

SWFL

# REAL PRODUCERS<sup>®</sup>

CONNECTING. ELEVATING. INSPIRING.



THE  
GRIFFERTY  
GROUP

APRIL 2021





▶ health & wellness

By Robin F. DeMattia

# Blue Zones Project

## Brings Well-Being to HOA Communities

What began as a New York Times best-seller by National Geographic Fellow Dan Buettner has evolved into a global movement that's inspiring people to live longer, more active lives. From Sardinia, Italy, to Okinawa, Japan, to Loma Linda, California, people are living vibrant, active lives well into their hundreds. Buettner calls these areas Blue Zones and they're the inspiration behind his book, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*. Buettner's research, along with a global longevity study, has led to the Blue Zones Project — a program that helps people live longer, healthier, and happier lives.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc., Blue Zones Project is a community-wide well-being improvement initiative to help make healthy choices easier for everyone in Southwest Florida. When the entire community participates — from worksites and schools to restaurants and grocery stores — small changes contribute to huge benefits: lowered health care costs, improved productivity, and a higher quality of life.

It's no wonder more than 70 local homeowners associations (HOAs) are partnering with Blue Zones Project.

People who live in HOA communities are perfectly situated to benefit from the Blue Zones Project's Power 9<sup>®</sup> principles, shared by the longest-lived people in the world: they likely have walking paths, there are probably volunteer opportunities, and there might even be a restaurant where they can have "Wine at 5" and enjoy a "Plant Slant" dinner.

"An HOA is one of the places where we can get many people engaged with Blue Zones Project," says Chante Pemberton, Faith-Based Organization and HOA Lead for Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida. "I love that I get to represent



something that helps people raise their well-being and helps improve the overall well-being of the Southwest Florida community.”

HOAs can become part of Blue Zones Project by completing a checklist of items they already do and easily adding some other elements, such as installing bicycle racks, organizing a walking group, or planting a community garden. “The list of best practices is very simple but meaningful,” Pemberton says.

Natalie Lewis serves on the Blue Zones Project engagement committee at Vanderbilt Country Club and took part when her community first became involved 10 years ago. “Health was a big issue for us,” she says. “We thought with our beautiful gym and very active people here, we could do something. The Blue Zones Project team gave us a fireside chat, and residents pledged to participate. Management was behind it, which made it easy. I truly believe in Blue Zones Project. It has allowed me to socialize with people I probably would not have met,” Lewis says.

Erika Rohde, president of the HOA in Delasol, says she, too, has always been a fan. “If you are socially engaged with other people, you’ll live a better life,” she says. When the board realized that many neighbors didn’t know each other and the community needed more activities, they reached out to Pemberton at Blue Zones Project. “Once we engaged with Chante, we took off like a wildfire.”

Almost 70 percent of Delasol residents signed the Power 9 pledge, a series of action steps to increase well-being. “Once we joined Blue Zones Project, we saw a huge change in our community,” says Rohde. “We saw a much more positive outlook. People want to live longer and happier lives.” The board organized walking “moais” (groups of five to eight people who meet weekly to walk together and socialize), yoga and bone-builders classes, pickleball leagues, men’s and ladies’ social groups, and food and clothing drives for charity.

“Blue Zones Project has really taken off and changed our community,” Rohde affirms. She even

attributes the community’s increased real estate sales to its positive social environment, which makes the community more attractive to potential buyers.

Barb Swendiman, who lives in VillageWalk of Bonita Springs, created a fun challenge with 23 activities to get neighbors involved, and gave prizes as rewards for participating. “It was simple stuff to do,” she says, “like go for a walk with a friend at least once a week, try a Blue Zones recipe, take the age test, or give someone an unexpected gift — easy things you could do that are good for your well-being.”

Barbara Mariano lives in the latest Blue Zones Project community, Del Webb Naples in Ave Maria, and says it’s a perfect fit. “The community is very active. People are walking, biking, swimming, and playing pickleball and tennis and golf. We’re a very, very active community. Blue Zones is the life we live out here.”

**To optimize well-being in your HOA community, and to partner with Blue Zones Project, contact [Chante.Pemberton@sharecare.com](mailto:Chante.Pemberton@sharecare.com) or visit [www.southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com](http://www.southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com).**



Blue Zones Project members at Twin Eagles organized an Moai® walking group around the golf course at their ribbon-cutting celebration.

