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Blue Zones Project helps ignite joy for overall well-being

What brings you joy and makes life worth living? Do you feel like you are living on purpose or stuck in a rut?

As Blue Zones Project works with partners to help Southwest Floridians live healthier, happier and longer lives, we recognize purpose (along with physical, social, community and financial) is one of the five key elements that impacts an individual's sense of well-being. Research has demonstrated that individuals can improve their overall well-being by utilizing their unique gifts and talents in a purposeful manner.

Another article in this section today explains how Blue Zones Project helps people identify or re-connect with their sense of purpose. If you want to enjoy a couple of hours of fun and inspiration, sign up for a Purpose Workshop and bring a friend, co-worker or family member.

I highly recommend you check it out. You might just have an experience like Andrea Posner. She shares, "Post retirement in 2015, I quickly discovered my purpose in life needed to be drawn out, examined, restructured — in a way that would bring me joy. When you're retired, you can really be your own boss, make the choices that might not have been offered to you when you were working full-time. At this stage in my life, at least for me, it's important to make a contribution to those around me."

Ultimately, Andrea has gifted her talent and passion to others by getting further involved in the Blue Zones Project. She is active on the Retail Food Committee that helps restaurants and grocery stores get involved in the project. In addition, she championed well-being where she lives, helping Verona-Walk become a Blue Zones Project participating homeowner's association.

"People come up to me to talk about their walking groups (Moais) or how much they enjoyed the purpose workshop or our plant-based cooking demonstrations," she says. "It's a great feeling and now I can clearly see that I am giving back and making that contribution to society that was missing during my career days."

Or perhaps, Ken Muckenhaupt's experience will resonate with you. He and his wife, Judi, both attended the purpose workshop offered at their homeowner's association. Being new to their community, they wanted to participate in activities where they could meet people. Recently retired and a seasonal resident, Ken serves as a volunteer firefighter, has a part-time ambulance job and is an adjunct professor at Fordham University in New York City.

"The purpose workshop validated that I am living on purpose," he said.

Although Ken's purpose in his retirement deviates significantly from his 38-year career as a software engineer and IT consultant at the IBM Corporation in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., it allows him to tap into activities that he finds equally rewarding.

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Barbara Saner, a retired educator, was so inspired by her purpose workshop experience that she decided she would like to volunteer by becoming a Blue Zones Project purpose workshop facilitator.

“Volunteering with Blue Zones has given me the opportunity to reignite my talents as an educator and my love of interacting with people,” she said. “It is exciting to use my gifts to help others find their purpose. Each time I facilitate a workshop, I know I am in the right place!”

Barbara is one of nine certified purpose workshop facilitators who generously volunteer their time to offer free workshops in English, Spanish and Creole throughout Southwest Florida.

Retired folks are not the only ones who benefit from purpose workshops. They are appropriate for all ages from mid-teens and on. Hundreds of school-aged youth have participated in the workshops through their school, after-school club or faith-based organization.

FGCU student Ashley Silva said, “The purpose workshop helped me see what kind of work I gravitate towards and feel fulfilled doing. I saw that it aligns

with my hobbies and the kind of work I want to do in the future. It gave me more motivation and a sense of assurance that I am on the right path and inspired me to let go of activities that don't align with my values and dreams.”

There are so many stories of people who reconnect with their passion for art and begin taking classes at local art associations or grab a friend and take in a musical or play.

Although there are many organizations in Southwest Florida that make these opportunities available, we appreciate the Naples Art Association and Artis—Naples for becoming Blue Zones-participating organizations.

Other people find they thrive in nature and want to volunteer at places like the Naples Botanical Garden, Naples Zoo (both participating in Blue Zones) or a local animal shelter.

Empty-nesters who miss their children, or retired teachers like Barbara Saner, find mentoring students at one of the many nonprofits — including Blue Zones-recognized organizations Guadalupe Center, Grace Place, Boys & Girls Club of Immokalee and New Horizons — extremely rewarding.

There are so many options in SWFL for you to utilize your unique gifts and talents. Why delay? It may just help you live longer!