

"Falls are the leading cause of fatal & non-fatal injuries for older Americans. Okinwan centenarians have very little furniture; they take meals and relax sitting on the floor. Getting up and down off the floor several dozen times daily builds lower body strength and balance." — Dan Buettner, author of "The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest"



Naples Zoo celebrates joining Blue Zones Project initiative in Collier County. SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Three more businesses join Blue Zones Project

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Three more businesses have gained designation as Blue Zones Project work sites for adopting practices to help employees be healthier and happier.

The three are Naples Zoo, David Lawrence Center and Community Health Partners.

The Naples Zoo, located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road, turned employee meetings into healthy potluck events and has developed an activity log to help employees participate in healthy activities, which includes volunteering in the community. The zoo also began offering free biometric screening.

"Naples Zoo staff are always outdoors enjoying nature and its endless health benefits, but we wanted to learn more about ways to make (the zoo) a happier place to work and play," Jack Mulvena, president and chief executive officer of the nonprofit Naples Zoo, said in a news release.

The zoo works with conservation groups locally and around the world to protect endangered species. The zoo has 70 full-time employees and 230 volunteers, who also are part of the Blue Zones Project.

"Our mission is to inspire people of all ages to respect, value and help conserve wildlife and our natural world," Mulvena said. "Conserving and respecting our natural world is an integral part of the Blue Zones Project and



David Lawrence Center employees celebrate joining the Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida.

we are excited to be taking more actions to be a part of the initiative that's transforming the well-being of our community."

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

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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.

See BLUE ZONES, Page 11D

Blue Zones

Continued from Page 7D

The philosophy is that over time, healthier choices will become the easier choice, and each incremental step can improve health and well-being.

The NCH Healthcare System is sponsoring the Blue Zones Project initiative in Southwest Florida.

To date 120 businesses, government agencies, nonprofit organizations and homeowner's groups have earned Blue Zones recognition or approval by adopting practices that are supported by the wellness initiative.

David Lawrence, the nonprofit mental health provider in Collier County, formed walking groups among employees at its three locations in Naples, Golden Gate and Immokalee. That serves a dual purpose of getting people more physically active, and it helps people develop new connections. David Lawrence has 303 employees.

Another change involved switching to standing desks for those employees

who prefer that, adding healthier snacks in vending machines and hosting a plant-based cooking class.

David Lawrence's mission is to empower people toward life-changing wellness, and that holds true for staff. Scott Burgess, president and chief executive officer of the mental health center, said in an email.

"Receiving the Blue Zones designation is one more example of how we are tangibly cultivating an environment of wellness, health, empowerment and engagement," he said. "(David Lawrence) staff across our organization have pledged to ourselves, and to each other, that we will promote, in every way possible, life-changing wellness. We are proud to be putting those words into action through advancing many healthy activities and habits."

Community Health Partners, which is a physician hospital organization in Collier and south Lee counties with 32 employees, formed walking groups for its employees and reimburses them for their fee to a fitness club when they work out at least eight times a month, said Kathy Jardone, chief operating offi-



Community Health Partners celebrates joining the Blue Zones Project of Southwest Florida. SUBMITTED

cer of the group.

At least half of the employees are taking advantage of the reimbursement to the wellness center, she said.

The company promotes plant-based diets in-house and to restaurants within a 2-mile radius, and it held a purpose workshop to help employees find more

meaning in their lives, she said.

To date, 42 communities around the U.S. have embarked on Blue Zones Projects to encourage residents to take action to be healthier and more engaged. An estimated 3.3 million Americans have been positively affected by the project.