



Muscatine earns Blue Zones certification

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MUSCATINE — It was not the celebration of the end of a project, but the beginning of one.

Members of the Blue Zones Project of Muscatine celebrated that beginning Tuesday night, as a crowd of more than 50 project volunteers, residents, and city and business leaders learned that Muscatine had officially earned certification as a Blue Zones Community.

"Wow, what a deal this is, isn't it?" Muscatine Mayor DeWayne Hopkins asked the crowd.

The Blue Zones Project, based on principles developed by Dan Buettner, author of the books "Blue Zones" and "Thrive," offers research and information targeted at helping people live longer, better lives by changing their environment and lifestyle.

"In supporting a commitment to healthy environment changes, Muscatine has made a wise investment in its future, and I am thrilled to recognize the community's achievements," Buettner said in a news release announcing the certification.

The Blue Zones Project is part of Gov. Terry Branstad's Healthiest State Initiative. It is sponsored by Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield and Healthways.

At the celebration, volunteers and other speakers recognized many of the community initiatives that have been undertaken to help gain Muscatine's certification. They include:

- The city's Complete Streets Policy, named one of the top such policies in America last year by the organization Smart Growth America, aimed at producing thoroughfares that are friendly to non-automobile traffic. Some projects that come from that policy are the \$5.3 million Cedar Street Reconstruction Project and the \$2.4 million Colorado Street Reconstruction Project.
- A city allocation of \$50,000 annually for the next 15 years to complete sidewalk gaps in the city.
- Healthier dining options in seven Blue Zones certified restaurants, and three Blue Zones certified schools that have banned sugar-sweetened beverages and vending machines from their campuses.
- Ten worksites, including Muscatine City Hall, becoming Blue Zones Worksites.
- Twenty percent of the residents in Muscatine committing to the Blue Zones Project and at least one well-being improvement goal.

"We're in this all together," community program manager Joni Axel said. "We've really come together for our well-being."

Healthways and Wellmark Blue Cross/Blue Shield has been providing initial funding for the startup of the Blue Zones Project Muscatine, including staffing and office space. On Thursday, Blue Zones Project Muscatine will close its offices in downtown Muscatine. Project members Andrew Anderson and Axel will be leaving the campaign.

Jodi Hansen of the Greater Muscatine Chamber of Commerce and Industry will serve as the project lead for the program, with the support of the Chamber.