

BLUE ZONES

“It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver.” – Mahatma Gandhi

Moving naturally: More than 500 in SWFL participate in 30 for 30 Movement Challenge



Lera Brial from Osceola Elementary Celebrates Winning Blue Zones Restaurant Gift Cards After Participation in the Challenge. SUBMITTED

Sebastien Saitta

Blue Zones Project-Southwest Florida

Since the pandemic began, many are staying home and sitting down more than usual.

Even before COVID-19 began, according to the World Health Organization, 31% of individuals 15 years or older are physically inactive and approximately 3.2 million deaths per year are attributed to this unhealthy lifestyle behavior. It has also been estimated that each additional hour of sitting time results in an increase of \$126 in annual health-care costs in older adults.

“Unfortunately, a sedentary lifestyle has existed as its own pandemic long before COVID-19 began,” said Megan Greer, Worksite and Policy Lead at Blue Zones Project. “Knowing this problem is accelerating due to COVID, it’s important that we continue making tools available for our community to help address this issue.”

Led by Greer, Blue Zones Project recently organized and invited the entire community to participate in a 30 Minutes for 30 Days movement challenge. The goal was to create a habit by getting people to become part of a larger, like-minded group and encourage them simply to get up and get moving for at least 30 minutes a day for 30 days straight. Participants logged their progress daily and reported it at the end of the challenge.

“We tend to get intimidated by the misconception that daily exercise requires a significant time commitment and a gym membership in order to count,” says Greer. “Our days are already packed, so the thought of exercise becomes a stressor and



Village Oaks Elementary School Teachers celebrate their completion of the 30 for 30 Challenge. SUBMITTED

falls off the list of things to do instead of being an essential daily stress reliever.”

Through this challenge, Blue Zones Project created a realistic goal and reinforced the idea that moving naturally, one of the Blue Zones Power 9 principles for longevity, for just 30 minutes a day doesn’t have to be so complicated. This involves getting your exercise in without thinking about it, including gardening, yoga, going for a walk, or yard work. In fact, doing yard work for an hour can end up burning twice the amount of calories as a gym session.

Collier County Public Schools teachers and staff were involved in the challenge making up for more than half the participants. “With many faculty and staff who may be feeling a bit overwhelmed by COVID-related stress, it was encouraging to see them take advantage of this well-being opportunity,” says Joe Stoner, Blue Zones Project Schools and Youth Coordinator.

Lera Brial from Osceola Elementary was among the many teachers and staff who found the challenge to be a great opportunity to get moving again.

“My workouts had gone by the wayside due to COVID, teaching virtually for the first time, and losing a loved one to ALS,” she said. “The first week was the toughest, but after that I looked forward to getting up at 5 a.m. and pushing myself out the door. It lifted my mood before I would head into work and gave me energy throughout the day.”

Lera combined walking, jogging, yoga, weights, abs, and meditation for well-rounded workouts. She also made small adjustments like parking farther away at work to get more steps in. “This has now become part of my daily life!”

Alyssa Heberle, teacher and wellness champion at Osceola Elementary adds that too often, stress reduction falls to the bottom of the priority list for many teachers and staff because something more important gets in the way.

“A challenge like this was a fun way to get moving and stay moving,” she says. “Knowing that activities like walking, gardening, and desk exercises all counted in this challenge made it more doable and fun.”

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Divas

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degree in music performance at Southern Methodist University.

● **Lydia Howery** has performed contemporary opera, including creating the role of Daphne in Jordan Farrar's opera "The Day Boy and the Night Girl." She has sung oratorios such as "The Messiah" and masses, and is on the adjunct voice faculty at Florida Gulf Coast University's Bower School of Music.

● **Lauryn Kay**, mezzo-soprano, completed her apprentice artist residency with Gulfshore Opera for which she sang the role of Flora in "La Traviata" and the notary in "Don Pasquale."

● **Daniela Magura**, a German-American mezzo-soprano, was a Young Artist with The Chautauqua Opera Company. She was a Young Artist with The Chautauqua Opera Company this season and played Olga in Mannes Opera's "Eugene Onegin" and Dorabella in Mozart's "Cosi fan Tutte" at Opera America.

● **Erika Ramirez**, soprano from Venezuela who now lives in Fort Myers, sings a range including Renaissance, Baroque, classical, bel canto, Latin Ameri-

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can music, Broadway musicals and traditional Spanish song. She has studied in Spain with Montserrat Caballé.

● **Marie Talley**, soprano, was the winner of the 2000 Central Florida Symphony Young Artist Competition. The Estero resident has performed with the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus and Chamber Singers; played Maria in "West Side Story" (Footlight Players, Charleston, South Carolina); and joined the chorus for Gulfshore Opera's "La Boheme" and "Amahl and the Night Visitors."

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Moving

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Heberle wants to remind teachers and staff to take note of what is in their control when feeling anxious and explains that it's important to begin and end your day with self-care practices.

"Start your day with guided meditation and end your day with exercise," she says. "Also, throughout the day allow yourself moments of self-care whether it's through deep breathing or taking a walk while on a break."

Joann Vukobratovich, Health and Physical Education Teacher at Village Oaks Elementary School celebrated the completion of the challenge with many of her fellow teachers and staff and discussed the creative ways they managed to add more movement in their day.

"Some simply walked while they were on a phone call, rode their bike to the store instead of driving, painted fences, and even created a scavenger hunt," says Vukobratovich. "No matter the activity, everyone agreed this challenge was a win-win!"

"By encouraging people to simply track the movements they already do every day, and give them fun and simple ideas to incorporate more movement, we have helped them create a positive habit that they can carry throughout their lives," says Greer.

Brought to Southwest Florida by NCH Healthcare System, in collaboration with Sharecare, Inc. and Blue Zones, LLC, Blue Zones Project is a vital part of South-

west Florida's well-being improvement initiative that encourages changes in the community that lead to healthier options. For more information about Blue Zones Project Southwest Florida, visit southwestflorida.bluezonesproject.com.

Online Power Nine activity of the week

To be a longevity super-star, you don't have to run marathons or compete in ultra-endurance events. In fact, Blue Zones researchers discovered that many of the world's oldest and healthiest people engage in low-intensity activities on a daily basis.

Remember when you were a kid constantly on the go? You didn't have to think about it — you just moved for the sheer fun of it! Movement was part of everyday play, whether it was climbing trees, swimming at the beach, jumping in puddles, or just plain running to feel the wind on your face.

This week we want to encourage you to find what you enjoy and do it! If you like an activity, you're much more likely to keep it up, well into your golden years.

Tell us the fun ways you moved naturally this week. Share your experience with us by commenting or by tagging us on Facebook @Blue Zones Project — Southwest Florida, or you can email us at bluezonesprojectsfl@sharecare.com to be entered in our prize drawing for a gift card from one of our Blue Zones Project Approved Restaurants.

Sebastien Saitta is with Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida.

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