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Neighbors connect with neighbors for healthier, happier lives

Do you remember moving to a new neighborhood and being welcomed with a casserole or plate of cookies? It was a wonderful way to meet new people.

This rarely occurs anymore, but Blue Zones Project homeowner's associations are reviving this tradition, as well as other creative ways to invite newcomers into the fold. Some HOAs take new members to lunch.

Almost all participating Blue Zones neighborhoods create opportunities for new and old members to connect by offering Blue Zones-inspired Moais, or groups who come together to support one another's well-being. Some of these groups walk together, others gather for plant-based potlucks or dine together at Blue Zones-Approved restaurants.

What they have in common is that participants often build meaningful friendships while getting a bit healthier.

Delasol is a North Naples community that has fully embraced bringing well-being to residents over the past year.

"Delasol has been on a mission to get homeowners excited and engaged and INVESTED in the community they live in!" Erika Rohde, vice president of Delasol's board of directors, explains. "Blue Zones Project is something we can all point to with pride, and also motivate homeowners to rally around a blueprint for living that benefits themselves, their home values, and the people who surround them every day."

Delasol's volunteer social committee has an explicit mission to "create energy as well as stronger bonds and relationships" throughout the community through three primary areas:

- Recreation (including fitness and active living opportunities)
- Social events (to bring people closer and build healthy relationships)
- Charitable giving (to share wealth and talents with the greater community)

In addition to creating Moais, Delasol now offers book and bridge clubs, ladies luncheons, fitness classes, men's game nights and themed social events to help members connect.

To support charitable giving, they

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held an outdoor movie night that benefited Ronald McDonald House, a Clean Up/ Clean Out donation drive for St. Matthew's House, a food drive for Meals of Hope and a Farewell to Season Brunch benefiting Epilepsy Florida.

These charitable events "create a purpose for our homeowners around giving back that helps make owners feel part of something bigger and just generally feel good about living in Delasol," Rohde said.

"Blue Zones Project is a rare opportunity to have a

template or blueprint to point to that encourages a healthy, connected environment. It is easy for communities to aspire to achieve the characteristics that Blue Zones embodies in its Power 9 principles.

"Best of all, it is not an all-or-nothing program — there are small and simple steps that communities can take to promote well-being that take little or no effort; many of which they may already be doing and not even realize it!" Rohde said.

To learn more about how your HOA can benefit from Blue Zones Project, contact Chante Pemberton at 239-331-6088. Blue Zones Project is free to individuals and organizations in Southwest Florida, thanks to the full sponsorship of NCH Healthcare System.