

Three businesses join in Blue Zones Project

LIZ FREEMAN

LIZ.FREEMAN@NAPLESNEWS.COM; 239-263-4778

Gianluca Corso, the owner of Cosmos Italian Café and Pizzeria in Naples, remembers well how his grandfather in Sardinia, Italy, enjoyed a glass of wine at lunch and dinner every day.

His grandfather lived to be 98 years old, a true-to-life story of how Sardinians enjoy longevity.

The Sardinia lifestyle of slowing down, enjoying family at meals, drinking a glass of wine daily and other habits are key parts of the Blue Zones Project, a longevity campaign that is outlined in "The Blue Zones Project," a New York Times bestseller by Dan Buettner.

The former explorer for National Geographic traveled the world and discovered places where people have great longevity based on common lifestyle habits. Sardinia is high on the list for longevity among its residents, second to Okinawa.

When Corso learned the Blue Zones Project was coming to Southwest Florida, he knew it was something for him and his restaurant, located at 311 Ninth St. N.

"It is part of my culture," Corso, 39, said.

He has created a Blue Zones page on his menu for both adults and children that highlight entrees with fresh ingredients, vegetarian choices and whole wheat pasta, all mainstays in his home



Dr. Allen Weiss, left, chief executive officer of the NCH Healthcare System, joins Gianluca Corso to celebrate his restaurant earning Blue Zones Project recognition.

country. He also offers wine selections to reflect how Sardinians enjoy a glass of wine every day, or at both lunch and dinner.

The restaurant is the latest business to earn Blue Zones recognition, which means it has taken steps to offer healthier options for customers so they become natural choices. Cosmos also operates the food concession at the Naples Pier.

Corso himself enjoys a glass of wine at lunch and dinner, and recognizes the value of a nap in the afternoon, something else Sardinians enjoy.

"It is not just the food, enjoy your family," he said. "It is enjoy the life, not just run, run, run."

The Blue Zones Project was introduced to Southwest Florida in 2015, a long-term effort to integrate healthier options in the daily lives of local residents at work, home or play. The NCH Healthcare System is underwriting the campaign.

The underlying philosophy of the Blue Zones is the "Power Nine," nine principles for improved longevity that include moving naturally by being physically active, knowing your purpose in life, taking time to relax, having a healthy social network and putting loved ones first.

Other principles include participating in a religious community, limiting alcohol consumption, eating a plant-salad diet and stopping to eat when you are 80 percent full.

Project consultants work with communities to identify strengths and gaps, and offer tools and resources so employers, schools, restaurants, grocery stores and other entities can take various steps to make healthier choices easier.

Two other local entities that have gained Blue Zones recognition recently are Central Auto Center and Quail Creek Fitness Center.

Central Auto, located at 160 10th St. N., began helping customers by producing maps of the area to encourage them to walk around the neighborhood while they wait for their car to be serviced.

The auto shop also took out all sugary beverages from the waiting room and restocked it with water and healthier snacks.

At the Quail Creek center, located at 13300 Valewood Drive, the fitness team launched a campaign to make group fitness more appealing and to encourage members to socialize with one another.

The center offered 20 complimentary group fitness classes, and it offers smaller group sessions so friends can get together and work privately with a trainer.

The center now offers weight loss tracking for members to encourage them to pursue better health. One member who has been training two to three times a week, and who changed her eating habits, has lost more than 30 pounds and dropped three dress sizes.

Currently, 37 communities in nine states have joined the Blue Zones Project, which has had an impact on 2.2 million Americans nationwide.

For more information about the Blue Zones Project, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.