



# CEDAR RAPIDS A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

The 15th certified Blue Zones Community® in the nation invests in well-being for a more livable, vibrant, and healthy future.







CONGRATS, CEDAR RAPIDS,  
FOR PUTTING WELL-BEING  
ON THE MAP!

We deserve a round of applause.  
And maybe even a standing ovation.  
Because we made it happen.

After launching Blue Zones Project®, our community saw **a nearly six percent increase in fruit and vegetable consumption**. This is thanks to improved access and a local food revolution that includes community gardens, school gardens, and urban agriculture. Our community is also seeing an **increase in the number of people exercising and a decline in obesity rates**. Our community's resurgence is anchored in putting the well-being of our residents first.

Cedar Rapids has always been a great place to live, work, and visit. And it's only getting better.

We did this together. By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone. Here's to making Cedar Rapids one of the healthiest cities in the nation, where residents are living better, together.

# THE JOURNEY TO BECOME A BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

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# PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP IN IOWA

## A GREAT STATE

What does it take to become a healthier state? What does that mean for those who live and work there? These were the questions on the minds of community leaders in 2011 when Governor Terry Branstad challenged Iowa to become the healthiest state alongside the Healthiest State Initiative. An answer came with Blue Zones Project, a community-wide initiative that united civic leaders, businesses, restaurants, schools, grocers, families, and others in an effort to enhance the community landscape and improve the overall well-being of Iowans. With this vision as a foundation, the Blue Zones Project partnership is bringing value to communities statewide — with things like improved health, a strong economy, and happier, healthier, and highly productive residents who spend more time living well.

## AN INNOVATIVE SPONSOR

Wellmark® Blue Cross® and Blue Shield® chose to invest in the lives of Iowans by bringing Blue Zones Project to the state for what would be the cornerstone of Iowa's Healthiest State Initiative.

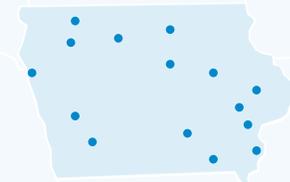
Wellmark knew that doing so would introduce an innovative approach that moves beyond diet and exercise regimens and applies the principles of behavioral economics to make healthier choices easier choices. The projected outcomes? Improved health and well-being for Iowans.

## A Transformative Solution

Blue Zones Project helps transform U.S. communities like ours into Blue Zones Communities — areas where people live longer with a higher quality of life. The secrets to well-being and longevity are found in the Power 9® — nine common principles from the Blue Zones® longevity hotspots of the world. Blue Zones Communities are places where residents, employers, and others collaborate to create environments where healthy choices are easier for everyone.

The results?

Vibrant communities where residents are happier, healthier, and more engaged with each other. Iowa was among the first to embark on this journey to well-being. Fifteen communities and five years later, the results are undeniable.





IN COMMUNITIES WITH HIGHER WELL-BEING, WE HAVE FOUND THAT PEOPLE LIVE LONGER, HAPPIER LIVES AND BUSINESS AND LOCAL ECONOMIES FLOURISH. A RELIABLE WELL-BEING METRIC PROVIDES COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS LEADERS WITH THE DATA AND INSIGHTS THEY NEED TO HELP MAKE SUSTAINED TRANSFORMATION A REALITY. AFTER ALL, IF YOU CAN'T MEASURE IT, YOU CAN'T MANAGE IT.

Dan Buettner  
*New York Times* best-selling author  
National Geographic Fellow  
Blue Zones founder

## Measuring the Impact

Change requires action. It isn't enough to do something one time; lasting change, which is a central tenet of Blue Zones Project, must be created from permanent and semi-permanent changes and alterations to the environment, policies, programs, and social networks. These actions allow healthy choices to become easy choices today and for many years to come.

From 2010 – 2015, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index®, Iowa has outpaced the nation in overall well-being, improving at twice the rate of the national average.



### GALLUP-HEALTHWAYS WELL-BEING INDEX

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index is the most proven, mature, and comprehensive measure of well-being in the world. Measuring well-being gives policy, community, and business leaders the data to benchmark populations, understand gaps and opportunities, and then prioritize interventions to measurably improve well-being. Improving well-being has been shown to lower health care costs and increase worker productivity, in turn, enhancing organizational and community competitiveness.



## 15 Communities Commit to Well-Being

In October 2011, 84 Iowa communities submitted statements of interest to be selected for Blue Zones Project, and an elite 15 were chosen. Communities received support from national experts and thousands of community members.

Across the state, Blue Zones Project has seen:

520,000

Lives impacted by environmental changes designed to help people move naturally, eat wisely, develop the right outlook, and connect with others.

430,000+

Actions taken by individuals to improve well-being for themselves, their families, and friends.

610

Worksites, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants achieved Blue Zones Project designation.

21,164

(And counting) Actions taken by those organizations to make healthy choices easier, helping residents, employees, and patrons live longer, better lives.

180,245

Total feet of bike lanes, trails, and sidewalks built to encourage people to move more naturally.

142

Walking School Bus routes created to encourage students to move naturally.

15

**All 15** communities passed new Complete Streets policies to enable safe access for all users — drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists.

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IT'S CELEBRATING WHAT THE PEOPLE OF AMERICA ARE NOW WAKING UP TO, AND REALIZING WHAT THEY WANT. IT'S GOING TO HAPPEN IN IOWA FIRST.

Dan Burden  
Walkability Expert  
Blue Zones



### WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY?

Worksites, schools, grocery stores, and restaurants complete various **action items** on a **pledge** in order to earn their Blue Zones Project **designation**.



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CEDAR RAPIDS PUTS A STRONG EMPHASIS ON WELL-BEING IMPROVEMENT THROUGH KEY ENVIRONMENTAL LEVERS. THIS COMMUNITY — THE LARGEST WE’VE WORKED WITH IN IOWA — IS SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES IN IOWA AND CITIES AROUND THE NATION. I APPLAUD THEM FOR THIS ACHIEVEMENT.

Dan Buettner

*New York Times* best-selling author

National Geographic Fellow

Blue Zones founder



# PUTTING WELL-BEING ON THE MAP IN CEDAR RAPIDS

As a pioneer in innovation, Cedar Rapids is leading the way for a movement that is now more than 26 communities strong nationwide.

Our neighbors, teachers, and community leaders have made tremendous strides in optimizing the places where we all live, work, learn, and play.



AS THE LARGEST COMMUNITY IN IOWA TO UNDERTAKE THIS PROJECT, WE ARE PROUD OF THE BROAD-BASED AND COMPREHENSIVE PROGRESS WE'VE MADE TOWARD HEALTHY LIVING AS A WAY OF LIFE. WE CONTINUE TO REBUILD AND REIMAGINE OUR CITY FOR THE FUTURE WITH A FOCUS ON OUR CITIZENS AND A STRONG QUALITY OF LIFE.

Ron Corbett  
Mayor  
Cedar Rapids

## New Active Living Options and Improved Food Access Grow Cedar Rapids' Well-Being

Cedar Rapids, the largest Blue Zones Community in Iowa, has come together to rebuild from an historic flood as a city focused on well-being by using policy as a catalyst to transform our environment with a focus on healthy foods and active living.

Since launching Blue Zones Project efforts, **exercise numbers have improved and obesity numbers are trending down.** Produce consumption is also on the rise, climbing nearly six percent, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index.

Cedar Rapids boasts the state's first green bike lanes, an innovative approach to street design and safety that sends a clear message that we are a bicycle-friendly community. Residents believe in this approach, and together we passed a ten-year local-option sales tax that will generate \$180 million for projects like the bike lanes. As exercise levels begin to increase and obesity level start to decrease, it's evident our community is moving more.

Cedar Rapids supports local food through an urban-agriculture ordinance that allows food to be grown on all land. In 2015, **325 garden plots were plowed on city-owned properties.** Fresh fruit can be picked at Noelridge Park, where students took the classroom outdoors to plant trees and learn in a unique way. Eighteen of our schools now offer gardens that enhance curriculum and increase life skills.

In Cedar Rapids, the journey to becoming a Blue Zones Community has laid an infrastructure that promotes high levels of well-being for all citizens.



## A Community-wide Commitment to Blue Zones Project



126,326

Lives impacted

57%

Community awareness

29%

People engaged

30,213

Individuals pledged to support well-being

80,915

Well-being actions taken by individuals

26%

Believe Blue Zones Project has made a positive impact on the community

273

Organizations implementing well-being principles

4,576

Changes made by organizations to support living longer, better

112

Organizations completing the pledge

57

Cedar Rapids worksites are Blue Zones Worksites®

29%

Of Cedar Rapids' locally owned restaurants are Blue Zones Restaurants®

38%

Of Cedar Rapids' public schools are Blue Zones Schools®

17%

Of Cedar Rapids' grocery stores are Blue Zones Grocery Stores®



## SEE IT IN ACTION

### Blue Zones Project Highlight: Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Cedar Rapids is making well-being a way of life. Hear from our leaders and neighbors about how an emphasis on well-being makes our community a better place to live.

Watch the video:

[explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids](http://explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids)



### Media Coverage Places Cedar Rapids on National Stage

Blue Zones Project in Iowa has attracted local and national recognition, with more than 1,600 media stories to date.

Since the launch in 2012, Blue Zones Project in Iowa has been heralded for innovative approaches to population health management in notable publications such as **O, The Oprah Magazine**.

### Cedar Rapids in the News

177

Total Mentions

23,256,387

Total Reach

\$44,432

Total Publicity Value\*

\* Publicity value calculated using Cisionpoint Media Monitoring service.

## The Des Moines Register



## The Gazette



## In the News

**Pumping up Cedar  
Rapids for blue lifestyle**  
**The Gazette**

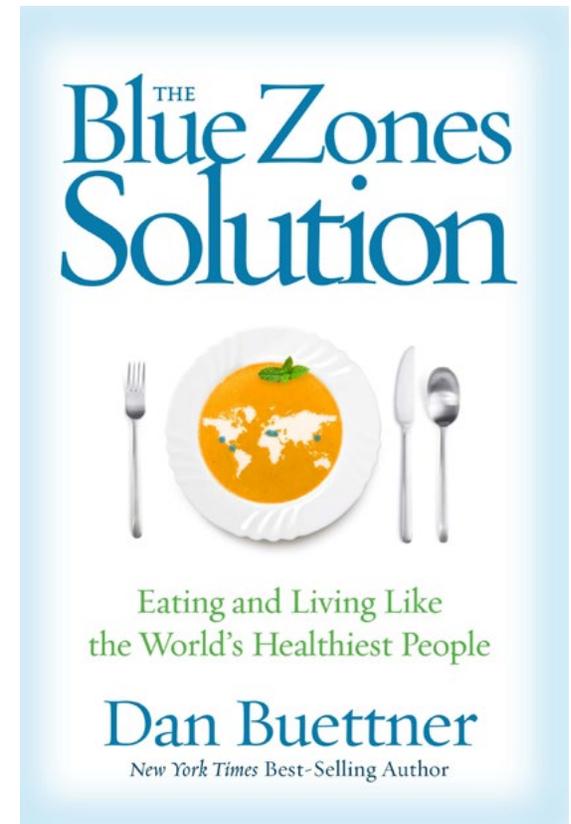
03.03.13



Cedar Rapids Blue Zones Project leaders meet with Governor Branstad, May 2015



Thank you to the City of Cedar Rapids, a committed well-being champion for Blue Zones Project.



In addition to great media stories covering our efforts, Iowa's story is featured prominently in Dan Buettner's latest *New York Times* best-selling book, *The Blue Zones Solution: Eating and Living Like the World's Healthiest People*.



# GUIDE TO THE POWER 9

The landscape for well-being in America cannot be improved without committed partnerships. That's why leaders across many sectors joined forces to take action and positively impact our residential and business communities. This broad, holistic approach is making healthy choices easier.

Using the secrets to longevity as our guide — **the Power 9** — businesses and residents have taken actions to make well-being a way of life.

## THE POWER 9

P.19

### Move Naturally

 Make daily physical activity an unavoidable part of your environment.

P.27

### Right Outlook

 Know your purpose.

 Downshift: work less, slow down, and take vacations.

P.32

### Eat Wisely

 Eat until 80 percent full.

 More veggies, less meat and processed food.

 Drink a glass of red wine each day.

P.40

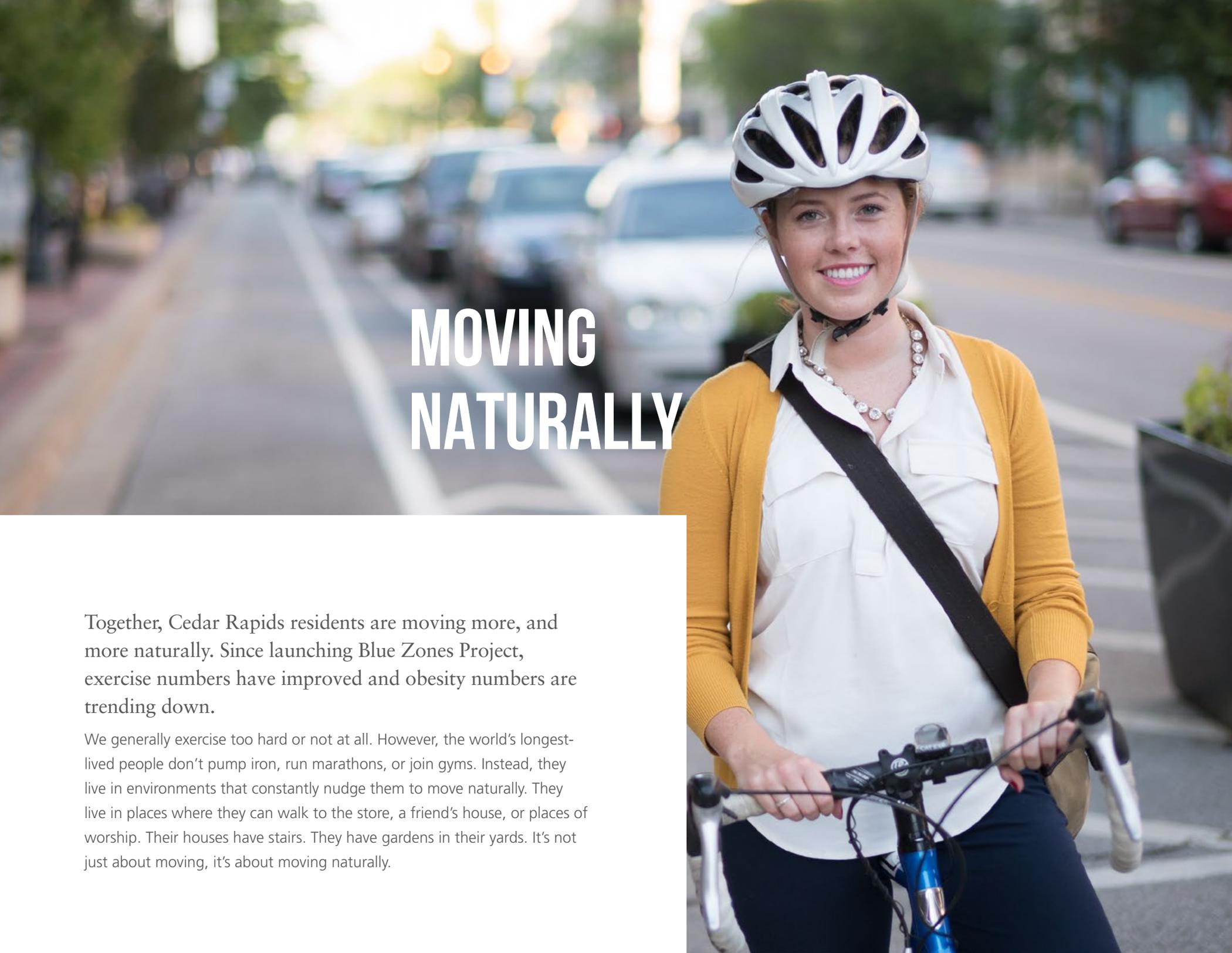
### Connect

 Create a healthy social network.

 Connect or reconnect with religion.

 Prioritize family.





# MOVING NATURALLY

Together, Cedar Rapids residents are moving more, and more naturally. Since launching Blue Zones Project, exercise numbers have improved and obesity numbers are trending down.

We generally exercise too hard or not at all. However, the world's longest-lived people don't pump iron, run marathons, or join gyms. Instead, they live in environments that constantly nudge them to move naturally. They live in places where they can walk to the store, a friend's house, or places of worship. Their houses have stairs. They have gardens in their yards. It's not just about moving, it's about moving naturally.

## WHY MOVEMENT MATTERS

About 69 percent of the American population can be classified as overweight or obese.<sup>2</sup>

Our children's life expectancy is projected to be shorter than that of their parents for the first time in history. Obesity is not just a health problem, it's an economic one, too. The estimated annual health care costs of obesity-related illness are a staggering \$190 billion, or nearly 21 percent of annual medical spending. Childhood obesity alone is responsible for \$14 billion in direct medical costs.<sup>3</sup>

The good news is there is a solution for this growing issue. **Increasing simple movements like standing, walking, stretching, and bending can help burn an extra 350 calories a day.** Studies show that just by making our communities more walkable, the prevalence of obesity can decrease by more than 10 percent.<sup>4</sup> That adds up to even bigger possibilities like lowered incidences of heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory issues and increased productivity, vitality, and years of quality life.

## How Moving Naturally Impacts Our Community

City planners, schools, worksites, and organizations across our community have come together to create environments and support programs that help Cedar Rapids residents move naturally. Our city has emerged as a leader for street and community design that nudges people to healthier daily habits. Here are some reasons why:

840

Actions taken by organizations to move naturally

18,621

Actions taken by individuals to move naturally, like getting a bike or a dog to encourage regular movement

248

Walking Moai teams with 1,512 participants

12

Walking School Bus routes



### WHAT'S A MOAI?

Moai is a concept from Okinawa, Japan, that roughly means coming together for a common purpose. When you find your Moai, you find your personal board of directors — a committed group of individuals supporting each other and working collectively to improve well-being, for life.



Dan Burden, Walkability and Livability Expert with Blue Zones who has advised the City of Cedar Rapids.



IT SEEMS ANYWHERE YOU GO IN CEDAR RAPIDS, THERE IS SOMETHING ENCOURAGING THE HEALTHY CHOICE — FROM GROCERY STORES TO RESTAURANTS TO MORE HEALTH-FOCUSED COMMUNITY EVENTS AND POLICIES. IT IS EXCITING TO SEE THIS ATTITUDE SHIFT!

Melissa L. Walker  
Deputy Director,  
Area Substance Abuse Council  
Power 9 board member

## TRANSFORMING ENVIRONMENTS

In 2015, Cedar Rapids introduced one of Iowa’s first protected green bike lanes. It’s part of a Complete Streets policy that ensures roads are safe for all users, including pedestrians and bicyclists.

Back in 2009, the city had only one bikeway. Since then, 19 more bikeways have been added, and nearly 5 miles of newly constructed bike lanes are expected to be complete by 2017. Total bike trail mileage has also increased, rising 28 percent, from 25 miles in 2009 to 32 miles in 2015. By 2017, the number will increase to 35 miles. Positive built-environment projects like these are popping up across the city to help people move naturally.

Employers are getting involved, too. Toyota Financial Services promotes on-site fitness activities like basketball and bike rides to keep employees moving throughout the day. Since these activities began, the number of employees exercising 30 minutes per day increased by 18.9 percent, while the percent who reported never exercising decreased by 42.5 percent.





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IT'S A GREAT NEIGHBORHOOD TO HAVE THIS KIND OF PROJECT BECAUSE IT'S SO WALKABLE AND THERE'S A LOT TO SEE AND SOMETHING'S ALWAYS CHANGING DOWN HERE. IT SHOULD REALLY HELP PEOPLE REALIZE HOW WALK-FRIENDLY THE AREA IS. I STARTED A FEW BLOCKS AWAY AND THEN SAW ANOTHER PAINTING ACROSS THE STREET SO I JUST KEPT WALKING TO SEE ALL THEM.

Terry Rogers  
Resident  
Cedar Rapids

## Concrete Connections Sidewalk Painting

Concrete Connections brought together **46 local organizations to paint two miles of sidewalks**, encouraging residents to explore the streets on foot or bicycle instead of by car.



## In The News



## ORGANIZATIONS MOVING NATURALLY

The health of our community is directly related to the health and vitality of our people.

Organizations across Cedar Rapids have recognized their responsibility to create environments that support their employees and patrons in moving more.

### Worksites

We spend about one third of our waking hours at work. Over the last 50 years, the percentage of jobs requiring moderate physical activity has fallen from 50 percent in 1960 to 20 percent today.<sup>9</sup>

**This means four out of five jobs are sedentary or only require light activity.** This decline in physical activity translates to Americans burning 120–140 fewer calories each day, which results in burning 12–15 fewer pounds each year.

As waistlines expand so do our medical costs. Annually, obesity-related illnesses cost more than \$190 billion in health care costs and \$153 billion in lost productivity, annually.<sup>3</sup>

These are small changes that can lead to huge results for the average person over the course of a career.

### Actions Completed by 57 Worksites

- 1 Standing desks
- 2 Sharing walking routes
- 3 Stretch breaks
- 4 Fitness classes





#### WALKING HELPS KIDS

Children who walk to school are more alert and ready to learn, strengthen their social networks and develop lifetime fitness habits.<sup>10, 11</sup> A Walking School Bus allows a group of children to walk to school under the supervision of two or more adults.

## Schools

Every day, children are learning habits they will carry for the rest of their lives.

Establishing healthy habits like moving naturally is so important in the early stages of life. Physical activity and stretch breaks during the school day can improve grades, increase concentration, and improve math, reading, and writing test scores.<sup>12</sup>

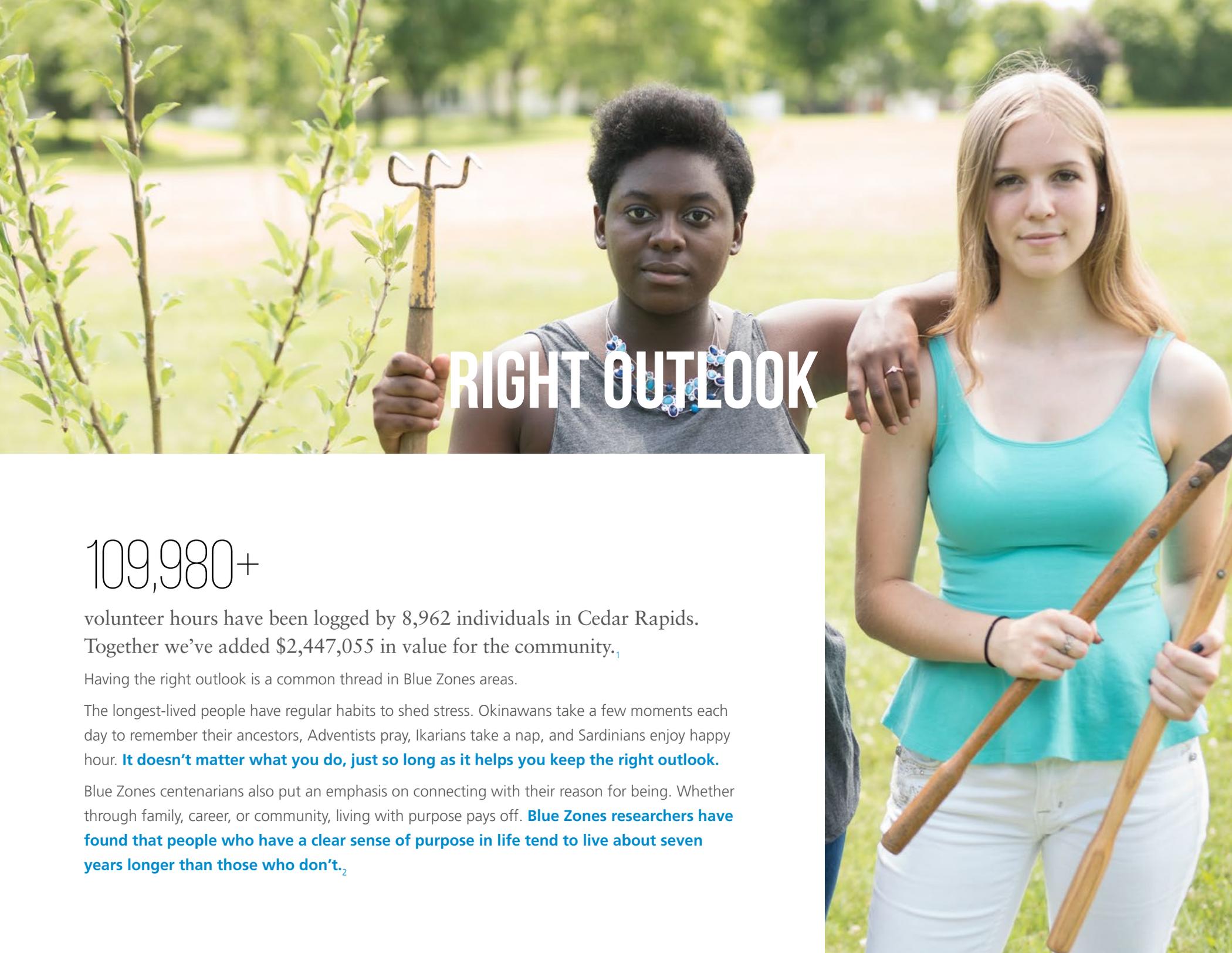
Additionally, research shows that including 10-minute activity breaks on a daily basis can promote improvement across these areas by up to 20 percent.

**Our community saw 17 schools complete actions to help get students moving, including adding four Walking School Buses, brain breaks, and additional recess and physical education time.**

Nine schools started a Walking School Bus program, which allows more than 700 students to walk to school with adult chaperones rather than riding in a bus or car.

## Restaurants and Grocery Stores

Grocery stores in Cedar Rapids remind shoppers that parking further away is one way to easily add more activity in their day. Restaurants are installing bicycle racks to encourage people to consider active transportation to common destinations (and work up a healthy appetite, too). Small efforts like these make moving naturally easier than ever before in Cedar Rapids.



# RIGHT OUTLOOK

109,980+

volunteer hours have been logged by 8,962 individuals in Cedar Rapids. Together we've added \$2,447,055 in value for the community.<sup>1</sup>

Having the right outlook is a common thread in Blue Zones areas.

The longest-lived people have regular habits to shed stress. Okinawans take a few moments each day to remember their ancestors, Adventists pray, Ikarians take a nap, and Sardinians enjoy happy hour. **It doesn't matter what you do, just so long as it helps you keep the right outlook.**

Blue Zones centenarians also put an emphasis on connecting with their reason for being. Whether through family, career, or community, living with purpose pays off. **Blue Zones researchers have found that people who have a clear sense of purpose in life tend to live about seven years longer than those who don't.**<sup>2</sup>

## WHY RIGHT OUTLOOK MATTERS

No matter where we live, stress and the pressures of daily life can weigh us down.

Practicing regular methods to downshift from everyday stress and understand our purpose can improve well-being. **Stress leads to chronic inflammation, which is tied to every major age-related disease.**

Research shows that those who connect with a sense of purpose and wake up to live with it each day outlive those who don't. In fact, those with a sense of purpose had a 15 percent lower rate of death than those who did not.<sup>13</sup>



### How Right Outlook Impacts Our Community

Through volunteering, Purpose Workshops, and Purpose Moais, Cedar Rapids supports individuals in discovering their innate gifts. We help our community members find opportunities to match their passion and commitment to deepen their sense of purpose.

Cedar Rapids is thriving, and our residents' outlook is on the rise. The number of all residents who fall into the "thriving" category when reflecting on their life purpose evaluation is up more than six points since 2015, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index



#### THRIVING

Well-being that is strong, consistent, and progressing in a particular element.

#### STRUGGLING

Well-being that is moderate or inconsistent in a particular element.

#### SUFFERING

Well-being that is very low and at high risk in a particular element.



#### BY THE NUMBERS

308

Actions taken by organizations to practice having the right outlook

18,119

Actions taken by individuals to practice having the right outlook, like designating a space at home for meditation or prayer, learning a new hobby, or discovering their purpose

12

Purpose Workshops with 630 participants

16

Purpose Moais with 144 participants

3,649

Volunteers with Blue Zones Project logging 9,072 hours

8,972

Volunteers in Cedar Rapids logging 109,980 hours

## OUTCOMES

With more than 109,980 volunteer hours logged by 8,962 volunteers, volunteers in Cedar Rapids added \$2,447,055 in value for the community.

Blue Zones Project volunteers make up 41 percent of the volunteers in Cedar Rapids. Additionally, more than 630 people sought to discover their gifts and deepen their sense of purpose through Purpose Workshops and the creation of 16 Purpose Moais with 144 participants.

## SEE IT IN ACTION

### Lynn Stansbery Transformation

Lynn Stansbery of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, talks about her journey to lose more than 100 lbs., and a hug that changed her life.

Watch the video:

[explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids](https://explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids)

## Volunteer Fever

- 1 109,980 volunteer hours logged in Cedar Rapids
- 2 8,962 Cedar Rapids volunteers
- 3 9,072 Blue Zones Project volunteer hours
- 4 3,649 Blue Zones Project volunteers





## ORGANIZATIONS WITH THE RIGHT OUTLOOK

### Worksites

Fewer than 50 percent of Americans find meaning at work. Employers that invest in making work meaningful for their employees are more likely to see production rise and turnover decrease.<sup>14</sup>

Midwest Metal Products incorporated well-being into its mission statement to make wellness a visible priority to employees. This effort, combined with monthly lunch-and-learn sessions and bimonthly health-related newsletters, helped medical claims drop from \$7,348 to \$5,207 per covered member.

Toyota Financial Services promotes employee volunteering throughout the community. In 2014, 4,408 volunteer hours were logged.

### Schools

Mindfulness is paying attention to the here and now with kindness and curiosity.

Research suggests that teaching mindfulness skills to students increases attention and improves social skills while decreasing test anxiety. It also creates a sense of calm connection to nature, and it improves sleep. These skills allow children to better cope with the stress and noise in life.<sup>15</sup>

**Our community saw 13 schools implement mindfulness programming to support the community's youngest minds.** Research shows that students who participate in similar programs improved in the areas of empathy, perspective taking, optimism, emotional control, and mindfulness. They also were more likely to show improvements on trustworthiness, helpfulness, and sharing while showing less rule breaking and starting fewer fights than the control group.<sup>15</sup>

Two high schools, Kennedy and Jefferson, offered Purpose Workshops to students to help them connect with their purpose as they planned for their futures.

### Actions Completed by 57 Worksites

- 1 Creating designated quiet spaces
- 2 Posting company mission
- 3 Encouraging volunteering
- 4 Offering Purpose Workshops





# EAT WISELY

From school gardens to urban orchards, and with more than 325 garden plots on city-owned land, an innovative approach is underway to connect residents with the land and provide fresh produce to those in need.

Eating wisely is not a diet plan, it's a way of life in Blue Zones areas. Residents of Okinawa, Japan, have a smart strategy for maintaining a healthy weight. **Before meals they say "hara hachi bu," which means stop eating when you're 80 percent full.** Studies show that cutting back on calories can lead to better health, longevity, and weight loss. Centenarians in Blue Zones areas eat a plant-packed diet with a variety of fresh fruits, vegetables, and beans. Rich in disease-fighting nutrients, fava beans, black beans, soy beans, and lentils are the cornerstone of their diets.

**Don't diet; eat wisely.**

## WHY EATING WISELY MATTERS

It is estimated that by 2030, 86 percent of the American population will be overweight or obese if current eating habits and exercise habits remain the same.<sup>16</sup>

Food is fuel, and what we eat impacts our productivity, too. A 2012 study revealed that **unhealthy eating is related to a 66 percent increased risk of loss of productivity.** Health-related employee productivity loss accounts for 77 percent of all productivity loss and costs employers up to three times more in annual health care expenses.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to looking and feeling better, **the benefits of healthy eating are numerous. In the U.S. estimated savings are \$114.5 billion per year (in 2012 dollars) in medical savings, increased productivity, and reductions in heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes, and osteoporotic hip fractures.**<sup>18</sup> Poor diet is a major risk factor for these five health conditions, all of which reduce life expectancy. By making subtle but substantial changes to our food options, we can be healthier.

## How Eating Wisely Impacts Our Community

People make more than 200 food decisions every day.<sup>19</sup> Blue Zones Project helps people choose wisely. Cedar Rapids implemented small changes and defaults in restaurants, worksites, grocery stores, and schools. For example, restaurants created new, irresistible, good-for-you menu options. Grocery stores stocked their shelves with nutritious, tasty foods. Schools removed vending machines so kids aren't tempted by sugary snacks and sodas during the school day.

**1,838** actions taken by organizations to support eating wisely

**26,379** actions taken by individuals to eat wisely, like joining a Plant-Based Potluck Moai, adding healthy items to their grocery list, or growing a garden

**66 cooking classes with 1,222 participants** bringing healthier cooking home to their families

**27 Plant-Based Potluck Moais** with 178 participants

**21 gardens:** three community gardens and 18 school gardens



### BY THE NUMBERS

Since the early 1900s plate sizes have grown from

9.5 INCHES  
TO  
12.5 INCHES<sup>19</sup>

We've increased how much we eat by

27%<sup>19</sup>



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THE URBAN ORCHARD IS AN IMPORTANT ADDITION TO NOELRIDGE PARK. SUPPORTING LOCAL FOOD PRODUCTION AND WATCHING AS THE KIDS CONNECT TO NATURE AND GARDENING HAS BEEN REWARDING FOR ALL OF THE PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS.

Daniel Gibbins  
Parks Superintendent  
City of Cedar Rapids

## Community Gardens

As a result of updating an Urban Agriculture Ordinance in 2013, residents have embraced gardening on plots of land across the community. From school gardens to urban orchards and with more than 325 garden plots on city-owned land, an innovative approach is underway to connect our residents with the land and provide fresh produce to those in need.

Approximately 20 acres were harvested in 2014, with an estimated **29,564 pounds of food valued at \$52,000 distributed to local food pantries**. In 2015, the project expanded, coordinating growing across organizations to improve ease of growing, harvesting, and distribution. Feed Iowa First, a Food Environment Alliance partner, secured an old school bus, which was retrofitted to carry fresh vegetables to food pantry locations and food desert areas, providing free vegetables to underserved families. In 2015, Feed Iowa First farmed 17 acres of urban land for food production, up from only five acres in 2012.



An urban-greening project initiated by Blue Zones Project and led by high school students from IowaBIG designed and installed an urban fruit orchard at Noelridge Park, concluding with tree plantings in the park on Arbor Day. The year-long project involved the Cedar Rapids Parks and Recreation Department, City of Cedar Rapids, ISU Community Design Lab, Trees Forever, and Hughes Nursery.

Students from Harding Middle School assisted in planting trees at a local urban orchard. Onsite gardens complemented the curriculum at 18 schools and produce from those gardens is being used in nutrition education, in garden clubs, and some is even making its way onto plates in the lunchroom as salads, sides, and entrees.

## SEE IT IN ACTION

### Iowa Community Gardens: Growing Well-Being

Watch the video:

[explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids](http://explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids)



## In the News





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## COMMUNITY GARDENS



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### PEAS IN A POD

People who garden tend to eat more fruits and vegetables on a daily basis. In a survey of home and community gardeners in San Jose, California, participants doubled their vegetable intake and consumed the nationally recommended daily servings of vegetables. Another study from Denver, Colorado showed gardeners ate more fruits and vegetable than non-gardeners.<sup>20</sup>



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### HOME IS WHERE THE GARDEN IS

An American Community Gardening Association report showed community gardens can increase home prices for residences near the garden as much as 9.4 percentage points within five years. The report also showed community gardens contribute to a reduction in violent and non-violent crime in the neighborhood and an overall increase in the feeling of safety.<sup>21</sup>



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### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Schools are taking part, too, with gardens at all four Blue Zones Schools tended by students. The produce is being used in nutrition education and some is even making its way onto plates in the lunchroom as salads, sides, and entrees.

Students who have access to school garden programs score significantly higher on science achievement tests than students who are taught by strictly traditional classroom methods.<sup>22</sup>

## ORGANIZATIONS EATING WISELY

Changes made to our restaurants, grocery stores, and schools can make a huge impact on the health and well-being of the community as a whole. By working together, we can make eating wisely second nature, not a chore.

### Restaurants

**Our community saw 36 restaurants complete actions to make healthy food choices easier**

— things like offering half-size portions, creating new healthy entrees for adults and children, serving food on smaller plates, and serving healthier sides as the default option.

Restaurants are seeing noticeable business benefits.

**Great Harvest Bread Co. introduced Blue Zones-inspired entrees** and saw sales of its three-seed hummus sandwich increase by 1,600 percent. Promotion throughout the community as a Blue Zones Restaurant contributed to this success.



**The Early Bird Café orders 50 percent more fruit** since becoming a Blue Zones Restaurant.

The restaurant removed its fountain soda machine and switched all breads and wraps to whole-grain options.

**Club Deli** features healthy Blue Zones approved options on its menu, removes salt shakers from tables, and prominently displays fresh fruit at the ordering counter.

Local worksites are promoting these healthy options and leveraging Blue Zones Restaurants for catering.

## SEE IT IN ACTION

Blue Zones restaurants serve up healthy options across Iowa

Watch the video:

[explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids](http://explore.bluezonesproject.com/CedarRapids)



### BY THE NUMBERS

**1,000 CALORIES**  
in a typical American entree in a restaurant<sup>23</sup>

**2 EXTRA POUNDS**  
gained a year by eating one meal away from home a week<sup>24</sup>

**5.5% INCREASE**  
in same-store sales at restaurants that increased their better-for-you/low-calorie servings between 2006 and 2011<sup>24</sup>

**5.5% DECREASE**  
in sales at restaurants that did not increase their better-for-you/low-calorie servings<sup>24</sup>

## Grocery Stores

Americans go to the grocery store more than twice a week. The actions we take to determine what we eat begin at the grocery store. Many grocery stores currently lead people to unhealthy foods in the way they are designed, the deals they promote, and the packaging of the food they sell.<sup>25</sup> Our community is taking the lead in taking the grocery store back.

60%

Of the food we purchase is highly processed, fatty, salty or sugary.<sup>26</sup>

43%

Increase of healthy Blue Zones food sales at the Hy-Vee Edgewood Road when foods were promoted in end caps and through shelf signs



### Actions Completed by 4 Grocery Stores

- 1 Sharing healthy recipes and offering cooking classes
- 2 Water made available in checkout lanes
- 3 Healthy food options on end caps
- 4 Blue Zones checkout lanes

”

THE BLUE ZONES-INSPIRED “SO YOU THINK YOU CAN COOK” COOK-OFF AT THE DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET WAS FUN AND A GREAT REMINDER OF THE IMPORTANCE OF INCORPORATING PLENTY OF FRESH VEGETABLES IN OUR DIET. THE BLUE ZONES APPROVED HONEY SOY VEGETABLE STIR FRY RECIPE WAS FAST AND EASY TO MAKE, APPEALING TO THE EYE, AND DELICIOUS. WHAT A GOOD WAY TO USE A VARIETY OF SUMMER PRODUCE. I’LL DEFINITELY MAKE THIS AGAIN.

Jade DeLang Hart  
Resident  
City of Cedar Rapids



## Worksites

Seventy percent of Americans eat at their desks several times a week, which can lead to distracted, disengaged, and mindless overeating.<sup>27</sup>

ESP International created a wellness refrigerator full of healthier food options that are lower in cost than snacks in their vending machine, and all proceeds from these purchases are donated to ESP International's charitable foundation. Raining Rose uses red, yellow, and green sticker codes to alert people to healthy choices in vending machines.

## Schools

**With childhood obesity at 17 percent, there's never been a more important time to examine what students are eating at school.**<sup>28</sup>

The place they go to learn about history and science should be the place they go to learn about eating wisely as well.

Garfield and Viola Gibson Elementary Schools hold recess before lunch to ensure children eat well and return to class calm and ready to learn. Grant Elementary redesigned the lunchroom to add fun, age-appropriate signage using the school mascot to make healthy choices easier to spot for kids.

Students who attend schools that sell foods with low nutrient density and sugar-sweetened beverages have lower intake of fruits, vegetables, and milk at lunch and higher daily percentages of calories from total fat and saturated fat.<sup>29</sup>

Redesigning the school lunchroom is a simple and cost-effective way to nudge students into eating healthier without creating strict policies. Research by Brian Wansink of Cornell University found that **simple changes to the lunchroom design tripled salad sales, doubled fruit sales, doubled sales of healthy sandwiches, and reduced the purchase of ice cream.**<sup>19</sup> By optimizing the school environment, students are nudged towards healthier choices.

## Actions Completed by 57 Worksites

- 1 Healthy potlucks and worksite gardens
- 2 Improved cafeteria options
- 3 Healthier vending machine choices

## Actions Completed by 16 Schools

- 1 School gardens
- 2 Farm-to-school programs
- 3 Healthier vending machines
- 4 New policies for celebrating and fundraising with food

Social well-being has increased five percent since 2015, and 81 percent of people say their relationships with the people in their lives are stronger than ever.

The world's longest-lived people in Blue Zones areas have always understood the power of social connectedness and putting their families first.

In Okinawa, "Moais" — groups of about five people who commit to each other for their whole lives — provide social connection and emotional and sometimes financial support in times of need. Moai members have the security of knowing there is always someone there for them.

**Putting family first and investing time with loved ones can add up to six years to your life.**<sup>30</sup> Having a sense of belonging is an important part of enjoying a long and healthy life. It doesn't matter which faith you belong to, **studies have shown that people who belong to a place of worship and attend four times a month live four to fourteen years longer than those who don't.**<sup>31</sup>





WE STARTED OUT WALKING TOGETHER, AND WE WOULD TRAVEL ACROSS TOWN TO MEET ONCE A WEEK. WE CONTINUE TO TRAVEL TO EACH OTHER, AND NOW WE HAVE CAMPING TRIPS AND FAMILY GET-TOGETHERS ON A REGULAR BASIS. WE HAVE NOT ONLY BECOME FRIENDS, BUT FAMILY!

Shannon Keller  
"Misfits" Walking Moai member  
Cedar Rapids

## WHY CONNECTION MATTERS

Our connections to friends, family, and those around us are very powerful. They have the ability to shape our lives in more ways than we realize. Research shows that even your friends' friends' friends — people you don't even know — have the ability to affect your health, happiness, and behaviors.<sup>32</sup>

### How Connectedness Impacts our Community

Spending time with people who positively influence one another is crucial. In Cedar Rapids, we embraced the power of social connections to bring citizens together through groups, clubs, and faith-based organizations.

We also encourage social connections throughout the community with our new community gardens, outdoor dining locales, and miles of new trails.

Meet Me at the Market is a unique opportunity inspired by Blue Zones Project that allows community members to connect every week from May through September. More than 400 people gather every Thursday night over the course of 20 weeks for free activities, including group walks, yoga, and healthy cooking demonstrations.



#### BY THE NUMBERS

340

Actions taken by organizations to build strong connections

15,995

Actions taken by individuals to connect, like designating regular family dinner nights, joining a Moai, or volunteering

248

Walking Moais with more than 1,500 participants

16

Purpose Moais with 144 participants

27

Plant-Based Potluck Moais with 178 participants



## ORGANIZATIONS CONNECTING

There are many ways to promote connections in organizations throughout the community.

By providing these opportunities, everyone in the community feels like a part of something bigger.

### Worksites

The digitalization of the work day has done wonders for productivity but not much for social connectivity.

Americans change jobs more often than ever before, and working from home or in isolated conditions can further a lack of socialization among coworkers and peers.

**Our community saw 57 worksites complete actions to help employees connect and boost social connections,** including things like “lunch with a co-worker” programs, flexible work schedules, offering strengths assessments, and implementing Moais.

### Schools

Students will tell you that they’re connected with their classmates, but, they mean that they’re connected by their cell phones, which children receive at the age of six, on average.<sup>33</sup>

To bolster real, human interaction, Cedar Rapids got students to plug in differently. Schools embraced connecting students to the world around them by establishing the **Legacy Project**, a program that encourages students to interact with and share stories with older adults.

### Restaurants

Eating together fosters togetherness in all kinds of families, even those that are the size of whole communities.

There is no better opportunity to connect than around a dining table. Outdoor dining options downtown provide more opportunities for people to connect more deeply with their neighbors and community while enjoying a healthy meal outdoors.



### FRIENDS ALWAYS SHARE

Friends provide more than good times, memories, and companionship — they also share health habits and other traits with one another. Did you know that if your friends are smokers, unhappy, or obese, you're more likely to adopt these same traits? You are twice as likely to be overweight if your three closest friends are overweight,<sup>34</sup> and inversely, you are 20 percent more likely to succeed at new behaviors if you do them with a buddy.<sup>35</sup>



## GOOD FRIENDS AND FAMILY MAKE EVERYTHING BETTER



### EAT TOGETHER BETTER

Adolescents who eat dinner with their family are 15 percent less likely to become obese. Additionally, a report by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse points out that teens who eat dinner with their families more than three times a week are less likely to do poorly in school.<sup>37</sup>



### SOCIAL WELL-BEING

The amount of time you spend socializing each day has a direct impact on your well-being. To have a good day, a person needs around six hours of socializing. So, get socializing!<sup>36</sup>



### DON'T GO IT ALONE

It's getting harder to be connected. In 2004, 25 percent of Americans felt they had no one to confide in. A lack of social connectedness leaves people vulnerable to depression, anxiety, and other anti-social behaviors.<sup>38</sup> Social isolation and feelings of loneliness can increase the chance of premature death by 14 percent—nearly double the risk of premature death from obesity.<sup>39</sup>



# CONGRATS, CEDAR RAPIDS!

A PROUD BLUE ZONES COMMUNITY

**We did this together.** By putting our personal and collective well-being first, we're making healthy choices easier, creating more economic opportunities, and ensuring a better quality of life for everyone. **Here's to making Cedar Rapids one of the healthiest cities in the nation, where residents are living better, together.**

## APPENDIX

### Designated Organizations

#### Blue Zones Grocery Stores

Collins Road Hy-Vee  
Edgewood Road Hy-Vee  
First Avenue Hy-Vee Grocery Store  
Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee  
Mount Vernon Road Hy-Vee  
Oakland Road Hy-Vee  
Wilson Avenue Hy-Vee

#### Blue Zones Schools

Arthur Elementary School  
Bowman Woods Elementary School  
Cleveland Elementary School  
Erskine Elementary School  
Garfield Elementary School  
Grant Elementary School  
Harrison Elementary School  
Hiawatha Elementary School  
Jefferson High School  
Johnson Elementary School of the Arts  
Kenwood Elementary School

Nixon Elementary School  
Prairie Ridge Elementary School  
Taylor Elementary School  
Truman Elementary School  
Viola-Gibson Elementary School  
Xavier High School

#### Blue Zones Restaurants

Bistro on the River Inc.  
Brewed Awakenings Coffeehouse  
Brewhemia  
Club Deli  
Coffee Emporium  
Deb's Ice Cream & Deli  
Edgewood Road Hy-Vee  
Great Harvest Bread Co.  
Greyhound Deli  
Hy-Vee Market Café  
Java Joint  
Johnson Ave Hy-Vee  
La Cantina

New Pioneer Coop Deli  
Phong Lan  
Puerto Vallarta  
Riley's Cafe 1st Avenue  
Riley's Cafe 6th Street  
Riley's Cafe Boyson  
Riley's Cafe Center Point  
Sauce Bar and Bistro  
Sub City  
Taste of India  
The Blue Strawberry Coffee Company  
The Class Act  
The Early Bird Cafe  
Vito's on 42nd  
Wilson Avenue Hy-Vee CR#3

## Blue Zones Worksites

1st Avenue Hy-Vee	Geonetric	Rockwell Collins
6th Street Hy-Vee Drugstore	Grant Wood AEA	Rockwell Collins Recreation Center
Alliant Energy — Cedar Rapids GO	Great America Financial Services	Ruffalo CODY
American Profol	Health Solutions	Sports Licensed Division of the Adidas Group
Apache Hose & Belting Company Inc.	Horizons, A Family Service Alliance	Stamats Communications, Inc.
Area Substance Abuse Council	Involta	The Gazette Company
Bergan Paulsen — CR	Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee	The Ghosh Center for Oncology and Hematology
Blairs Ferry Road Hy-Vee Drugstore	Johnson Avenue Hy-Vee Drugstore	Toyota Financial Services
Boyson Road Hy-Vee Drugstore	Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids	Transamerica
CarePro Health Services	Linn County CSB	TrueNorth Companies
Cedar Rapids Bank & Trust	Linn County LIFTS	United Way of East Central Iowa
Cedar Rapids Community School District	Linn County Public Health	Unity Point — St. Luke's Hospital
Cedar Rapids Goodwill of the Heartland	Linn County Public Service Center	University of Iowa Community Credit Union
Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance	Linn County Sheriff's Office	Van Meter Inc.—Cedar Rapids
City of Cedar Rapids	Mercy Medical Center — Cedar Rapids	Wellmark Cedar Rapids
Coe College	Midwest Metal Products	Wilson Avenue Hy-Vee
Collins Road Hy-Vee	Mount Mercy University	YMCA — Cedar Rapids Branches
Edgewood Road Hy-Vee	Mt. Vernon Road Hy-Vee	
ESP International	Oakland Road Hy-Vee	
	Raining Rose	
	Rapids Reproductions	

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