



Vitality Project

Helping you live longer, better

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Albert Lea Residents Pledge to Add 10,000 Collective Years of Life to Their City

(*Albert Lea, MN*) Hundreds of Albert Lea residents joined together on Thursday night and pledged to take part in the **AARP®/Blue Zones® Vitality Project sponsored by United Health Foundation**, an unprecedented city-wide health makeover designed to inspire residents to take charge of their health so that they can live longer, better.

Since January, Albert Lea leaders have been working behind the scenes with the AARP/Blue Zones Vitality Project to make changes to their community that will promote health and longevity. Today, residents who live or work in Albert Lea made an individual commitment to participate in the first-ever longevity makeover of an **entire community**. The Vitality Project will shine a national spotlight on the efforts of one small town working together to make a commitment to better health and increased longevity.

“Albert Lea residents will learn that by making a few simple changes to the way we live and the way we think, we can vastly improve our health and actually stack the deck in our favor to live longer, better,” said Dan Buettner, founder of Blue Zones and the project leader. Buettner is a Minnesotan and author of the *New York Times* bestselling book, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*.

“The people of Albert Lea have shown an intense commitment to this project already— and I believe they are ready to not just add years to their life – **but life to their years**,” said AARP National Board Member Hubert H. “Skip” Humphrey, III. “AARP is proud to watch Albert Lea, Minnesota show the rest of the world how to make a serious and mindful commitment to improving health and longevity.”

"The United Health Foundation has a passion for supporting projects that can strengthen the overall health of a community," said Daniel Johnson, executive director of the United Health Foundation. "We jumped at the opportunity to participate with AARP and Blue Zones as they find new ways to improve community health through a holistic approach."

A dynamic web site was launched at www.aarp.org/bluezonesproject to track the town's progress and allow Albert Lea residents to take the "Vitality Compass," a tool designed to project life expectancy and allow residents to track their progress.

National Experts Come to Albert Lea

The project is using national experts to bring the latest teachings about health and longevity to Albert Lea.

- ❖ Longevity Expert **Dan Buettner**, director of the **AARP®/Blue Zones® Vitality Project sponsored by United Health Foundation** and Blue Zones founder, shared longevity information about his recent trip to Ikaria, Greece, a longevity hotspot where people are reaching age 90 at astonishing rates.
- ❖ University of Minnesota's **Dr. Leslie Lytle**, co-director of the Vitality Project is an expert in children's health promotion and childhood obesity prevention and is working with Albert Lea schools, employers and government to improve foods and activity offerings.
- ❖ At the launch event, national eating expert **Dr. Brian Wansink** provided information about avoiding "mindless eating," and offered tips for making over one's habitat. In Albert Lea, he will work with restaurants, businesses, and citizens' homes, teaching simple tricks to eat less.
- ❖ **Richard Leider**, an expert in helping people find a clear sense of purpose, will lead a series of workshops free of charge for about 1,500 residents in Albert Lea to help them realize and express their gifts and talents.

Community Events and Engagement

From now through September, the Vitality Project will work with volunteer leaders to roll out several activities designed to inspire health and wellness.

- ❖ An AARP Walking Program will help residents exercise and strengthen social circles and will provide 3,000 pedometers to dedicated walkers.
- ❖ An intergenerational "walking school bus" is now launched, to provide volunteers such as retirees to walk Albert Lea area children to school as a group.
- ❖ Volunteer leaders will promote community gardens, healthy cooking classes and wine tastings to promote the teachings of the Blue Zones.

Visit www.aarp.org/bluezonesproject or call Community Education (507)379-4834 to find out more about the various events and projects available to residents of Albert Lea.

About AARP

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that helps people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. AARP does not endorse candidates for public office or make contributions to either political campaigns or candidates. We produce AARP The Magazine, the definitive voice for 50+ Americans and the world's largest-circulation magazine with over 34.5 million readers; AARP Bulletin, the go-to news source for AARP's 40 million members and Americans 50+; AARP Segunda Juventud, the only bilingual U.S. publication dedicated exclusively to the 50+ Hispanic community; and our website, AARP.org. AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity that provides security, protection, and empowerment to older persons in need with support from thousands of volunteers, donors, and sponsors. We have staffed offices in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

About Blue Zones®

Founded by Dan Buettner as an ongoing project that is part of Quest Network, Inc., Blue Zones® studies the world's longest-lived populations for wellness information and lifestyle management tools that can help Americans live longer, healthier lives. For each Blue Zones® expedition, Buettner and his award-winning team journey to a specific region whose population is reaching age 100 at an extraordinarily high rate. These longevity hotspots are called "Blue Zones®" Buettner and his team of scientists identify and study the regions' common threads in lifestyle behavior, diet, outlook and stress-coping mechanisms. Through this ongoing study, Blue Zones® has developed a formula of the world's best practices in healthy longevity that people can put to work in their own lives. In short, Buettner aims to help everyone live within their personal "Blue Zone." Buettner's research and his insight into enhancing longevity has been published in his *New York Times* bestselling book, *THE BLUE ZONES: Lessons for Living Longer by the People Who've Lived the Longest*, which was published by National Geographic Book in 2008. Partially funded by the National Institutes on Health, Blue Zones® is advised by an internationally-recognized panel of academic and scientific experts on the topic, and supported by the National Geographic Expeditions Council as well as by researchers at the National Institute on Aging (NIA). For more information, visit www.bluezones.com.

About the United Health Foundation

Guided by a passion to help people live healthier lives, United Health Foundation supports activities that expand access to quality health care services for those in challenging circumstances and partners with others to improve the well being of communities. The Foundation also provides helpful information to support decisions that lead to better health outcomes and healthier communities. Since established by UnitedHealth Group [NYSE: UNH] in 1999 as a not for profit private foundation, the Foundation has committed more than \$160 million to improve health and health care. For more information, visit www.unitedhealthfoundation.org.