Episode Description:
UNO Vice Chancellor for Student Success Dan Shipp and UNO Dean of Students Cathy Pettid are joined by Kristina Hughes, UNO's Sustainability Coordinator, to discuss the impact of environmental wellness on health and well-being.

Transcript:
Well, hello everyone. Hello, Dan Shipp.

Hi, Cathy, hello.

Welcome back to staying well at UNO. We're broadcasting today in the snow - not outside but-

I'm ready to go sledding, right? Like this is it. Like how many times can you go sledding in April?

Right, well, in Nebraska, right? We have to deal with it - well how are you this week Dan?

Doing great, I think you know, we talked a couple episodes back about sleeping and so, I've been working hard at it and would tell you that listening to that light meditation before I go to sleep every night helps. I don't know what it is about rain falling on leaves, right? That's kind of keeping in the spirit of our environmental theme today but-

It is-

I love it, I mean I- rarely do I have trouble sleeping now when I listen to that at night so, I feel like I have more energy, I'm getting my mojo back.

Yeah, and I'm still hearing a lot from students, and faculty, and staff who are saying that sleep is a little difficult and so, we talked last week also about experimenting and trying different things, and for you, that audio of the rain has been really important and I just ask our listeners also to think about you know, really working hard to keep that routine of about 45 minutes to an hour before they want to be asleep, shutting off all of the electronics and especially our cell phones, etc. and easing our way into that sleep.
Tell me about that Cathy, that's one thing that drives me nuts in our house. Vanessa likes to catch up on Grey's Anatomy before she goes to bed so she will forever be checking her iPhone and I'm like man, put that stuff away, yeah.

Yeah, well, I adore your wife so I'm never going to say anything negative about her. But, you know, I think there is- you know, a lot of students will say to me well I relax by watching tv or watching videos on my phone, the reality is, you're still then keeping your brain working- right. You can’t help but have a reaction to a scene that you’re seeing or something that you’re reading and the idea of something that’s more calming like you know, whether its rain on leaves or the ocean waves, is that its meditative and it helps empty your mind versus giving your mind something more to think about.

Some of us are pretty empty to begin with, Cathy so it doesn’t take much to do that.

Yeah, so you know, as much as I like Vanessa, she really is not practicing good sleep hygiene.

This is going to be a doctor Cathy recommendation. I’m going to practice that tonight.

Don’t put me in the middle of that.

How about you? So, what are you doing?

Yeah so, I have had some really good Zoom conversations this week with family. Our family celebrates the Easter holiday- of course we couldn’t celebrate that together, so that was a really special moment for all of us and I don’t think we previously talked about it on our time together but I have an 89-year-old mother who lives in a retirement village and of course, wisely, they are on lockdown so I- this is the longest I’ve ever gone in my entire life without seeing her in person- so that’s been really, really emotionally difficult but through the wonders of technology, we’re able to stay connected via Zoom so it does help to not only hear her voice, but see her face so-

I love it, how are grandma’s Zoom skills, Cathy?

We walk her through it every time-

Is she like I can't-

But she gets it every time and it’s always a “eureka” moment when we see her on the screen.

Oh, I love that.
But during the Easter holiday I had my nephew and his fiancée who live in Denver and my son who lives in Fort Collins, Colorado and my daughter who is here in Omaha and lots of cousins, so it was really good to connect- so that filled my bucket.

You had your whole Hollywood squares board.

Yes, we did, there were 19 of us- yeah. But you know Dan, one of the things that struck me this week as I’m talking with students, is also, I’m starting to think that actually stress is getting a bit of a bad rep. It’s really easy in such crazy times like this- when we feel any stress to think oh my goodness, I’m not coping well, and I better go do something. I think it’s an important reminder for all of us that not all stress is bad. You know sports, like colleges, make millions out of figuring out what’s the sweet spot for an athlete to get them hyped up and ready to run the race or go out on the field versus flooding, but you never see soccer players or football players, basketball players walking out onto the court kind of lackadaisical saying hey, it might be cool if we win-

They’re focused, right?

Yeah, they’re focused and they’re ready to go and so, what I’ve been telling students- and what I thought we’d just talk a minute about is channeling stress for the greater good. Because our stress helps us focus, our stress can help us want to do just that extra little bit of reading or spend a little more time on the writing project and so, reminding everyone who’s listening today that it’s okay if you’re experiencing some stress, good productivity can come out of that and in fact, a lot of the students I’m talking to who are completely flooded with stress is because they are not doing enough. Too little stress is just as stressful as too much, so right now it’s finding our own sweet spot of what’s going to help us feel productive and active because if all we’re doing is laying on the couch watching Friends reruns, we’re going to feel sluggish and so it’s figuring out healthy ways of garnering our energy.

Well you know, it probably seems strange- I totally relate with what you’re saying, I mean I have a background as a competitive athlete and one of the things that- I used to look for those moments of really high performance and it was always around that right balance of being really sharp, ready to go, and- but not too over anxious or too amped, and I think that is really good advice, I mean I think that this- todays COVID-19 reality is pushing us towards those different spots, but that’s good advice that some level of stress is a good thing because it can push you towards excellence in different ways.

Exactly so, I’m going to throw out a challenge to everyone who’s listening, that you really pay attention to finding that sweet spot and it’s different for everyone but paying attention to that and we’ll check in with everybody and you and I will hold each other accountable and talk about that next week- but today, we have a really important wellness topic and it’s a wellness topic that I think sometimes gets a bit overlooked and
that is of our environmental wellness, so we have a fun guest today, Kristina do you want to join us?

Magic! Hi, Kristina.

So, Kristina Hughes, thanks for joining us today. We wanted to chat with you a little bit about what you do here at the university and talk about environmental wellness so take it away.

Sure, yeah absolutely thanks Cathy, thanks Dan, I really appreciate the time being here and I would agree that often, environmental wellness does get overlooked but it can be so powerful and can really tie into a lot of these other areas of wellness, so I’m very happy to have the opportunity to be on with you all and I am currently the sustainability coordinator at UNO and so, my day to day tasks is to work with students, staff, faculty to increase their knowledge and increase their practice of sustainability. In addition, I look at UNO as a campus whole, to see what areas can the campus itself initiate more sustainable practices- become a greener university so, I was hired in October and really excited to join the UNO family, the Mavericks have been so warm and welcoming so it’s been a really, really great experience.

And you have a green thumb, right? I’m looking at all the plants, yeah. I have no idea what you’re doing there but your garden is thriving indoors.

Yeah, and that’s something that I think is really key, especially on days like this when you want to increase your environmental wellness but maybe don’t necessarily want to go outside, is how can you bring that indoors and how can you still make that connection with nature in an inside setting too so, my office is full of plants.

Maybe Kristina, help us because you know, we talk about on this show a lot- the dimensionality of wellness and so, I mean it would be interesting to maybe help some of our viewers know what really is environmental wellness and how does the inner play between sustainability and wellness- maybe help walk us through that a little bit to better understand it.

Sure yeah, absolutely so, I like to think of environmental wellness of really, an understanding of our personal wellness is tied to our environment and additionally, our daily habits affect the health of the environment so that’s where you see that crossover of environmental wellness- wellness itself and sustainability. So, environmental wellness promotes healthy interactions with nature and encourages us to live a lifestyle that respects our surroundings. There are also many things that anybody can do to become more environmentally aware and many practices you can adopt that can improve your relationship with nature and with the environment.
Give us some UNO recommendations, right, if I want to find more resources and where to go- what are some things that we have kind of special on our campus to help our students, faculty, and staff consider this.

Definitely, so there’s sustainability webpages so if you’re on UNO’s website- if you search for sustainability, you’re going to find webpages there that have tips and resources for sustainability practices in your own life, sustainability practices that you can practice at home or on campus. There’s also information about the gardens and natural areas that UNO has and so there’s several gardens on campus, there’s also the glacier creek preserve which is a natural area that UNO manages- wonderful place to get out to-

It’s beautiful, yeah for- if you haven’t been there and you’re listening to this, this will be something to put on your bucket list in the metro area- something that UNO is responsible for, it’s beautiful.

And it’s seeing what Nebraska was like hundreds and hundreds of years ago with the natural grasses, it’s really a serene place.

Yeah and I think even right now that there are still opportunities to go out there, I know that the area is closed for classes but I do believe they are letting a small amount of people in every day so call ahead and see if they are open, but I highly recommend that area. There’s also classes that you can take that are related to sustainability, that are related to looking at the environment, so if anybody is interested there’s a sustainability minor that you can take and add it to your course load and learn about a lot of these different ideas and programs, green infrastructure. We also have lots of social media pages for UNO sustainability, we have one on Instagram, we have Twitter, we have Facebook and we’re constantly posting educational information. We’re really going to try and start putting together content for folks who are at home, while we’re working in these remote situations, to do at home gardening or meal prepping, or looking at natural cleaners that you can put together yourself. So really, social media I think would be a great place to get a lot of these resources.

You know, I don’t know if you were forewarned but you have to self-disclose if you join so, I’m just curious, how has environmental wellness impacted your mental health and well-being on a personal level.

Definitely, I actually have two examples from today, right before we got on this call, I’m looking outside- it is absolutely gorgeous with the snow coming down and I’m about to come on live in front of UNO so I have some nerves going and I see outside my window, my neighbor who is actually putting together snowballs and just throwing them for his dog, and I just sat there and I probably watched it for about 5 minutes- and just with the snow falling, automatically felt calmer and it was really kind of magical how that happened, and earlier today, I was- I used to start my days with watching the news, and
found my days were a little bit more stressful so I decided to start my days with
meditation- and the Center for Mindful Living here in Omaha, does Zoom meditations
every morning and this morning I could hear the birds while I was meditating I- my mind
kept getting drawn to the birds and the singing and I was able to pick out seven distinct
bird calls and counting each one of them, but again, it was really instilling a sense of
calmness.

That’s awesome because last week we talked quite a bit about mindfulness and you just
gave a brilliant example of a mindfulness activity. Well, Kristina I know we’re short on
time so I wanted to thank you for joining us today and giving such fantastic examples
and places that folks can go to find out more about sustainability at UNO and think more
about- strategically about environmental wellness so thanks for your time.

Sure, absolutely yeah, happy to be here, thank you so much.

Thank you, Kristina, stay warm today.

Absolutely yeah, you too, thank you.

So we have a lot to think about for our next recording next week, both in terms of finding
our sweet spot with stress and recognizing that stress can be a force of good, and also
paying attention to nature and the world around us- I really liked how she made that
connection between our healthy habits contribute to a healthy environment- that
synergy, that really resonated with me.

Me too, you know it’ll be fun to play forward into our conversation next week- a little
teaser, we’re going to have Dr. Steven Wingall with us, who is involved in wellness at
both UNO and UNMC and he’s going to- we’re going to talk a little bit about resilience,
right? You can’t help but look out the window and see the metaphors all around of our
green grass and our flowers that are starting to emerge with snow now covering them
so I think resilience could be a really good topic, not only from the environment
standpoint around the earth, but also as individuals and how we’re going to work
through and come out on the other side of COVID-19 stronger, healthier people.

Well said, and to remind all of our listeners that you can send in your questions and
your requests to stayingwell@unomaha.edu and until next week, we wish you health
and happiness, stay safe everyone.

Bye, take care.