

INSPIRING. EMPOWERING. WOMEN.

ETELLA

NAPLES. BONITA. ESTERO. MARCO

Navigating the **SWAMP**

WITH BRITTANY BORGES

**KINDNESS
GOES VIRAL**

**4 WAYS TO
MITIGATE GOSSIP**

**PRESERVING
HISTORIC HOMES**

*** PLUS!
NATURAL PARADISE**

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in this issue

BEHIND THE SCENES ★ 10 :: PUBLISHER'S NOTE 11 :: CONTRIBUTORS 14 :: ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



“If you want something you’ve never had, you must be willing to do something you’ve never done.” – Thomas Jefferson

GULF SWING

18 **Loco for Locals:** Making kindness go viral

INSPIRED LIVING

- 26 **Community Connection:**
Inside Growing Climate Solutions' hub
- 28 **Where Are They Now?** Take Stock in Children graduate comes full circle
- 29 **Vital Volunteer:** The art of spreading joy

HEALTHY LIVING

30 **Passion & Purpose:** Living in the (Blue) Zones

34 **Relationships:** Being there for those in need

36 **Mind Matters:** Truths About Stress

SPIRITED LIVING

- 38 **Everybody Has a Story:** Taking the Heat
- 40 **Loud Girl Talking:** The Price of Humor
- 42 **Worth Reading:** “Rita the Remodel Girl”

COLLABORATING

- 44 **CIA:** MS Center of Southwest Florida
- 45 **CIA:** Avow
- 46 **Caught in the Act of Kindness**
- 48 **President's Corner:** Wendy Needham



ON THE COVER
Navigating the Swamp
with Brittany Borges
PAGE 50

Kindness Goes Viral
PAGE 18

4 Ways to Mitigate Gossip
PAGE 66

Preserving Historic Homes
PAGE 74

PLUS! Natural Paradise
PAGE 62



Living in the Zone

Blue Zones lifestyle promotes health, happiness and longevity

Lisa Gruenloh

JoAnn Toppin

Janette Jean-Louis



"Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made." This, from Victorian English poet Robert Browning, reminds us that some fear aging and its physical and cognitive decline.

But that doesn't have to be the case. In fact, results from a community-based study published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* found a clear, linear relationship between age and mental health. The older people were, the happier they felt, reports Psychiatrist.com in its "Paradoxical Trend for Improvement in Mental Health with Aging: A Community-Based Study of 1,546 Adults aged 21-100 Years."

So why not live to be 100?

Dan Buettner, an explorer, *National Geographic* fellow, award-winning journalist and producer and a *New York Times* bestselling author, set out to discover the lifestyles and environments of the world's "longest lived" people. He found five places around the world where the most people lived to be around 100 years old, regions he dubbed as Blue Zones — Icaria, Greece; Sardinia, Italy; Okinawa, Japan; Loma Linda, California; and Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica.

Despite each location's variance in culture and food, they shared nine specific principles, something Blue Zones calls the Power 9.

Contrary to most Americans' perception of having a healthier lifestyle, achieved forcibly through dieting and working out at the gym, Buettner found it to be much simpler.

"When you try to pursue longevity, it almost never works," Buettner says. "The secret is that longevity successfully ensues from the right environment. In other words, you can shape people's environments to make the healthy choice the easy choice."

GIVING IT BODY

In 2015, this concept was successfully launched in our community as Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. This well-being initiative works with individuals, homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, restaurants, grocery stores, schools and businesses in the community to help them implement healthier practices in their personal and professional lives.

NCH Healthcare sponsored the eight-year Blue Zones project that, to date, has impacted more than 700 organizations and 225,000 individuals. Not surprisingly, Southwest Florida has gone from being ranked 73rd in the nation for well-being in 2011 to achieving the No. 1 spot in the nation over the past four years, according to Gallup.

"The idea is to empower with choice," says Deb Logan, executive director of Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. "We strive to meet people and organizations where they are on their well-being journey and invite them to make small changes that will lead to big health benefits in the long run."

Changes include adding Blue Zones parking spots located farther away from worksite buildings to encourage movement, offering fruit instead of pastries at meetings, adding plant-based menu items at restaurants, encouraging more movement and adding hydration stations at schools.

Because of the NCH sponsorship, Blue Zones Project offers free events designed to get people moving, discover and reconnect with their purpose, give back to their community through volunteering and increase socialization and companionship. These events include purpose workshops, cooking demonstrations and moais (mo-eyes), a Japanese term for "meeting for a common purpose."

The moais concept was created to support mutual well-being. Gatherings can be organized for walking, restaurant-hopping at Blue Zones Project-approved locations and at potluck get-togethers. To date, more than 4,300 individuals have participated in a walking or plant-based potluck moai.

LOCAL GOES NATIONAL

Last year, NBC's "Today" TV program took note of Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida and followed 22 plant-based potluck moais. In just three months, 100% of participants said their moai had a positive impact on their well-being and all were eating more plant-based meals. Almost 70% said they had made new friends, and many had lost weight, lowered their cholesterol and/or reduced their blood sugar.

Three Southwest Florida participants were featured on "Today," providing personal anecdotes of Blue Zones' impact.

JoAnn Toppin had struggled with weight all her life and was battling other health issues. She adopted the Blue Zones way of life, and after three months, her story changed.

In addition to bonding with "amazing people," Toppin says, "I lost 37 pounds, reduced my blood sugar and blood pressure, and my labs are the best they have been in 20 years. One of the best things is that two of my autoimmune disorders are in remission. My life has truly been altered and changed for the better."

Naples resident Lisa Gruenloh was also featured in the "Today" segment.

"Shifting to a plant-based diet not only helped me lose weight and lower my cholesterol, I have more energy," Gruenloh said. "The commitment was an important catalyst for what has become a permanent lifestyle change, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity to work toward my health goals with amazing people in my community."

Janette Jean-Louis' experience with her new way of eating has helped her become more mindful about her overall health.

"I look and feel great," she says. "Knowing now how truly beneficial plant-based eating is for me and my family, my plan is to continue with this for the rest of my life."

RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

Blue Zones' founder — Dan Buettner himself — joined in the final celebration of the potluck moais at Baker Park in Naples. Each participant received a copy of his new plant-based recipe book, "The Blue Zones Kitchen: 100 Recipes to Live to 100."

The book captures the way of eating with recipes from the five Blue Zones. It also helps to explain why foods eaten in those regions have enabled longer, healthier lives.

"There is an interconnected web of factors," Buettner explains, "including having a sense of purpose, surrounding yourself with the right people and moving every 20 minutes or so."

Having studied longevity for 15 years," he adds, "I've come to realize that the best way to people's hearts and heads is through their mouths. 'The Blue Zones Kitchen' captures 500 years of food traditions that make it easy for people to cook in a way that will maximize not only their life expectancy, but their health along the way."

Today, Southwest Florida is joined by 50 communities in the United States and Canada, working through the project to reverse-engineer their environments into the Blue Zone.

Homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, restaurants, grocery stores, school and businesses are encouraged to learn more about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida and get involved at no cost.

To learn more, visit SouthwestFlorida.BlueZonesProject.com. ☎

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Haystacks

This recipe, seen in the photos in this article, appears in Dan Buettner's new cookbook, "The Blue Zones Kitchen: 100 Recipes to Live to 100."

Easy to customize, this is a version of a taco salad, with beans, chips, salad greens and tomatoes. Haystack ingredients are usually served individually so that people can pick and choose what they like, assembly-line fashion. It's the ultimate taco bar.

Ingredients

2 cups lightly salted or low sodium tortilla chips (Blue corn chips make a nice presentation.)

2 cups shredded romaine lettuce
1 avocado, chopped
1 Roma tomato, chopped
½ cup corn kernels
1 cup cooked black beans (drained and rinsed, if using canned)
1 cup good quality salsa

Suggested Toppings

Sliced pickled jalapeños
2-3 green onions, sliced
Chopped cilantro, optional

½ cup meatless crumbles; optional
Cashew cream drizzle, optional
(See recipe below.)

Method

If assembling as completed dish, on a large platter, spread a layer of tortilla chips.

Then add a layer of lettuce and any other chopped vegetables, followed by a layer of beans, then salsa.

Add all other toppings, then drizzle

with cashew cream and a sprinkle of meatless crumbles, if desired.

Cashew cream drizzle

Soak 1 cup raw cashews 3 hours in hot water or overnight.

Drain.

Blend cashews with ½ cup water in a blender or food processor at high speed until completely smooth, adding extra water as needed to reach desired consistency.

