

NAPLES FLORIDA WEEKLY®

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WEEK OF JUNE 18-24, 2020

www.FloridaWeekly.com

Vol. XII, No. 35 • FREE

"If we leave it up to the individual and they keep having environmental influences that are so strong, they're really trying to fight an uphill battle against it."

— **Deb Logan**, executive director of the Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida

H O M E T O W N HEALTH

How a community approach makes getting and staying well everyone's responsibility



COURTESY BLUE ZONES PROJECT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA



THE SWFL COALITION FOR A DRUG FREE FLORIDA; HEALTHY LEE

BY LAURA TICHY-SMITH

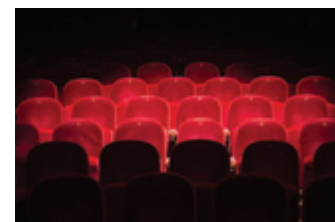
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WHEN IT COMES TO WELLNESS, YOU are not alone — although you used to be.

Although public health officials in Florida wrangle with the new coronavirus alongside the old chronic diseases, there's some work going on behind the scenes to move beyond public health to a new model to help people become more resilient. This new model is called community wellness.

SEE HEALTH, A8 ►

At top: Attendees at Blue Zones Project palooza practice tai chi. At left: Busey Run for The Cure in Fort Myers.



Arts & Entertainment

The show will go on — venues' plans for reopening. **B1** ►



Shopping for care

Naples doctor launches digital marketplace for self-pay patients. **A16** ►



At the movies

Theaters may open at 50 percent capacity; movies like Steve Carell's "Irresistible" premiere online. **B1** ►



Location, location, location

Shy Wolf Sanctuary reaches property expansion plans milestone. **A15** ►

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Union fights to keep Florida officers' identities secret

BY ANA CEBALLOS AND DARA KAM

News Service of Florida

The Florida Police Benevolent Association made a second attempt last week at getting a court to settle a dispute about whether a constitutional amendment aimed at protecting victims' rights should apply to law enforcement officers.

Citing privacy protections for crime victims in a 2018 Florida constitutional amendment known as "Marsy's Law," the police union maintains that the identity of a Tallahassee police officer that killed a black

transgender suspect should be kept secret.

Marsy's Law, approved by voters in 2018, enshrined in the Constitution a variety of rights for crime victims, including "the right to prevent the disclosure of information of records that could be used to locate or harass the victim or the victim's family, or which could disclose confidential or privileged information of the victim."

Law enforcement agencies throughout the state are split on whether Marsy's Law covers police officers involved in use-of

SEE VICTIMS, A10 ►



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HEALTH

From page 1

The old “personal responsibility” model of wellness often narrowly focuses on the physical, with diet and fitness equating wellness. Perhaps there’s a nod toward mental wellness by acknowledging stress reduction and meditation. But even with this view, which includes social aspects — yoga classes, group cardio sessions, recreational sport competitions, etc. — the onus remains upon the individual to show discipline, willpower and fortitude against their perceived personal laziness, weakness and tendency to succumb to temptations.

“In an ideal world, that would work,” said Deb Logan, executive director of the Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, an initiative sponsored by the NCH Healthcare System to improve wellness within its service area. “That’s the old public health model — if you educate people enough, incentivize them or maybe even shame them — they will stop smoking, they’ll eat better, exercise and stick to it. But we do understand that we’re a product of the environment in which we live, and those influences within our environment impact our choices.”

You’ve probably felt the struggle if, for example, you’ve adopted healthy eating habits, but someone in your office brings in a box of doughnuts to share every day. Or, perhaps, you’d like to take up running, but the infrastructure in the area where you live prevents you from doing so safely.

“We make over 250 health-related decisions every day,” Ms. Logan noted, “and most of them are just automatic pilot. If we leave it up to the individual and they keep having environmental influences that are so strong, they’re really trying to fight an uphill battle against it.”

In contrast, community wellness takes public health to a new level by shifting the model of the personal fitness battle to one where the greater community supports wellness both through modifying surroundings and through social collaboration. This concept recognizes that individuals do not live separated from their surroundings, so those surroundings can have profound effects upon their wellness — in either positive or negative ways. Also, the goals move beyond mere physical fitness toward creating an environment where all community members may thrive because wellness has instilled resiliency into these individuals.

Community wellness initiatives attempt to modify the environment so that the effects upon individuals are positive and support wellness. How the initiatives attempt to make positive, supportive changes varies by community, which makes sense since the problem — and, therefore, the needs — vary by community. What’s common is that, no matter the focus of each initiative’s lead agency, they are all trying to help their populations thrive.

Leaning toward longevity

The NCH Healthcare System is presently in the fifth year of its eight-year sponsorship commitment for the Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida — a branch of Sharecare, a digital health and wellness company owned by Jeff Arnold, the founder of WebMD, and Dr. Mehmet Oz.

Blue Zones was a term used by National Geographic fellow Dan Buettner to describe places that researchers identified as seeming to have concentrations



LOGAN



COURTESY OF BLUE ZONES PROJECT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA
Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida engagement leader Rafael Campo leads a walking moai group at Eagle Lakes Community Park in Collier County.



COURTESY OF PREFERRED TRAVEL OF NAPLES
Kristina Gear, managing director of Preferred Travel of Naples, leads yoga classes for employees as part of the company’s Blue Zones participation.

of centenarians among their populations. The term originated because researchers marked the pockets of centenarians by drawing circles on maps with blue pens. Mr. Buettner wrote about the lifestyle habits of the centenarians in the 2005 National Geographic article “Secrets of Long Life” and followed with a series of best-selling Blue Zones books. The Blue Zones system for enhancing wellness and extending lifespan focuses around principles that Mr. Buettner dubbed the Power 9, which include natural movement, plant-based foods, connecting with friends and family, stress reduction and finding purpose in life.

Mr. Buettner then conducted a trial project in Albert Lea, Minnesota, to see if a community could be modified to create an environment that resembled conditions in the Blue Zones in order to make it easier for residents to improve their health, which proved successful. Sharecare acquired the rights from Mr. Buettner to manage Blue Zones Projects in communities where sponsors agree to a multi-year financial commitment to have the companies implement the project.

“If you live somewhere where it’s not inviting to take a walk or ride a bike, best intentions sometimes are hard to implement,” Ms. Logan said. “So that’s why our focus is more on looking at the entire environment that touches people and trying to make healthy choices easier in that environment. Everybody starts off really wanting to do it, but if the choices are not easy in their daily environment, it really gets hard.”

Ms. Logan said NCH was looking for a way to decrease chronic disease admissions to its health care system, so it was willing to make the financial commitment

that a Blue Zones Project required.

“Their leadership did a tremendous amount of research on it and said this one looks like it really has teeth because it is a very robust communitywide project that touches all aspects of wellbeing — not just on the surface like getting one person at a time to make change — but to impact that environment that makes it more long-term, reengineering the environment a little bit to make healthier choices easier.”

Among the ways that the Blue Zones creates an environment for community wellness is through its partnership with restaurants and grocery stores. Even if a person has never heard of Blue Zones, they have plant-based healthier food choices presented to them in the Blue Zones section of the menu at nearly 40 restaurants. These partners range from upscale steakhouses to modest diners. Ms. Logan said a local grocery that started offering Blue Zones grab-and-go plant-based meals had to hire an extra person just to keep the special case stocked because the meals proved so popular. Shoppers can then go through the store’s Blue Zones checkout lane, where the candy bars are replaced with healthy choices such as nuts.

Another way Blue Zones contributes to an environment that makes community wellness easier is through public policy initiatives. Blue Zones does research in each community — what the project calls its discovery phase — to involve residents and learn what the community needs to optimize wellness. Blue Zones organizers then work with planners regarding things such as the built environment and tobacco-use policies, and then they work with elected officials to approve the policies. Sometimes this involves bringing in national-level experts that Sharecare has



COURTESY OF BLUE ZONES PROJECT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

Nearly 40 restaurants in Collier and southern Lee counties offer Blue Zones menu items, such as the Southwest quinoa bowl at Naples Flatbread Kitchen and Bar.

access to.

“Planners already do good work in the communities, but we give them support on how they can move initiatives,” Ms. Logan said. “A lot of times they say, ‘Yeah, we think roundabouts are better because there’s much lower risk of injury and traffic moves smoother, but our constituents hate them, so we don’t want to do that.’ One of our roles is to bring in our national experts on built environment and to help people understand what the value is and what risks and costs are if you don’t do this, so we really inform people plus give support to elected officials to do the right thing for wellbeing. These things take time, and that’s why we want to be in each community for long enough to have the kind of movement that it takes to pass policies.”

Blue Zones also enlists workplaces into its efforts to improve community wellness. Kristina Gear, managing director of Preferred Travel of Naples, began providing yogurt and granola instead of donuts at morning meetings after the company pursued Blue Zones certification.

“Having a program in place already that we were just becoming participants of made it a lot easier on the implementations side of things, so our employees didn’t just think I was some crazy hippie trying to implement yogurt instead of donuts,” Ms. Gear said with a chuckle. “I felt that it was a good opportunity to bring awareness of community wellness as a whole and not single anyone out because that’s one of the things that makes a big difference when it’s a group effort — you have accountability.”

Ms. Gear said she got initial pushback from some employees, but when they realized the wellness program only required minimal adjustments, they became more receptive. She began leading a voluntary twice-weekly yoga session for employees. Certifying the business with Blue Zones also made it easier when a vendor wanted to send a thank-you lunch. It was easier to explain why she requested the vendor send salads rather than pizzas because she could point to her company’s Blue Zones certification.

Then one of Ms. Gear’s employees came in with some good news.

“About three months after I planted the

Blue Zones seed in everybody’s minds, one of my employees went to the doctor and her cholesterol had reduced,” Ms. Gear said. “So, she was like, ‘I think it is due to your initiative.’”

The Million Mile Movement

Healthy Lee started in 2007 as a Lee County coalition called Community Health Visioning 2017 after community leaders from nonprofits, faith and health care organizations came together to address chronic disease and health access issues among underserved populations in the county. The local United Way served a major role in the initiative.

After a decade, the partners decided to reevaluate the initiative’s focus, and change its name, since they had met many of their goals. With its previous accomplishments and the change in mission, the initiative has gone from pursuing seven goals to now focusing on behavioral health and on lifestyle, which encompasses the built environment as well as chronic disease management. While its work in the policy realm continues, Healthy Lee’s most publicly known program is its movement challenge.

The annual challenge calls for residents to contribute to a collective countywide goal of logging 1 million miles of cardiovascular exercise during the six-week participation period while encouraging them to form into teams for camaraderie and friendly competition. Workplaces often join the Million Mile Movement by forming teams, such as the employee wellness challenge team that Jamie Hoover, a Lee Health Coconut Point employee, facilitates.

“They don’t have to run 20 miles in order for it to contribute, so it really gave value to even the smaller amounts of collective activity that people participated in, which is great because it’s not all about enormous, mountain-moving type exer-



COURTESY OF BLUE ZONES PROJECT SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

The Blue Zones Project team carry signs to raise awareness about wellbeing and the Power 9 concept at Naples’ Martin Luther King Jr. Parade.

cise but about what they can do that day, Ms. Hoover said. “So, as a facilitator, I really wanted to emphasize that effort and the intentions that are there. Lifestyle change does happen slowly in order for it to last.”

A culture of wellness

This concept of community change to support improved wellness for the population may sound like an overwhelming undertaking, but it is not unprecedented in this country. We have done it before — to combat drunken driving.

The government changed laws to criminalize drunken driving in order to reduce deaths and disabilities caused by this preventable health hazard. However, this was only one step since a police officer could not be stationed at the exit of every establishment selling alcohol. More was needed to enforce the law. It took a change of culture.

Bars started designated driver recognition programs. Public health education programs introduced the idea that individuals needed to take care of their friends. With “Friends don’t let friends

drive drunk,” it became socially acceptable and expected to intervene. Taking car keys and calling a cab was both for the friend’s safety and for the safety of the public out on the roads.

It took more than a law; it took a change of culture to combat drunken driving. If the community could agree to change cultural acceptance of drunken driving, supporting optimal wellness for everyone shouldn’t be that great a cultural shift. Instead of community wellness, perhaps the concept should be called a culture of wellness. ■

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