

‘The more things for which you develop a fondness the richer the life you live.’ – Dan Buettner

Restaurants collaborate with Blue Zones to create healthy fare



Some Southwest Florida restaurants have teamed up with Blue Zones to provide more healthful plant-based dishes for patrons. GETTY IMAGES



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Guest Columnist

What was the top dining trend in 2018? According to international food and restaurant consultants, Baum and Whiteman, it was plant-based food. In fact, 83 percent of US consumers are adding plant-based foods to their diets to improve their health, 68 percent are eating more plant-based meals to help with weight control, and 31 percent of Americans are choosing to make some days completely meat-free. **See LOGAN, Page 9D**

Logan

Continued from Page 6D

When Tom Donahue, General Manager of Shula's Steakhouse, first decided to participate with Blue Zones Project he thought adding plant-based dishes to his menu made perfect sense. He understood, even a few years ago, the trend of plant-based dishes was only increasing. According to Donahue, "Shula's understands that if one person within a party of four is a vegetarian and there aren't options for them on the menu, they will be going elsewhere unless we can accommodate all types of diners." As a result, Shula's joined the more than 35 restaurants which are Blue Zones Project Approved.

Other restaurateurs also are changing with the plant-based trend. Ross and Noreen Edlund, owners of Skillet's restaurants in SWFL, have added 10 plant-based dishes to their menu. The most popular are Noreen's Breakfast and the Power Salad. Noreen's Breakfast is a delicious dish of steamed spinach, grilled tomatoes, sliced avocado and a poached egg, while the Power Salad is a tasty assortment of vegetables, nuts, beans and fruits on mixed greens served with homemade strawberry vinaigrette. In addition to providing meals to their customers that will help them to live longer, healthier lives, plant-based dishes benefit the restaurants bottom line. In 2018, Skillet's sold 71,514 Blue Zones inspired dishes.

Owners of Naples Flatbread, Ralph and Palma Desiano, were attracted to Blue Zones Project "because many of our personal and professional values about a healthy balanced lifestyle align with the project. Our restaurant was designed to be a healthier alternative to the normal grease-laden food available at many restaurants. We serve nothing fried, a lot of vegetables, and our rule is that everything has to be flavorful."

Naples Flatbread's most popular Blue Zones Inspired dish is their Southwest Quinoa Bowl, followed by their Meatless Chili. Both scrumptious dishes feature roasted quinoa which is tossed with their house-made salsa and then cooked golden brown. The Southwest Quinoa Bowl is flavored with black beans, corn, peppers, onions, tomato, and avocado which is mixed with their cilantro honey lime dressing. Complementing the quinoa in the Meatless Chili are cannellini beans, tomato, and onion. Naples Flatbread, with two restaurants in SWFL, sold 9,766 plant-based dishes in 2018.

To see a listing of other restaurants which are collaborating with Blue Zones Project to help make healthy choices, easier, go to southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com/organization. If you would like your restaurant to take advantage of Blue Zone Project, a free community-wide well-being initiative, sponsored by NCH Healthcare System, contact David Longfield-Smith at 239-248-9154 or David.LongfieldSmith@Sharecare.com.



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