

Inverness Village promotes living 'stronger'

with Blue Zones campaign



Inspired by a bestselling book, this senior living community encouraged residents to adopt lessons from the healthier, long-lived populations in five distinct geographical regions—the Blue Zones—to improve their well-being

This article profiles a recipient of the 2014 ICAA Innovators Achievement Award, a category of the Innovators Awards program recognizing programs and concepts that advance active aging. Presented in three categories, the annual Innovators Awards honor creativity and excellence in the active-aging industry. They highlight innovations that lead the way, set new standards, and make a difference in the lives of older adults.

Inverness Village “lends itself to a rich and rewarding later life,” observes Director of Wellness Jana Headrick. Located in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the life care retirement community “was the dream of a group of dedicated civic leaders ... who believed that life’s third stage is a time to learn, grow, serve, share, discover, experience, explore and continually improve,” Headrick says. These founders “were committed to enhancing the long life, personal growth, autonomy, health and well-being of all those they served.”

More than 400 adults ages 55 and older live on the 190-acre Inverness Village campus today. The not-for-profit community, managed by Asbury in Germantown, Maryland, exists to “[Do] all the

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An Inverness Village resident sketches a scene. Many people derive a sense of purpose, a Blue Zones trait, from creative work



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Women enjoy each other's company while making jewelry at Inverness Village. Social circles abound in this community—a common denominator of Blue Zones

good we can by providing exceptional lifestyle opportunities to those we serve.”

Building on existing efforts to support whole-person wellness, Headrick and her colleagues launched a semester-long campaign in 2014 based on Dan Buettner's bestseller *The Blue Zones*, a book that describes the shared traits of populations in five long-lived areas of the world. The semester was the community's most influential to date, according to Headrick. “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER” produced more permanent changes in lifestyle choices, increased requests for healthy dining options, and [had] more positive impact on how we operate on a daily basis than any other singular focused theme we have ever done,” she reveals.

To learn more, the *Journal on Active Aging*® recently asked Headrick to describe the “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER”

initiative and how Inverness Village delivered its components to support residents in living well.

JAA: *What was the catalyst that led Inverness Village to establish the “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER” initiative?*

JH: As a leadership team, we were inspired after listening to Dan Buettner speak at the LeadingAge conference about *The Blue Zones*, and his studies of the areas of the world where people live longer and, more importantly, with less chronic disease, illness and disability. We were intrigued and wanted to know more, so as a team we read about these zones and learned their secrets to longevity. We began to think, Could we make our retirement community a Blue Zone? Could we use the concept of the Blue Zones to help the residents of Inverness Village not only add years to their life, but life to their years?

In *The Blue Zones*, Dan Buettner discusses the common denominators found in these longevity superstars, distilling shared traits into nine lessons for living longer.¹ It was evident to us after reading the book that the power of these lessons wasn't in their complexity, but rather in the environment that influences the lifestyles of residents in the Blue Zones and allows them to maximize their years. We chose to concentrate on how we could help Inverness Village residents and associates live *stronger*. Our efforts focused on a campaign to explore the secrets of the Blue Zones using the “Power of 9” as the basis for the semester's theme, “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER.”

JAA: *What did Inverness Village hope to achieve with this initiative? What were the objectives?*

JH: As with any of our wellness programs, we hoped to meet people where they were in their journey and provide them with resources and tools to age successfully. The main objective was to share the Power of 9 in hopes that residents would adopt one or more of the lessons to help improve their well-being. It was also a way for us to showcase the many things we already offer at our community to support living stronger.

JAA: *What were key programming components of “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER,” and why?*

JH: Here are the Power of 9 and just a few of things we implemented to support them:

Hara Hachi Bu. Okinawans say this 2,500-year-old mantra before meals to remind them to stop eating when their stomachs are 80% full, to maintain optimal weight. Our dining tables had table tents with the 80% rule to encourage residents to stop eating when they were no longer hungry.

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Purpose. Blue Zone cultures focus on “ikigai,” which translates as “why I wake up in the morning.” Having a sense of purpose adds to life expectancy. Our chaplain created a special presentation, “Rethinking your Sense of Purpose: Re-Engaging your Sense of Meaning,” and focused on purpose during vespers and worship services in the health center.

Move Naturally. Movement Stations encouraged sit-to-stands at elevators and in common areas, nudging residents to add intentional movement into their day.

Plant Slant. Blue Zone meals were placed on menus throughout all venues, and Meatless Monday was incorporated. Our executive director gave a presentation to residents on the health benefits of plant-based diets. And health center

residents created a greenhouse of their own vegetables.

Loved Ones First. A Loved Ones Luncheon held on Valentine’s Day invited spouses, friends, neighbors or “special someones” to share what linked them. Lessons about video calling, Facebook, and text messaging helped residents stay connected with family.

Belong. Regularly participating in faith-based activities is a strong predictor of longevity. To increase participation, we introduced a seasonal Bible-study series and worship services on compelling topics such as “Useless Baggage,” “Shadows that We Carry,” and “When the Wine Fails.”

Down Shift. The world’s longest-lived people find ways to shed stress. Group tai chi, happy hours and laughter clubs helped the residents “down shift.”

Grapes of Life. A local wine cellar shipped in Sardinian wine with high concentrations of polyphenols for residents to enjoy during a wine tasting. Happy hours featured this wine throughout the month.

Right Tribe. Social circles that support healthy behaviors are shown to increase longevity. Such groups abound throughout our community—for example, the Women’s Circle, Men’s Fitness League, Women in the Weight Room, support groups, intergenerational reading programs, and volunteer and social opportunities.

JAA: *How did Inverness Village introduce the initiative to residents, and how did they respond?*

JH: The intention was to slowly integrate the nine lessons over three months throughout the continuum of care, so residents could ease them into their lifestyles and create their personal Blue Zones. To educate residents on the Blue

Zones and their longevity secrets, we held a launch presentation introducing the Power of 9 while sipping red wine and tasting the traditional foods of these areas. The response was overwhelming. In fact, we had to hold encore presentations just to accommodate all the residents interested in “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER.”

Of the programs implemented specifically to support the Power of 9, we had a participation rate of over 1,566 throughout the continuum. Residents were so pleased with the results that they didn’t want “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER” to stop. So a second semester theme, “Small Things, Big Difference,” was an outgrowth and focused on continuing the ideas and principles they had learned and adopted.

JAA: *What was involved practically in offering “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER”? And did you encounter any challenges?*

JH: The experience team was able to weave “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER” into existing program structure. The focus of the activity simply shifted to center on one of the Power of 9. Examples include a focus on purpose during vespers and worship services in the health center, and a collaboration with dining services to highlight existing menu items that residents could choose to adopt a more plant-based focus at mealtime.

When developing and delivering “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER,” we found it was a lot of information to disseminate, so we had to do it in a way that was not overwhelming for staff and residents. And that required extra planning and intentionality.

JAA: *What were the initiative’s most notable outcomes?*

JH: Many of the Power of 9 have been enhanced and permanently woven into the operations and culture of Inverness

Providing a Blue Zones-inspired campaign: five key steps

1. Encourage staff members and interested residents/members to read *The Blue Zones* by Dan Buettner.
2. Engage staff in the campaign.
3. Collaborate with dining, spiritual and resident committees (or relevant committees in your organization).
4. Ask staff who implement programs to identify what the Power of 9 looks like within the continuum of care or population they serve.
5. Conduct a comprehensive rollout or introduction of the Power of 9 and how people can incorporate them simply into their existing lifestyle.

Village. Some specific impacts from “Go BLUE: Live Stronger” include:

- Many staff and residents have adopted vegetarian or Blue Zone meal plans. All dining venues have permanently incorporated Blue Zone meal options and Meatless Mondays, while residents can still be heard saying, “Hara Hachi Bu.”
- Our Board of Directors and Advisory Board now eat a Blue Zone meal at every meeting. In addition, movement sessions have been incorporated into every Inverness Village meeting over one hour.
- The sit-to-stand Movement Stations are now permanent fixtures. The Men’s Fitness League and Women in the Weight Room social groups continue to grow in membership, and additional “movement” programming meets residents where they are to encourage movement throughout the day. With “Movement in the Moment”, for example, a Fitness Center staff member visits memory neigh-

borhoods for 30 minutes daily to facilitate functional and active movement, such as group walks and flower-cutting in the garden.

- U.F.O. (Unique Fun Opportunity) was a way for our chaplain to grow awareness around Belonging, Purpose and Right Tribe. And the spiritual committee created a vacation Bible school, using music, film, conversation, creative experiences, and fellowship to encourage participants to be energized and “inner-gized” by their love of God and the beauty of others.
- Inverness Village invited Nick Buettner, brother of Dan, to present to residents on his exploration of the Blue Zones. He shared photographs, stories and eyewitness accounts of the impact the Power of 9 had on people in these areas, and spoke about the importance of environment to longevity and well-being. Nick also noted that the culture, program, practices and built environment at Inverness Village support the Blue Zones lifestyle.

JAA: *In your view, how did “Go BLUE: Live STRONGER” advance active aging at Inverness Village?*

JH: The introduction of *The Blue Zones* Power of 9 allowed us to highlight the benefits that already existed on our campus in a way that was palatable for residents to make simple but powerful lifestyle changes. It also allowed the health center residents specifically to understand the focus on quality of life, not just length of life. 🌀

The Journal on Active Aging thanks Jana Headrick for her help with this article. For more information about Inverness Village, visit www.invernessvillage.com.

Images courtesy of Inverness Village

Reference

1. Buettner, D. (2008, 2012). *The Blue Zones, Second Edition: 9 Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who’ve Lived the Longest*. Washington, DC: National Geographic. Visit <http://www.bluezones.com> for information.



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