

'Begin by answering this question in a single, memorable sentence: Why do you get up in the morning?'

– Dan Buettner, The Blue Zones founder

Why Skilletts Restaurants joined Blue Zones Project



Skilletts' eighth location opened recently in south Fort Myers. Shown is the location for the local breakfast-lunch chain at the Strand Shopping Center in North Naples. TIM ATEN/NAPLES DAILY NEWS



Ross Edlund
Guest columnist

Skilletts opened its doors to serve quality breakfasts and lunches in July 1995.

Owners Ross and Noreen Edlund were no strangers to the hospitality business, having created and operated a chain of upscale bakery pastry shops in Chicago in the 1970s and '80s.

When Jeff Wynn, a business colleague and a Blue Zones Project champion, contacted me in early 2016 with a proposal for Skilletts to become a Blue Zones Project Approved restaurant, the fit seemed to be a natural.

I had already read about the original Blue Zones and about the benefits of plant-based dining. The documentary "Forks over Knives" opened my eyes to the life changing

gifts that eating fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes could bestow.

Many of Skilletts offerings already qualified as a Blue Zones Inspired dish. We had already been conscious of having alternatives for our vegan customers — our Healthy Omelet, our steel cut oatmeal, avocado toast, Very Veggie Frittata, Italian Vegetarian Panini and our Mediterranean wrap, to name a few.

After Skilletts joined up with Blue Zones Project, there has been a greater focus on providing even more items to our menu that have become terrific sellers, like the Veggie Power Wrap and Noreen's breakfast — a mix of avocado, grilled spinach and tomato, and one egg.

It's Skilletts' goal to serve the highest quality food, using only the freshest ingredients and making all products from scratch. There would always be a focus on keeping items as healthy as possible. Eliminate excess sugars and salt, no high fructose corn syrup, no preservatives, and no artificial flavors or color-

ing.

By sticking with "homemade from scratch" it was easy to control the ingredients going into all the menu items.

In addition, Skilletts cut down on the grease and cheese. America's love of restaurant food is unfortunately largely based on deep frying and high fat content. Cheese is everywhere and hard to avoid.

At Skilletts, we cook our eggs in non-stick pans to minimize the added fat in our omelets and fried eggs. Our bacon and potatoes are baked, not fried.

Even if most people don't consume only plant-based foods, the awareness that Blue Zones Project creates about adding healthier foods to our diet step-by-step certainly helps to steer us in a healthy direction.

Who doesn't want to enjoy food that is kind and nurturing to our bodies and souls?

Ross Edlund is CEO of Skilletts Restaurants.