

NCH  
EXPANDING HEALTH CARE

BLUE ZONE  
SAY YES TO WELL-BEING

VALUE OF PLAY  
GET OUTDOORS

# BONITA & ESTERO MAGAZINE

JUL/AUG 2021  
VOL. 10 NO. 4  
U.S. \$4.95

## SHANGRI-LA SPRINGS

MYSTERY AND HISTORY



bonitaestero.com  
Published by TOTI Media, Inc.

\$4.95



Display until August 31



# REACHING FOR THE

# BLUE ZONE

Southwest Florida says yes to well-being  
BY JEFF LYTTLE

A youth class from the Bonita Springs Charter School at Estero Community Park.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE ZONES PROJECT

**W**hen the Blue Zones Project (BZP) launched in Naples in 2015, the expectation was for a grassroots healthy living crusade focusing on Collier County, where the lead sponsor, NCH Healthcare System, is the largest medical provider.

Since then the Blue Zones Project has grown into a phenomenon, touching 225,000 people in 730 organizations throughout Collier and into southern Lee County.

The experience has been, as BZP executive director Deb Logan puts it, “beyond amazing.”

“It has been an inspiration to see so many in Southwest Florida say yes to well-being,” says Logan. “To witness individuals, as well as organizations such as our schools, worksites, restaurants, homeowners associations and faith-based organizations, embrace the Power 9 principles (see sidebar on page 55) and other best practices to help make healthy choices easier is powerful.”

Eileen Connolly-Keesler, president and CEO of the Community Foundation of Collier County, adds context. “Sometimes it is hard to keep projects going after several years,” she says, “but Blue Zones has done an amazing job and hasn’t let up on their mission.”

The Blue Zones endeavor is based on National Geographic research of locations around the world where people live longest and happiest. Natives’ environment, diets and lifestyles were studied. Author Dan Buettner used this data for magazine articles and a series of best-selling books. His healthy living movement now touches 57 American communities, with chapters across Hawaii and Fort Worth, Texas, even bigger than Southwest Florida’s.

The local impact shows when comparing national Gallup polling done before and after the BZP launch. Collier County has ranked No. 1 in America in a sense of community well-being four years in a row, compared with No. 73 previously.

## The Blue Zones Project has grown into a phenomenon, touching 225,000 people in 730 organizations throughout Collier and into southern Lee County.



Bonita Bay residents were among those who gathered to meet Blue Zones Project author Dan Buettner at an FGCU event.

Now that impact is starting to spread. “We are thrilled to be able to share it with organizations based in South Lee (Estero and Bonita),” says Logan. “Individuals living farther north often will drive down to engage in our events, and they are hoping we can expand our reach in the future. We hope so too! The will of the community, as well as funding, will tell if that is a possibility.”

Nolen Rollins has the distinction of helping two Lee County organizations connect with the BZP: Estero’s Legacy Church and Chamber of Commerce. He sees a “perfect alignment” of BZP and scriptural principles such as neighborliness, taking good care of our health and embracing worthwhile missions and life purposes.

BZP membership, he notes, has meant doughnuts are off the menu for church gatherings. BZP’s goal of a better quality of life for all provides a “natural connection” with the chamber, he explains.

Shangri-La Springs publicist Kathy Becker says BZP comes naturally for the historic property in Bonita Springs, which



**MEET VINNY**  
#Inspiration

**100 YEARS OF FABULOUS**

Bocce Club Member. Blue Zones Pledger. Centenarian (No hearing aids. No glasses. No medicines!)

Bonita Bay sends Blue Zones Project messages to residents every chance it gets.

## Collier County has ranked No. 1 in America in a sense of community well-being four years in a row, compared with No. 73 previously.

encourages walking and outdoor activities with its weekly produce sales and garden tours. The community of Twin Eagles, a Blue Zone member, recently arranged for a tour of Shangri-La Springs, which practices a wholly organic lifestyle, including bedclothes, towels and furnishings.

Romi Hayashi, co-owner of the Café at Bonita Beach, says Blue Zones-designated menu items such as veggie wraps,



Romi Hayashi

burgers and bowls are so popular they attract repeat customers. “We found more and more people are into healthy food, especially because of this pandemic,” she reports. “Also, we have much younger customers compared to when I first opened in December 2018. Young people are so much more aware of healthy eating and organic food.”

Healthy eating is high on the list at Bonita Springs Elementary School, which pre-pandemic also held special exercise classes, walk-to-school days and eye exams. “The students loved it,” says principal Robert Cooper.

Residents of Copperleaf in The Brooks are deep into BZP with



Vi at Bentley Village, a senior living community in Naples, is a BZP worksite, where executive chef Joel Hetrick cultivates on-site herbs and vegetables.



Clockwise from left: Another nugget of Blue Zones advice for Bonita Bay residents.

Veg Fest promotes healthy food choices with Blue Zones Project team at Riverside Park in Bonita.

Moai Launch at Coconut Point Mall led by Blue Zones Project Executive Director Deb Logan

## Bonita Bay Residents "Moving Naturally"



Cafe of Life Ribbon Cutting Celebration



Paul Hiltz, CEO of NCH

golf, tennis, bocce, pickleball and fitness classes. "Our executive chef, Paul Meyer, has embraced the Blue Zones Project and has added several healthy food options to our regular menus and our member socials," says Anna Laabs, Copperleaf events and marketing director. "Just this season we have invited the Bike Medic to come to our community monthly and encouraged riding to the clubhouse versus driving.

"Also this season, we had to think outside of the box to come up with more socially distanced activities. Our community has started Fun Walks on the main loop of the neighborhood, and our golf superintendent, David Dore-Smith, opened up our monthly Walk the Golf Course event to dogs as well, part of BZP's goal to move naturally. Our charitable foundation also

had a great year of fundraising for our local charities (as in BZP's accent on life's purpose).

At Bonita Bay, the Community Activities Center cut out sugar-laden beverages and hosted well-being events such as chair yoga, tai chi, dance classes, health seminars and plant-based cooking demonstrations—for example, Breakfasts You Want to Eat and Raw Foods for Rookies.

"When we began to explore the concept of Blue Zones Project, we quickly realized it's a natural fit for our residents," states Elke Kauder, lifestyle director. "Bonita Bay is a thriving, active community, and Blue Zones Project gives us the tools and resources to take well-being to an even higher level."

Paul Hiltz, CEO of NCH—whose name originated from Naples Community Hospital—says the program is now more timely than ever. "The challenges of the pandemic have reminded us just how important optimizing well-being and building resilience is," he explains, "and the work we do through the Blue Zones Project provides the tools to help build a safer, stronger Southwest Florida."

Jeff Lytle is the retired editorial page editor and TV host from the Naples Daily News. He now lives in Bonita Springs.

### POWER 9 PRINCIPLES

Researchers have found that people who live in Blue Zones share nine common lifestyle behaviors. The Power 9 Principles focus on moving naturally, eating wisely, knowing your life's purpose and belonging to a social community. The principles are easy, small steps that everyone can take in their daily lives to feel better, live longer and be happier.

1. Make daily physical activity an unavoidable part of your environment.
  2. Know your purpose.
  3. Downshift: work less, slow down, take vacations.
  4. Eat until 80 percent full.
  5. Eat more veggies, less meat and processed food.
  6. Drink a glass of red wine each day.
  7. Create a healthy social network.
  8. Connect/reconnect with religion.
  9. Prioritize family.
- Blue Zones Project

For more info, go to [bluezones.com](http://bluezones.com) and [southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).

PHOTOS ON BOTH PAGES COURTESY OF BONITA BAY BLUE ZONES PROJECT