

“I think we need to think about our physical activity as a reward, as something enjoyable and something we look forward to doing, not something that we regard as self-flogging.”

— Dan Buettner, author of “The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest”



Eric Cioffi, owner of Well Vending in Naples, restocks a machine at NCH North Naples Hospital on Monday. PHOTOS BY LIZ FREEMAN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS

Blue Zones Project promotes healthier snacking

Liz Freeman Naples Daily News | USA TODAY NETWORK - FLORIDA

The candy bar in the vending machine is tugging at your taste buds.

But officials with the Blue Zones Project in Southwest Florida want you to fight the urge and opt for something healthier.

The Blue Zones health initiative is working with the Florida Department of Health in Collier County to promote nutritious snack items in vending machines in Collier County parks and recreation centers, and at any businesses or homeowners' associations interested in changing out what's available in vending machines.

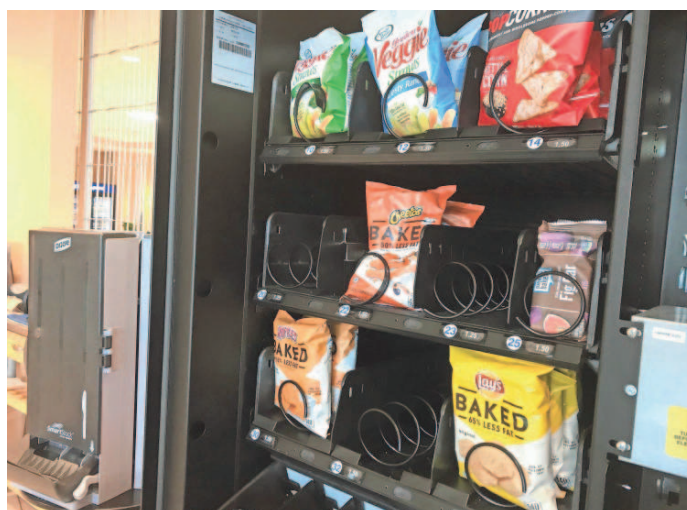
The goal is to have 40 percent of selections in snack machines in county parks and recreation centers be lower in sugar, salt and fat content, said Jessica Crane, community policy leader with the local Blue Zones Project.

A passive education campaign with signs will be displayed at the machines in county parks and recreation centers to help consumers learn what is healthiest and what is not so healthy, she said.

There are roughly 140 machines in county parks and recreation locations, she said. About 25 percent of the choices are healthy, Crane said.

“We would like to get two aisles (in vending machines) dedicated to water,” she said.

The Blue Zones project was introduced to Southwest Florida in 2015 based on the travels of Dan Buettner, who identified communities worldwide where people share lifestyle traits



Cioffi restocks a machine at NCH North Naples Hospital.

Online

Watch a video about healthy snacking. naplesnews.com

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Eric Cioffi, owner of Well Vending of Naples, fills a snack machine at NCH North Naples Hospital on Monday.

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and live to 100 or older. He wrote a New York Times best-seller about the nine principles of longevity.

The “Power Nine” include moving naturally by being physically active, eating a plant-slant diet, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social network and putting loved ones first. A popular activity is to form walking groups at worksites, which gets people active and engaging with one another.

The NCH Healthcare System is underwriting the costs of the project locally, where consultants from ShareCare, a partner with the national Blue Zones Project in Minneapolis, work with communities that are pursuing the Blue Zones lifestyles.

Crane said people who are on board with promoting better health can do their part by contacting the county parks and recreation division to let them know they would support healthier snack items in the machines.

NCH, as the champion of the Blue Zones Project, switched its vendor in 2013 to Well Vending, a family-owned business in Naples that launched in 2012.

Well Vending has nine vending machines at NCH locations in hospital cafeterias, emergency rooms, and other areas that have a lot of visitors, said Eric Cioffi, owner of Well Vending.

Getting the NCH contract was a boost for the business as it was getting estab-

lished in the region, Cioffi said. Well Vending now serves the Greater Naples YMCA, Marco Island YMCA, the Healthcare Network of Southwest Florida and several private schools, he said.

“Our business model is healthy products,” he said.

Selections include baked chips, fruit and nut bars, unsweetened green tea, energy bars, cookies with natural sweeteners, trail mix that is lower in calories and other items, he said.

The selections Well Vending offers are what the Blue Zones would like to see catch on elsewhere, Crane said.

“At NCH in two years, we surpassed the sales of junk food,” Cioffi said.

The health department will be including healthier vending machine selections in its update in August to its community health improvement plan, said Reggie Wilson, health education program consultant for the Collier health department. He has been working with Crane and the county on the passive education signs, and Wilson acknowledged there is reluctance by some in the public and vending machine operators to switch out some items for healthier snacks.

“It’s going to take some time,” Wilson said, adding that the health department and Blue Zones officials don’t have a deadline.

Wilson said the vendor contract for county parks and recreation may be up for renewal in 2020, and the county could add terms for healthier snack items.

For information about Well Vending, reach out to Cioffi at eric.cioffi@well-vending.com.