



Klamath Falls Blue Zone Wins:

More than \$1.3 million in grant funding to support community well-being projects including Safe Routes to Parks, Safe Routes to Schools, a Cigarette Litter Prevention Program, and supporting a preventative food pantry.

The Dalles Blue Zone Wins:

The Dalles, a town 90 miles east of Portland, has seen a decrease in overweight and obesity of more than 12 percent since 2017. More than 1,400 people have made a personal pledge to live healthier, longer lives.

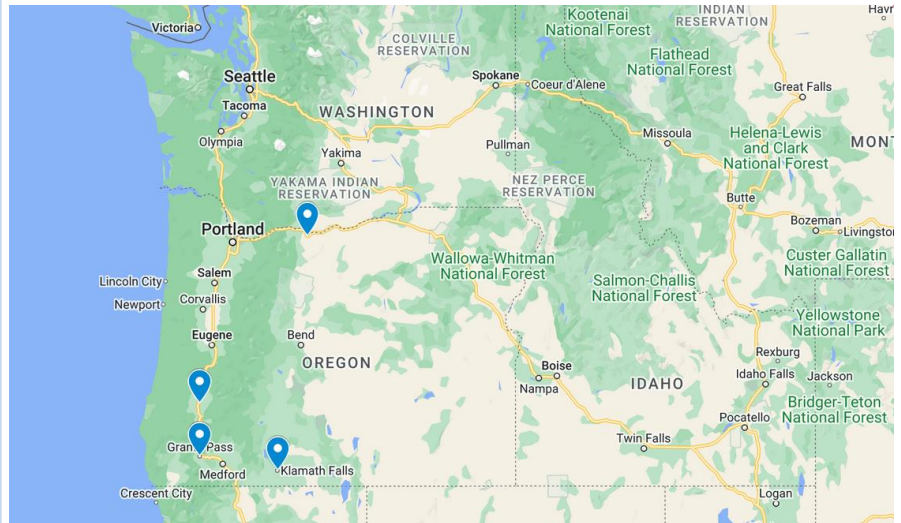
Grants Pass Blue Zone Wins: In May 2023, the Grants Pass City Council passed a one-of-a-kind sustainability plan that, if implemented, would transition publicly owned buildings and vehicles to renewable energy, diversifying their power sources in case of natural disaster.

Umpqua Region Blue Zone Wins:

Tucked away in southern Oregon, Umpqua Valley was the most recent place to be recognized as a certified Blue Zones Community® after it demonstrated improvement in predefined community metrics such as childhood obesity, tobacco usage, and factors related to economic development; and measurable improvement in well-being,

What Are Blue Zone Projects and Where Are They in Oregon?

By Lilly Anderson, MPH, DAFH Director, April 2024



Blue Zone Projects in Oregon: The Dalles, Klamath Falls, Grant Pass and the Umpqua Region, including Roseburg.

In our last issue we investigated Blue Zones, areas that the world's longest living residents call home. Many of the protective or health enhancing features or habits that help the centenarians live so long are factors that all the Blue Zones have in common, such as eating primarily plant-based foods, eating relatively few processed foods, regular consumption of foods high in antioxidants, living in geographical areas that encourage, even require daily physical activity, and having strong social networks. From this early research and reporting came the Blue Zones **Projects**. The Blue Zones Projects are initiatives designed to help people live healthier, but rather than relying on individual behavior change, the Blue Zones Projects focuses on creating surroundings that default to healthy choices.

In Oregon, OSU Extension Service and Cambria Health Solutions have sponsored Blue Zones Projects in four areas: Klamath Falls, the Dalles, Grants Pass and the Umpqua region, including Roseburg. These are now official Blue Zone Project Demonstration Communities.¹

The Blue Zones Projects bring all sectors of the community (residents, businesses and civic leaders) to the table and asks them to commit to actions that will provide people with the opportunity to live a healthier life. This commitment must be demonstrated with financial support, volunteerism, and program participation by all sectors.

In early 2014, leadership funding from Oregon-based Cambria Health Foundation helped launch Oregon's Healthiest State organization and brought the Blue Zones Projects to Oregon.² The Blue Zones Project model is a three-year, comprehensive plan that focuses on changing the natural environments, built environments, policies and social networks to improve the well-being of residents, lower health care costs and increase civic engagement. The Blue Zone Project team brings with them a vast amount of experience working with community leaders, businesses, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, faith communities, public jurisdictions, and other groups to make changes that optimize people's health.

At this time, all four Blue Zones Project areas have experienced measurable impacts, including decreased tobacco use, increased use of Farmer's Markets, reopening of previously closed grocery stores, and increased resident feelings of safety and security.¹ In addition to stores and restaurants featuring healthy foods and increasing access to Farmer's Markets, Blue Zone communities also host workshops and classes followed by *moias*, the Okinawa term for small social group. Participants in *moias* agree to meet for 30 minutes a week for 10 weeks. *Moias* might be centered on healthy meal potlucks or a physical activity like a walking group. Participation focuses on living with purpose.³

Lauren Kraemer, Assistant Professor of Practice with OSU Extension Services Family & Community Health Program, who guided the process to bring the Blue Zones Projects to The Dalles, has this to say about Blue Zones, *"I'm convinced that the holistic framework of health that Blue Zones uses is the best way to improve the health and well-being of a community."* In my work with the SNAP-Ed Program, Food Hero, and Extension – much of our work encourages more physical activity and eating healthy foods. But without a sense of purpose or belonging and strong connections to family and friends, no amount of physical health can make us truly happy and well."

Klamath Falls Blue Zones Project:

In 2015, Klamath Falls was selected to be the first Blue Zones Project demonstration site in the Pacific Northwest. This collaborative effort by Sky Lakes Medical Center, Cambia Health Foundation, Cascade Health Alliance, the City of Klamath Falls, and Klamath County led to the 2018 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Prize.⁷

Historically at the bottom of RWJF's Oregon county health rankings, Klamath County has seen reduced crime, improved high school graduation rates, better management of chronic disease and mental health, improved housing conditions, better food security and more. This effort required a heavy investment of time and money, but the results have been remarkable.⁷

The Dalles Blue Zones Project:

Like many communities across the United States, The Dalles has struggled with the health and well-being of its residents. Access to nutritious food, good health care and fitness opportunities fell far short of what was needed.⁸ In 2016, Lauren Kramer, assistant professor of practice at Oregon State University Extension Service Family and Community Health program, guided the Blue Zones process of bringing the Blue Zones to The Dalles⁸. As a result, The Dalles is on the road to optimal health and well-being. A few of the early successes include:

- A 20% increase over two years in residents feeling “proud of their community”
- Development of safer, traffic-calming pickup/drop-off infrastructure at local elementary schools (collaboration by City of The Dalles and North Wasco County School District).
- Over 250 people participated in “Purpose Workshops”
- Over 150 people took part in healthy cooking demonstrations
- Over 350 students and volunteers came together for “Walk to School Wednesdays”
- Over 300 people attended community clean-ups
- Over 1,500 people have taken a personal pledge to live healthier, longer lives

Grants Pass Blue Zones Project:

Community champions Asante Health System, AllCare Health, Primary Health of Josephine County, and Siskiyou Community Health Center are providing support for the Grants Pass Blue Zone Project. In Grants Pass, more than 2,600 individuals and 30 organizations have participated in Blue Zones health and well-being programs, while eight local schools participated in the Walking School Bus program.⁹

Roseburg and the Umpqua Region Blue Zones Project:

In 2017, Douglas County ranked 31 out of 36 Oregon counties for health and was selected as the newest of Oregon Blue Zone Projects. Local donors who helped to fund the project included the Ford Family Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians, Adapt, Douglas Education Service District, Umpqua Health Alliance and CHI Mercy Health.

The Blue Zones Project in Roseburg has transitioned to *Thrive Umpqua*, who's primary goal remains to make the healthy choice the easy choice for residents and businesses by implementing well-being best practices throughout our community's neighborhoods, organizations, policies, and social networks. "People can really celebrate this is something great that's come to our community," Palenshus, Executive Director, said. "We have this opportunity to have leadership, expertise and matching funding for what could potentially be really impactful for the community."

Palenshus said that the team's well-being initiative outperformed the state's trends since 2017, seeing 4.6% fewer health risks than expected if the community had followed state trends. "This means that individual lives are being impacted and there's a measurable cost saving associated with that impact," Palenshus said. "And we're creating a culture of well-being that impacts the food we eat, the company we keep, the way we move, and our overall outlook on life."

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