

HEALTHY LIVING

Making connections can make for a longer, healthier life



COURTESY PHOTO

Dr. Allen Weiss of the NCH Healthcare System presents a Blue Zones Project certification to restaurateur Gianluca Corso.

Blue Zones Project welcomes three new participants

Three new organizations are helping to spread well-being in Collier County by partnering with Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. Central Auto Center and Quail Creek Fitness Center recently became Blue Zones Project recognized organizations, while Cosmos Italian Café and Pizzeria became a Blue Zones Project approved restaurant. The businesses join more than 50 area companies engaged in the movement.

Blue Zones Project is a community-by-community, well-being improvement initiative designed to make healthy choices easier through permanent changes to environment, policy, and social networks.

To achieve Blue Zones Project recognition, Central Auto Center began helping employees and customers implement the best practices of the "Power 9," or the nine commonalities of people around the world who are living the longest. Staff produced area maps to encourage customers to walk while they wait for their automobile to be serviced. The center also removed all soda and sugary beverages from the waiting area and began stocking water and healthier snacks.

Quail Creek Fitness Center focused efforts on making group fitness classes more appealing and helping members socialize with friends. The fit-

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NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Whether with romantic partners, family, friends, neighbors or others, social connections can influence our biology and well-being.

Wide-ranging research suggests that strong social ties are linked to a longer life. In contrast, loneliness and social isolation are linked to poorer health, depression and increased risk of early death.

Studies have found that having a variety of social relationships might help reduce stress and heart-related risks. Such connections might improve your ability to fight off germs or give you a more positive outlook on life. Physical contact — from holding hands to having sex — can trigger release of hormones and brain chemicals that not only make us feel great but also have other biological benefits.

Marriage is one of the most-studied social bonds.

"For many people, marriage is their most important relationship. And the evidence is very strong that marriage is generally good for health," says Janice Kiecolt-Glaser, PhD, an expert on health and relationships at Ohio State University. A relationship that is not going well, on the other hand, could have significant health-related consequences, she adds.

In NIH-funded studies, Ms. Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues found that how couples behave during conflict can affect wound healing and blood levels of stress hormones. In a study of more than 40 married couples, the researchers measured changes to body chemistry over a 24-hour period both before and after spouses discussed a conflict. The troublesome topics included money, in-laws and communication.

"We found that the quality of the discussion really mattered," Ms. Kiecolt-Glaser says. Couples who were more hostile to each other showed much larger negative changes, including big spikes in stress hormones and inflammation-related molecules. In a related study, blister wounds healed substantially more slowly in couples who were nastier to each other than in those who were kinder and gentler during difficult discussions.

Couples with the "double-whammy" of hostile marriages and depression might also be at risk for weight problems. After eating a high-fat meal and discussing a difficult topic, these troubled couples tended to burn fewer calories than less hostile counterparts.



"The metabolism in these couples was slower in ways that could account for weight gain across time," Ms. Kiecolt-Glaser says. Compared to the kinder couples, the distressed spouses had signs of more fat storage and other risks for heart disease.

Age matters

The quality of a marriage — whether supportive or hostile — may be especially important to the health of older couples.

Hui Liu, PhD, at Michigan State University studied data on the health and sexuality of more than 2,200 older people, ages 57 to 85. Good marriage quality, she found, is linked to reduced risk of developing cardiovascular disease, while bad marriage quality is tied to increased risk, particularly in women. "The association between marriage quality and heart health becomes increasingly strong at older ages," Ms. Liu says.

She and her colleagues are also looking at the links between late-life sexuality and health, including whether sex among the very old is beneficial or risky to heart health. "Some people assume that sex isn't important in older ages, so those ages are often overlooked in research studies related to sex," Ms. Liu says. "But our studies suggest that for many older people, sex quality and sex life are important to overall quality of life."

In one recent analysis, Ms. Liu and co-workers found that older women who reported having a satisfying sex life were at reduced risk for high blood pressure five years later. However, the researchers also found that some older men were at increased risk for certain heart-related problems after five years if they reported having frequent (at least once a week) or extremely enjoyable sex. The reasons for

these increased risks aren't clear and are still under study.

Beyond marriage

Other types of relationships are important, too. These can include friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, clubs, and religious groups. Studies have found that people who have larger and more diverse types of social ties tend to live longer. They also tend to have better physical and mental health than people with fewer such relationships. Social support may be especially protective during difficult times.

Scientists have also been exploring whether simply believing you have strong social support might help protect against the harms of stress.

"People who have high levels of conflict and low levels of social support are much more likely to get sick when exposed to a virus," according to psychologist Sheldon Cohen at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. "But those with high conflict and high levels of social support seem protected," he adds.

In addition, hugging seems to shield against stress. People who reported having more frequent hugs were less likely to develop an infection after viral exposure.

Social ties can have mixed effects on our health. But overall, research suggests that the benefits of interactions with others outweigh any risks.

"It's generally healthy for people to try to belong to different groups, to volunteer in different ways and be involved with a church or involved in their neighborhood," Mr. Cohen says. "Involvement with other people across diverse situations clearly can have a very potent, very positive effect on health." ■



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Step out for mental health at 15th annual Walk for NAMI

Friends of the National Alliance on Mental Illness-Collier County step out for the 15th annual Walk for NAMI-Collier on Saturday morning, Feb. 25, at Cambier Park. Pete Earley, a former Washington Post staff reporter and the author of 11 nonfiction books and six novels, is this year's grand marshal.



EARLEY

Mr. Earley is best known for his non-fiction book, "CRAZY: A father's search through America's Mental Health Madness," which was a finalist for the 2007 Pulitzer Prize/General Nonfiction. He spent 10 months inside the Miami Dade

County Jail, following inmates with mental disorders through the criminal justice system and out onto the streets after their release.

He has testified before Congress five times about the need for mental health reform and writes regularly for *USA Today* and *The Washington Post* and appears on CNN, PBS, NPR and other networks as a mental health advocate. He is a lifetime member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

The Walk for NAMI-Collier steps out at 8:30 a.m. Family-friendly activities, live entertainment and free refreshments will take place until 10:30 a.m. To form a walking team or for information about sponsorship and volunteer opportunities, email jacquelyn@namicollier.org, call 260-7302 or visit www.namicollier.org/walks. ■

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ness center offered 20 complimentary group classes to members and private, small groups, so that friends could get together and work privately with a personal trainer.

The fitness center also began tracking the weight loss efforts of its members. Cosmos restaurant developed new Blue Zones-inspired menu items,



including four entrées and three children's dishes. The eatery also added a bike rack and made its outdoor patio a tobacco-free area. "The entire staff is now more aware of not only healthier food choices but lifestyle decisions and how they affect daily living," said owner Gianluca Corso.

Blue Zones Project is brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System in collaboration with Healthways Inc. and Blue Zones LLC. For more information, visit www.southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com. ■

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ADVERTORIAL



Introducing the Azul Non-Surgical Facelift

Does the idea of surgery make you uncomfortable? If so, you're not alone. "Going under the knife" is something that a lot of people out there just aren't ready for. The invasive nature of surgery can seem intimidating and extreme. This is totally understandable!

Thankfully, there are many cosmetic procedures available today that can create impressive results. Dr. Flaharty has selected the most effective of these procedures and packaged them together in what we call the Azul Non-Surgical Facelift.

Believe it or not, non-invasive procedures actually have a number of benefits compared to traditional cosmetic surgery, the biggest one being the downtime. Cosmetic surgery, still the gold standard, is invasive and therefore will require downtime, the amount depending on the procedure. With non-invasive procedures, the downtime is minimal to even non-existent. You walk into the office to have your Non-Surgical Facelift, and you walk out again just a few hours later, ready to go!

Since everyone has different cosmetic needs, the Non-Surgical Facelift is specifically customized to your personal goals. Before anything, we arrange a consult between you and Dr. Flaharty to figure out exactly what procedures are best for you and what combination will give you the most harmonious result possible.

BOTOX COSMETIC

This famous cosmetic procedure first gained popularity with celebrities, and is now used all over the world to help reduce fine lines and wrinkles that appear around the eyes and forehead. We inject a tiny amount of a paralyzing agent into the small muscles that cause these wrinkles to be formed. As the muscles are weakened, your muscles stop contracting and the crow's feet and forehead furrows fade away.

DERMAL FILLERS

As we age, we lose collagen and elastin in our skin. This leads to drooping skin, deep wrinkles and a loss of volume in the face. That is where dermal fillers come in. Think of fillers as all-natural sculpting clay for your face. We inject the filler into your deeper wrinkles, filling them out. We can also use them to restore lost facial volume, softening your facial features and filling out the area around your cheeks.

INTENSE PULSED LIGHT

Intense pulsed light is specifically designed to gently renew damaged skin. Precise levels of light energy are delivered through the skin to reduce redness and sunspots by up to 90%. The light targets only the discolorations in your skin, leaving the rest of the tissue healthy and untouched. The light energy also stimulates the production of collagen, helping to naturally restore volume, reduce fine lines and give a

natural lift.

INFINI

Combining RF energy and microneedling into one treatment, Infini is one of the most effective non-surgical treatments to stimulate new collagen production deep in the skin. An applicator delivers focused RF energy to precise depths of your skin. This creates a sort of intentional skin "injury" that kicks your body's natural healing process into action, to develop new collagen and help promote skin tightening. Infini can greatly reduce the appearance of wrinkles, sunspots, uneven texture, acne scars and sagging skin.

ULTHERAPY

With Ultherapy, ultrasound energy is projected into your skin to deliver focused heat at the perfect depth to promote new collagen growth. The new collagen produced will both tighten and firm your skin while leaving the top layer of your skin undisturbed.

CHEMICAL PEEL

During a chemical peel, a solution is applied to your skin that helps exfoliate and remove the top layer of skin to reveal the smoother, healthier skin beneath. We offer a number of different peels, depending on what your skin needs. A chemical peel can address many skin concerns, from simple environmentally damaged skin to superficial pigmentation.

We're extremely excited about the Azul Non-Surgical Facelift and the incredible results it yields. Together, this group of procedures can yield very impressive results with very little to no downtime. If you'd like to learn more, please visit us at our website, www.azulbeauty.com, or give the office a call at (239) 415-7576. During your consultation with Dr. Flaharty, you will come up with a rejuvenation plan that is customized just for you! ■



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