

“I think we live in a culture that relentlessly pursues comfort. Ease is related to disease. We shouldn’t always be fleeing hardship. Hardship also brings people together. We should welcome it.”

Dan Buettner

Author of “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest”

Walkers in 10-week challenge can win big spa prize



GETTY IMAGES

Liz Freeman

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Have you dusted off the walking shoes yet?

The Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida has an incentive in the offering to start healthier habits in 2019.

The health and wellness initiative is kicking into gear Jan. 28 for a 10-week walking challenge for anyone who wants to join for the entire stretch or part of it, which will wrap up April 3 on National Walking Day, said Kate Walter, with the local Blue Zones Project.

The idea is for participants to track their steps and for the entire group to cumulatively walk the

distance to Loma Linda, California, that is roughly 2,560 miles from Naples. Loma Linda is one of the first Blue Zones Project communities.

More than 260 people have signed up for the challenge and enrollment will stay open, she said.

At the end of the challenge there will be a National Walking Day event in Naples and those details are still being planned. Last year, Blue Zones Project founder Dan Buettner led a walk after speaking at Florida Gulf Coast University.

The Blue Zones was introduced to Southwest Florida in 2015 based on the world travels of Buettner, a National Geographic explorer 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 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 several years. NCH

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president and chief executive officer, Dr. Allen Weiss, had been talking about it for a year or longer before leading the campaign that will span 8 to 10 years.

Participants in the 10-week challenge will be asked to track their steps on the honor system or could use a fitbit or other device, Walter said.

All walkers will be entered to win a grand prize of a two-night stay and spa package at the JW Marriott resort on Marco Island, and teams will be entered to win \$2,000 worth of gift cards to restaurants that have gained Blue Zones status for making changes that help people make healthier choices.

For more information and to register, go to <https://trackyourtrek.eventbrite.com>.



A free bag is shown laying on a table Saturday, Nov. 14, 2015 at North Collier Regional Park in Naples, Fla. The Blue Zones Project, a NCH funded health initiative, kicked off with a celebration cultivating healthy living in the community with vendor booths, local marching bands, yoga, music and more. LPGA's Morgan Pressel spoke and headlined with founder Dan Buettner. (Corey Perrine/Staff) COREY PERRINE, COREY PERRINE