

Let's spread the concept of long-living 'blue zones'

by MARK PAVILONS

The key to longevity, according to Carl Reiner, is to interact with other people.

Turns out he was right. And comedian George Burns, who made it to 100, once said the key to longevity is avoiding stress, worry and tension.

Turns out he was right, too.

The Dalai Lama contends that a long life depends on kindness and a good heart.

He is likely right as well.

I recently watched a short documentary on 'Blue Zones,' specific hot spots around the world where people routinely live to be centenarians. They don't only live long, but are active, spry, mentally agile and have no health issues.

Too good to be true?

'Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones' takes viewers around the world to investigate the diet and lifestyles of those living the longest lives. Explore the original blue zones, be immersed in their culture and lifestyles, and see how Blue Zones is applying the research in communities across North America.

In the early 2000s, Dan Buettner collaborated with National Geographic to reverse-engineer a formula for longevity. He scoured the globe for years in pursuit of places where people live much longer than average, and the concept of blue zones came to fruition. To date, the expeditions unveiled Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Ikaria, Greece; Nicoya, Costa Rica; and Loma Linda, California, as blue zones with the highest rates of living centenarians. These five spots share some similar elements - a plant-based diet, natural movement, and putting family first - that have been proven to promote longevity and health in residents.

It's a must-watch documentary and dives into one of the Blue Zones around the globe - the Italian mountain villages of Sardinia; Japan's famous Okinawan people, the family and wine-oriented Greek Ikarians; the farmers of Costa Rica's Nicoya region; the tight-knit Seventh Day Adventists in Loma Linda, and the surprising rise of centenarians in Singapore.

There is no one simple answer. It's a combination of diet, exercise, simplicity, and yes, little to no stress or anxiety. Our species has been searching for the proverbial fountain of youth for hundreds, perhaps thousands of years. And what, my friends, would we do with immortality exactly?

Buettner, in his travels, created a chart that indicated all the right ingredients that perpetuated longevity. They include a sense of belonging and connection to others; a plant-based diet; a sense of purpose; physically moving naturally; having a positive outlook and overall just eating wisely. And let's not forget the wine, and a strong faith. Some people right here have the right idea. Going for walks in the neighbourhood or on the trails.

Enjoying community activities, volunteering, gathering at special events. And drinking wine, well that goes without saying.

I have attended many events in King where the room is filled with kind people, chatting, laughing and enjoying a great 'farm to table' meal. It just doesn't get any better than that.

One city caught my attention in the documentary - Singapore. Its residents have the highest life expectancy in the world at 81.4 and

85.7 for men and women respectively.

Mortality rates in Singapore due to cancer, stroke and heart diseases have also reduced over the years.

Their sense of duty and community is commendable. Their grass roots efforts during the pandemic were admirable.

There are other interesting aspects of Singapore that we in the west should take note of.

Roughly 90 per cent of households in Singapore live within a 10-minute walk from a park and 70% live within a 10-minute walk from public transit. It's one of the world's greenest and most liveable cities, said the report.

In a city of roughly 5 million, that's quite impressive.

Some 80 per cent of resident households live in Housing and Development Board flats, with 90 per cent owning their own homes. Families buying their first flat can use the Enhanced CPF Housing Grant.

Singapore is aiming for 20-minute towns within a 45-minute city, meaning people can walk, cycle, or ride to the nearest neighbourhood centre within 20 minutes, and complete most peak-period journeys between their homes and workplaces within 45 minutes.

Brilliant! Here, we all know that Toronto is an hour away from Toronto!

With the GTA struggling with a housing crisis, why can't we take a lesson from Singapore?

Why can't Caledon become its own Blue Zone? We have the will, the resources, brain power and clean air to start. All we need is a bit more infrastructure, making every municipal facility, village core, just a quick jaunt from one another.

Can you imagine local centenarians walking, arm in arm, along a never-ending local sidewalk, admiring the greenery?

Herbal tea shops, an abundance of locally grown whole grains, nuts, fruits and veggies will dominate the landscape. Citizens will do Tai chi in every park. We could bring back community potlucks, where everyone gathers, bringing all the farm-to-table products we could ever need.

Yes, my friends, being a healthy centenarian is within our grasp. Let's all work together and take as many baby steps as we need to reach this goal.