

FREE

HEALTHY LIVING HEALTHY PLANET

natural awakenings

Healing Our Kids

Reversing a Rising Tide
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The Rise of
Blue Zones
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VEGGIE
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The Rise of Blue Zones in America

Places that Encourage Healthy Living

by Avery Mack



Dan Buettner's book *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest* launched a movement a decade ago. Sequels include *The Blue Zones of Happiness*, *The Blue Zones Solution* and *Thrive*. Many communities have embraced the principles of this "make healthy living easier" paradigm, resulting in the improved well-being of residents.

"Add more years to your life and more life to your years," says Nick Buettner, vice president at Blue Zones LLC, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the founder's brother who spoke with us. "The people around you, the places where you work, live and play, and the social norms in your community have an impact on your health."

The original U.S. pilot project in 2009, in Albert Lea, Minnesota, is a prime example. Instead of widening a main thoroughfare and raising the speed limit, the city widened the sidewalk and created a path around nearby Fountain Lake, offering safe exercise for bikers, joggers and walkers. The Hy-Vee grocery increased its health market section from two to seven aisles, leading to a 130 percent rise in related sales, and added a Blue Zones checkout lane for healthy grab-and-go options. City workplaces now offer quiet rooms and fruit instead of candy; one business converted a garage to a pickleball court.

The five original Blue Zones are Ikaria, Greece; Loma Linda, California; Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica; Okinawa, Japan; and Sardinia, Italy.

Blue Zone Basics

Move Naturally – Even at work, get up and move at least once every 20 minutes.

Reduce Stress – Take a nap, nature walk or meditate.

Act Intentionally – "People that feel they have a reason to get out of bed in the morning tend to live seven years longer than those who just go through the motions," says Buettner. A strong sense of purpose defines quality of life.

Eat Healthy – Enjoy the benefits of a plant-based diet. One cup of beans a day adds three to four years in life expectancy. Plant a garden to grow fresher, pesticide-free food. Eat meat an average of five times a month and in small-portioned stir-fry, soups and pasta. Consume fewer calories. Drink wine in moderation. Check out BlueZones.com/recipes.

Maintain Relationships – "If you have fewer than three friends, it's the equivalent of smoking for 20 years," Buettner maintains.

"Growing old in place and staying at home instead of a retirement or nursing home is easier to accomplish when you have a social network." Meet regularly with friends.

Have Faith – A faith-based life taps into a larger resource far greater than oneself and enhances a sense of purpose, social network and calm content.

Prioritize Family – Amid the busyness of life, make the most enjoyable family time and nurturing activities each day's first choice.

"Over the last four years in Florida, our sponsor, NCH Healthcare System, has helped to build well-being infrastructure and sustainability for approximately 400,000 people; that swells to nearly 1.2 million during high season from January to April," says Deb Logan, executive director of Blue Zones Project-SWFL (Southwest Florida). "We have 33 Blue Zone-approved restaurants that collectively make an additional 176 plant-based menu items available locally; the first half of this year, they sold 130,000 Blue Zones-inspired dishes."

The healthful community philosophy was vital in Hawaii, when the Kilauea Volcano spewed lava, sulfur dioxide and acid rain. First-responders staffed checkpoint stations around the clock to protect the public from dangerous areas, exposing themselves to combined sun and volcanic heat. The Hawaiian Blue Zone team delivered smoothies, beverages and paletas—healthy popsicles made with real fruit—to help workers stay cooler. They also delivered them to volunteers and public service groups, including Hope Services Hawaii, which built tiny houses for families displaced by volcanic activity.

"We don't come into an area and say, 'This is what you must do.' We say, 'This is what you can do.' The readiness must come from the city level, businesses, schools and nonprofits," Buettner says. "The right leadership must be committed and prepared to follow through on multiple years of initiatives."

He remarks, "In the end, my hope for the future lies in the fact that communities care about their health. Blue Zones isn't about the quantity of years, but the quality of life, and often that adds years, too."

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Blue Zone-Certified Cities

Certified communities have achieved their predetermined goals (outlined in project blueprints) as attested to via a combination of the Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index and community-reported metrics.

California—Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach

Iowa—Algona, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Fairfield, Harlan, Iowa City, Marion, Mason City, Muscatine, Oska-loosa, Sioux City, Spencer, Spirit Lake, Waterloo, Woodbine

Minnesota—Albert Lea
Cities and other areas transforming to Blue Zone status

Hawaii—East/North/West Hawaii, Kapolei/Ewa, Koolaupoko, Manoa/Makiki/McCully/Moiliili, Wahiawa, Wailuku/Kahului (aka Central Maui)

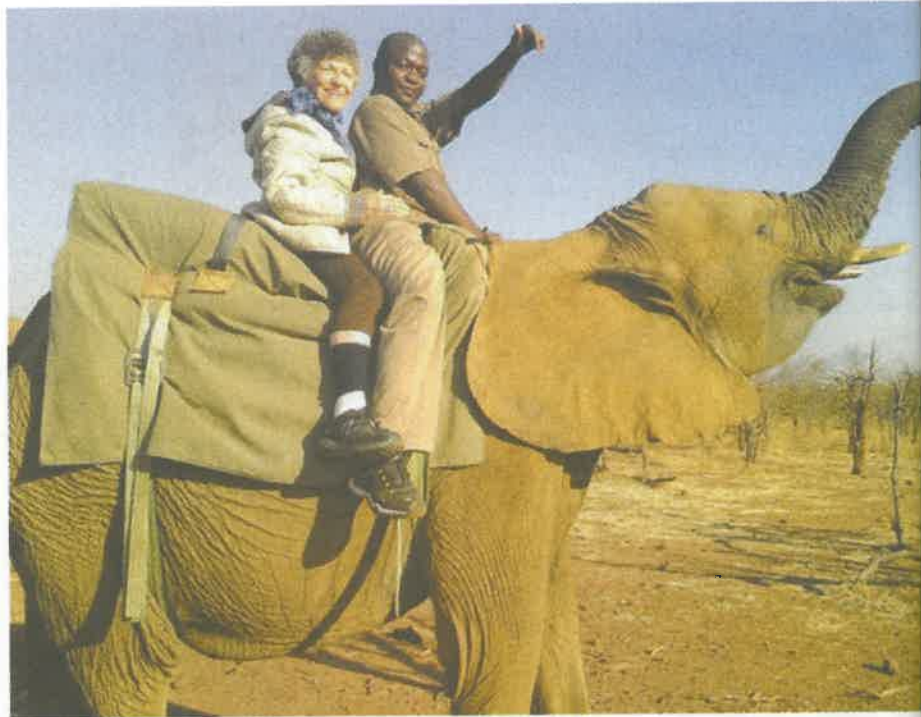
Oklahoma—Pottawatomie County

Oregon—The Dalles, Grants Pass, Klamath Falls, Umpqua

Southwest Florida—Ave Maria, Bonita Springs, Estero, Golden Gate, Immokalee, Naples/East Naples

Texas—Fort Worth

Wisconsin—Beaver Dam, Horicon, Juneau, Mayville



Sara Deets riding an elephant in Zimbabwe at age 96

Accolades for the Blue Zones Naples Project

by Linda Sechrist

Since NCH Healthcare launched the Blue Zones Project in 2014, it has enjoyed continued success. “Individuals and organizations are now reaching out to us. We no longer have to knock on doors in Naples, Marco Island, Immokalee, Bonita Springs and Estero to promote our community-wide well-being initiative that helps make the healthier choices the easiest choices,” says Deb Logan, executive director of the Southwest Florida Blue Zones Project.

The eight-year project has received accolades from many of its participants, such as The City of Naples, Lely

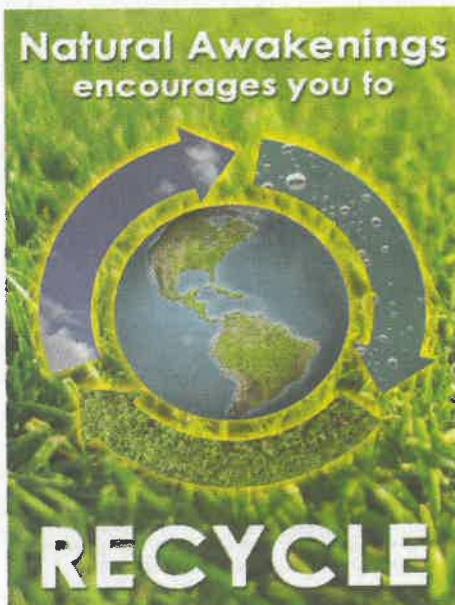
Homeowners Association and several Blue Zones workshop volunteers, including Lisa Guenloh, Andrea Posner and Deborah Woller.

City of Naples

“From a community perspective, as well as our organization that consists of 460 individuals, we’ve had a positive experience,” says Bill Moser, Naples city manager. “We went through an extensive process designed to enhance a healthy and productive workplace. The results of that effort include allowing us to stabilize health insurance rates for the last five years, a healthy financial benefit to taxpayers



Healthy vending machine at Naples City Hall



who indirectly pay for our insurance. We also now look at our city from a more holistic perspective, which includes considering how the built environment, sidewalks, street landscaping, parks and bike paths can be used to enhance blue zone concepts and allow residents and visitors to move easily, live without unnecessary stress and interact with others. We also have healthier snacks in our vending machines and encourage businesses and grocery stores within our city limits to help build awareness by having displays of healthy foods that are part of Blue Zones. Wynn's Market has one."

Lisa Gruenloh

Gruenloh, a Blue Zones purpose workshop facilitator and director of development at the Naples Community Hospital (NCH) Center for Philanthropy, loves



helping people find their purpose and live a more fulfilling, meaningful life. "We've reached thousands of people in Southwest Florida. From young people wanting to establish a meaningful career to mid-career professionals needing a sense of rejuvenation in work and life and retired individuals going through change or disappointment and seeking new ways of living with purpose, I hear a lot of stories about the exciting and often courageous changes in their life after the workshop," says Gruenloh.

Andrea Posner

Posner is a member of the VeronaWalk Homeowners Association (HOA), which comprises 1,920 homes. As a Blue Zones volunteer, Posner



has served in numerous roles, beginning with the retail food committee dedicated to educating restaurants and grocery stores on the benefits of add-



Blue Zones display at Wynn's Market, Naples

ing Blue Zones plant-based options, as well as promoting Blue Zones-approved certification.

"When a former VeronaWalk Homeowners Association board member read about another community receiving Blue Zones recognition, he said, 'If they can, we can.' Since I was already involved, I offered my help. The next thing I knew, I was congratulated, named as chairperson and put in charge of forming a committee. We needed 480 signatures from HOA families who would agree to take the Blue Zones personal pledge. We got 600," Posner recalls.

"We also started three Blue Zones Moais, a concept from Okinawa, Japan, which roughly means meeting for a common purpose. Our potluck moai meets for 10 weeks to learn how to cook plant-based meals. We also have a restaurant and walking moai. I've been part of a walking moai for two years and I appreciate the friendships and social networks I've formed," notes Posner.

Deborah Woller

Woller, whose lifestyle reflects Blue Zones goals, has also been involved in multiple Blue Zone roles. She began with assisting businesses such as NCH and Arthrex with collecting pledges at local farmers' markets and special company

events and acting as a purpose workshop co-facilitator. "I am passionate about educating people on different choices and the importance of having a sense of purpose. As a result of volunteering I've seen that with a strong purpose in life, anyone's 'shoulda, coulda, woulda' dreams can still come true. Women I've met, who ranged in ages from 100 to 103, told me stories about riding elephants in Zimbabwe at age 96, walking the great wall of China at 94 and penning poems for a children's book at age 90," says Woller.

Logan recommends that individuals interested in learning more about Blue Zones register for Blue Zones Ambassador training, which explains all the ways to get involved in the project and reach out to worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores and faith-based organizations, as well as other types of businesses in Naples and other nearby communities.

For more information, call 239-624-2312 or visit SouthwestFlorida.BlueZonesProject.com.



Sara Deets (left) and Deb Woller at Sara's 100th birthday