

# Longevity project turning Southwest Florida blue

By Dayna Harpster  
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Lifestyle Director Michelle Kithcart of Tidewater in Estero zeroed in on Blue Zones Project about four years ago when working at another local property. “And when it came to this area I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, this is so amazing. We are so lucky in our community to have this.’”

Plenty of local participants in the national health-and-longevity project echo that enthusiasm. Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida is off and running.

Although Tidewater is still under development, among the 50 or so sales to date are people already dedicated to a walking program, receiving a regular newsletter with lots of Blue Zones ideas and news and anticipating a cooking class.

Cris Hayes of Bonita Bay is Blue Zones Southwest Florida chairwoman for the 26-story Tavira condominium tower. In January, she heard about an organizational meeting for Blue Zones in



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**New bocce and pickleball courts at Wyndemere Country Club in Naples are popular additions made to increase members’ physical activity.**

Naples and recruited her husband and a friend to go along. Having already read Dan Buettner’s bestseller, on which the project is based, Hayes was enthusiastic from the start. She organized a meeting of mainly Tavira residents. “And it was a cold, rainy, windy night at 5:30 and I think we had 75 people show up,” she said. “So I put together a committee.

We met weekly until we got Blue Zones recognition in April.” Some of the most popular activities have been walking groups and potlucks, both fitting the program’s emphasis on socializing with like-minded people.

CEO and General Manager Jimmy Lynn of Wyndemere Country Club in Naples was an even earlier adopter of

The Blue Zones program centers around these principles, called the “Power 9,” or the nine secrets of longevity gleaned from studies of areas of the world where people live the longest and healthiest.

**Move Naturally:** Find ways to move more.

**Purpose:** Wake up with purpose each day.

**Down Shift:** Reverse disease by finding a stress-relieving strategy.

**80 Percent Rule:** Eat mindfully and stop when 80 percent full.

**Plant Slant:** Put more fruits and vegetables on your plate.

**Wine @ 5:** Enjoy a glass of wine with good friends each day.

**Belong:** Participate in a faith-based community.

**Family First:** Invest time with family.

**Right Tribe:** Surround yourself with people who support you and positive behaviors.

the Blue Zones Project. Along with Tidewater and Tavira, Wyndemere is one of the 18 communities (at press time) participating in the local Blue Zones Project, which is sponsored by NCH Healthcare

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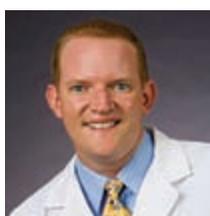
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## Longevity project

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System. Blue Zones officially recognizes communities, restaurants, schools, grocery stores and worksites. The criteria for recognition differs in each category but always centers on making physical and behavioral changes that enable people to

**Early on, the project took its cue from the longevity pattern in a region of Sardinia where the “Mediterranean diet” reigned.**

live healthier, longer lives.

Lynn became CEO and general manager of Wyndemere Country Club about three years ago. Right away he said he noticed that the culture lacked many of the Blue Zones principles for wellbeing -- things like following a plant-based diet, having a sense of purpose and increasing physical activity. Through his leadership and with organizational help from



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**Wyndemere Country Club is one of 18 communities participating in Blue Zones Southwest Florida.**

administrative assistant Barbara Davidson, a year later Wyndemere was the first locally recognized worksite.

One of his initial moves was outfitting the staff with fitness trackers. Various “downshift-

ing” areas were placed for employees to gather and reduce stress. Walking programs were organized. As a result, staff members became ambassadors. “Once the members saw the (individual) changes, the ca-

maraderie, the teamwork, they got behind it,” he said.

New bocce and pickleball courts became members’ favorite spots; Lynn, a former executive chef, added a restaurant salad station and a culinary

herb garden. He organized bird-watching events.

The Blue Zones movement began with Buettner’s book, “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest” and an eight-year, worldwide study of certain extraordinarily healthy communities. Early on, the project took its cue from the longevity pattern in a region of Sardinia where the “Mediterranean diet” reigned. It was the first Blue Zone – named because researchers circled it in blue on a project map.

Buettner and a team of demographers, medical scientists and journalists spent eight years researching other places in the world where people live longest and healthiest and identifying the likely reasons why. Those communities were Ikaria, Greece; Okinawa, Japan; Loma Linda, Calif., and Nicoya Peninsula, Costa Rica.

Healthways, a 30-year-old company based in Nashville, and the newer Blue Zones company, based in Minnesota, administer the growing number of programs in this country. 🌊



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