declines in well-being elsewhere. The national score is 61.5, a drop from 62.1 last year.

"I think the community is on a roll," said Dr. Allen Weiss, president and chief executive officer of the NCH Healthcare System. "I think it is more than a coincidence we are three years in a row (at the top) and we have improved dramatically now that that Blue Zones Project is getting more and more mature."

In 2011, Naples was ranked No. 73 for well-being out of 190 metro areas surveyed.

Weiss introduced the Blue Zones Project to the region in 2015, based on the travels of National Geographic explorer Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle traits and live to 100 or older. He wrote a New York Times best-seller about the nine principles of longevity.

NCH is underwriting the cost for the community to adopt Blue Zones principles for getting healthier and happier with the help of Sharecare, an Atlanta-based company that works with groups to improve health.

More than 200 organizations in Collier have gained Blue Zones recognition for adopting healthier habits, and 19,000 individuals have signed a pledge to make healthier choices in their day-to-day lives.

"Programs like the Blue Zones Project are bringing together diverse people and organizations across our region in collective efforts to improve community health," Weiss said.

Dan Witters, research director with Gallup-Sharecare, said Naples in the past had proven to be a high well-being area for years, but it was inconsistent. That has changed.

"What is most impressive is how it has shown great consistency in its well-being excellence since 2014-2015, and it has been strengthening its position at the top along the way," he said in a statement. "I think a big part of their story is the presence of the Blue Zones Project in Southwest Florida, which specializes in community-level interventions designed to increase the probability that residents make healthy, well-being affirming choices in their lives."

Fort Myers ranks 22 in the survey with a score of 63.6. Other Florida communities with high marks for well-being include Sarasota at 7, Fort Walton Beach at 25, Port St. Lucie at 28 and Miami at 31.

The Gallup-Sharecare survey examines five key elements of well-being:

- sense of purpose, if people like what they do each

day;

- social well-being, having supportive relationships;
- financial standing, with the ability to reduce stress and increase security;

- » a sense of community, if residents like where they live and feel safe;

- » physical health.

Naples has the highest scores in the categories of purpose, social life and financial standing.

Naples came in second-highest for a sense of community, behind Barnstable Town, Massachusetts, and second-highest for physical health, with Boulder, Colorado, taking the top spot.

Naples often gets top marks from other survey or data-based studies, which include having the longest life expectancy of 83.5 years, according to a 24/7 Wall Street report last year.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the University of Wisconsin conducts annual health rankings of counties, and Collier County is consistently among the top three healthiest counties in the state. New rankings from Robert Wood Johnson will be released Wednesday.

Naples also came out as the top place to retire, based on a Kiplinger survey.

Barnett, the Naples mayor, said the Gallup-Sharecare survey findings will market Naples to outsiders, similar to how other surveys make Naples stand out.

With three organizations saying Naples is doing well, that says something, Weiss said.

Someone looking to relocate from a Northern climate would find Naples appealing because it is a safe community and the tax structure is favorable, Weiss said.

The region's growth will continue as more people are drawn to the community, Weiss said.

"The county is planning ahead for growth," he said. "You are not going to stop growth, you need to plan for it."

After Naples in the top spot for well-being, the next four communities with the overall highest scores are Barnstable Town; Boulder; Santa Cruz, California; and Charlottesville, Virginia.

Coming in last for the lowest well-being is Fort Smith, on the border of Arkansas and Oklahoma, which is the third time that Fort Smith was among the lowest communities. The other four at the bottom are Canton, Ohio; Gulfport, Mississippi; Hickory, North Carolina; and Binghamton, New York.

The lowest well-being scores were found primarily in the South and industrial Midwest. The highest well-being communities are found scattered along the Eastern seaboard, the Mountain West and West.

Witter, with Gallup-Sharecare, said the declines in well-being scores on the national level was driven by worsening emotional, mental and psychological well-being. On the other hand, it was the best year ever for reduced smoking and increases in exercise.

Five states account for 17 of the top 25 communities for high well-being. California has seven communities and Florida has four. Colorado, North Carolina and Virginia each have two communities with high well-being scores.