

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO FLORIDA'S BEST PLACE TO LIVE, WORK, AND VISIT

NAPLES

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FOR ALL AGES

Blue Zones: Embracing the Power 9

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THE PATH TO WELL-BEING IS
A MARATHON, NOT A SPRINT

NCH Healthcare System knew this concept when it sponsored and introduced Blue Zones Project to Southwest Florida in 2015 with the goal of decreasing chronic disease and helping residents live longer, healthier, and happier lives. Now in its seventh year, Blue Zones Project has impacted the well-being of more than 275,000 individuals and 760 organizations throughout Collier County and southern Lee County.

After Blue Zones Project was launched, well-being in the Naples-Immokalee-Marco area ranked the healthiest place in the nation for four consecutive years, per Gallup well-being data. This is a big jump considering, just nine years ago, Gallup ranked this area seventy-third in the nation for well-being.

If you're hearing about it for the first

time, Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida is a community initiative that works with individuals, homeowners' associations, faith-based organizations, restaurants, grocery stores, schools, and businesses to help make healthy choices easier. The idea is to implement best practices and encourage small changes in the environment that have a profound effect on well-being over time.

This is done using National Geographic Society research that found nine commonalities among people around the world who live the longest and healthiest lives. These longevity hotspots are known as Blue Zones and the principles they follow are dubbed the "Power 9."

Here are the Power 9, and an example of how they are playing out in real-time in the community:

1 MOVE NATURALLY

The longest lived people in the world don't spend their time exercising in a gym. Instead, they simply move more within their natural environment. This includes activities like walking, gardening, swimming, or biking. Southwest Florida offers ample opportunity for these activities through its many parks, trails, and beaches.

2 PURPOSE People who have purpose—a sense of their gifts and strengths that they regularly utilize—tend to live about seven years longer than those who do not. This is typically exercised through volunteering for a cause that is important to you, at church, or your children's school. There are hundreds of nonprofits in Collier County. Here is a good place to start your search: volunteercollier.com. Blue Zones Project also facilitates workshops to help people define their sense of purpose.



3 DOWNSHIFT

Long-term stress raises cortisol levels that can cause inflammation and a host of other health problems. Downshift techniques to help combat stress and anxiety include meditation, tai chi, yoga, and spending more time in nature. Find programs through local parks, recreational facilities, private studios, and events such as Donation Yoga Naples (donationyoganaples.com). There are endless opportunities for spending time in nature at a beach or park. See "Where the Wild Things Are" on page 34 to get started.

4 80 PERCENT RULE

"Hara hachi bu!" The longest-lived people in Okinawa, Japan, use this term to remind themselves to stop eating when their stomachs are 80 percent full. The 20 percent gap between not being hungry and feeling full could be the difference between maintaining proper weight or gaining it. Take time to eat more slowly and eat in the company of family or friends to allow for conversation between bites.

7 BELONG

Belonging to a faith-based community has many benefits that include a sense of peace, support, and acceptance. Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida works with nearly 40 faith-based organizations in the community to help make healthy choices easier for their congregations.



8 FAMILY FIRST

Maintaining good family relationships and ensuring that family comes first can make us feel safe and loved, and provides a sense of belonging. This reduces stress and elevates the feel-good chemicals in our brain that lead to healthier outcomes and a strong sense of well-being.

5 PLANT SLANT

Loading your plate with plant-based foods has been proven to add years to your life. A recent study by *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that shifting three percent of caloric intake from animal to plant protein corresponded with a 10 percent decrease in death from any cause. Blue Zones Project works with local restaurants to add more healthy options to their menus. Find a list of Blue Zones Project-approved restaurants: southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.



6 WINE WITH FRIENDS @ 5

People in all Blue Zones (except Adventists) drink alcohol moderately and regularly do so with friends (accompanied with food). In Sardinia, Italy, a Blue Zone, residents are famous for their daily consumption of a regional red wine called cannonau that has a high polyphenol content linked to heart health.

9 RIGHT TRIBE

Surrounding yourself with people that practice healthy behaviors will increase the likelihood of you doing the same. You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with. If you spend time with people who engage in unhealthy behaviors, chances are, you will, too. Participate in a Blue Zones Project walking or a plant-based potluck group. In Japan, spending time with your tribe on a positive endeavor is called a *moai* ("meeting for a common purpose").

Blue Zones Project provides access to free Power 9 tools and resources through the Sharecare online platform to help power community well-being. Start with the RealAge health assessment. Each person—no matter where they are in their health journey—is provided a customized well-being plan, and evidence-based programs to help you live your best (and youngest) life.

Visit bzpsouthwestflorida.sharecare.com or scan the QR code.

