

# BLUE ZONES

“As long as I have health and strength, I will gladly work all my days.” ~ Frederic Chopin

## Tai chi instructor discusses her transition to online teaching



Suzanne Jeffreys, owner and Tai Chi instructor at Tai Chi with Suz, transitioned to online teaching. She said she met this opportunity to help people optimize their well-being. SUBMITTED

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It is no secret that online wellness has seen a major boom since the pandemic began.

As gyms closed and group classes like zumba, yoga and tai chi were put to a halt, people searched for new ways to safely optimize their well-being. The virtual world quickly stepped up to meet the need of the ever-growing health and fitness industry.

Blue Zones Project champion Suzanne Jeffreys, owner and tai chi instructor at Tai Chi with Suz, met this opportunity to help people optimize their well-being and discussed her transition into a virtual platform.

**Q:** Do you see a trend with less people attending in-person classes and going online instead?

**A:** Over the 27 years I've been teaching tai chi, people have loved the in-person classes. Experiencing the moving meditation flow together, chatting about the ancient 10 principles that are life-changing, playing with the self-defense demos (slow motion sparring), and seeing each other improve in balance and grace creates a rich group experience. It's known as "group chi," or energy.

However, with a live class on location, the day or time may not work for some, or the location may be too far away. Plus, here in SWFL, many of my students go back north when the season ends, and used to lament that they missed our classes, and nothing on YouTube was the same.

So, in 2019, I decided to learn how to create online classes, live and recorded videos that could be available to my students, anytime, anywhere. Little did I know that COVID would create a unique sense of urgency to get my online classes up and running. Interestingly, I now have students from all over the world; the U.S., Canada, Dubai, France ... that never would've happened without going online.

**Q:** How do you feel the online classes have impacted well-being for your students?

**A:** Being able to continue our tai chi classes online has been amazing. With virtual classes we're still connected, meeting every week, practicing together, learning new moves and making progress. And, because tai chi is an incredibly effective way to manage stress, and improve our health on so many levels, it's more relevant today than ever.

Plus, we always take a little time before and after class to chat and check in with each other.

So, we feel very connected, even though we may be half a continent apart. And we're getting to know each other in a way that wouldn't have happened before, staying connected beyond season.

One student has had knee surgery. Another had their grandchildren go off to college for the first time. One young mom has her kids starting kindergarten and first grade online. We get to ask about these experiences, and are here for each other to support and celebrate! We're becoming like extended family. And in these times when so

many feel isolated, that's profoundly important.

**Q:** Tell us about your transition to online classes?

**A:** It's been a big learning curve: videotaping myself, hiring a webmaster, and getting the equipment, sound and lighting just right has been an investment of money, time, and energy for sure.

The location is really important to me, too. Tai chi was inspired by nature, the earth, the sky, the animals, so I'm always outside whenever possible. Also, my students have been very receptive and the responses I get have made it all worth it!

**Q:** Do you ever see a shift back to more on location classes when COVID is over or is the online trend here to stay?

**A:** I think online classes are here to stay, and that on location classes will come back. There will be a new spectrum of choices: the convenience and flexibility of classes available anywhere, anytime, plus the in-person experiences that we as human beings crave. It's a great example of yin and yang: complimentary opposites that enhance each other. I predict the best of both is our wellness and fitness future. And perhaps that is one silver lining of these challenging times.

*For more information on Tai Chi and to find out more about Suzanne's online classes, visit [TaiChiwithSuz.com](http://TaiChiwithSuz.com). To register for Blue Zones Project free virtual well-being activities that include impactful tai chi lessons with Suzanne, visit [BlueZonesProjectSWFL.Eventbrite.com](http://BlueZonesProjectSWFL.Eventbrite.com)*

*Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc. and Blue Zones, LLC, Blue Zones Project is a vital part of Southwest Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).*

### Online Power Nine activity of the week

Did you know we tend to make over 250 health-related decisions daily? They can be as simple as whether or not we brush our teeth, wear our seat belt, eat breakfast, or even deciding to learn a new skill.

This week we want to encourage you to pay attention to your daily choices. Write down as many of them as you can no matter how large or small they seem. Reflect on whether your choices are supporting your health or distracting from it. Are there any that you might be willing to consciously change to boost your well-being?

Share with us by commenting or by tagging us on Facebook @Blue Zones Project — Southwest Florida, or you can email us at [bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com](mailto:bluezonesprojectswfl@sharecare.com) to be entered in our prize drawing for a gift card from one of our Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants.

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