

ATENAS TODAY

Issue No. 65
May 21, 2010



ATENAS TODAY is a free English language newsletter for the residents and potential residents of Atenas, Costa Rica. It contains informative articles and creative compositions submitted by our readers, and is distributed via email approximately once a month to over 250 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at fredmac222@yahoo.com.

Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, www.atenascatucca.com. Click on the English version and then Atenas Today on the business page.



DIRECTORY OF ENGLISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE IN THE ATENAS AREA

New names and numbers have been added to the directory. With each issue Atenas Today subscribers will receive an updated file containing the names and contact information of people who have chosen to be listed. Simply download the PDF file attached to this Atenas Today email and print it or save it on your computer.

If your name is on the list without contact information, it is because you are a subscriber to the newsletter, but have **not authorized the publication of your email address or other information**. To add or correct data please send an email to fredmac222@yahoo.com.

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Atenas Today Interviews
Rafael Rodriguez and Carlos Aviles

Atenas Fire Chief and Chief of Volunteers



AT: Thank you for inviting us to have a tour of your fire house and learn about the fire department.

Rafael: We are pleased to have you. The support of our English-speaking residents is very important to us.

AT: Your English is excellent. Did you live in an English-speaking country?

Rafael: No. I am one of those people who like to study language and practice it. My great grandmother was French, so that was the first foreign language I learned. Since then I have learned English, as well as some German and Portuguese.

AT: And Carlos, you also speak English.

Carlos: Yes, but not as good as Rafael. I need more practice.

AT: Tell me about how the fire department is organized.

Rafael: In Atenas we have four full time professional fire fighters, including myself, plus ten to fifteen part time volunteers. And we have one fully equipped fire truck.

AT: Do you work for the town of Atenas, or for the national government?

Rafael: Officially we are part of INS, the national insurance company. All of the fire departments in Costa Rica are funded by INS, which gives us 4% of their revenue.

We are managed by a central fire and rescue department in San Jose. From your roster it seems that you rely heavily on volunteers.

AT: Carlos: We used to, but it has become increasingly difficult to recruit, train, and keep volunteers. And most of them have regular jobs outside of Atenas and therefore are not always around when you need them.

AT: What is involved in being a volunteer fire fighter?

Carlos: You need to go through training sessions over a six month period, and then commit to working at least 40 hours per month, sometimes sleeping here in the fire house.

AT: So do you feel you are short handed?

Rafael: Yes. We are asking for the Atenas Fire Department to be upgraded from a "C" class station with four professionals and one truck, to a "B" class station with six professionals and two trucks. The number of incidents we have responded to has increased 40% in the last year.

AT: Why do you think that is?

Rafael: More people, more houses, more cars; and lately because of the new highway. We can now be in Turrucas or Orotina in a few minutes, so we are expected to support fire and rescue operations in those areas. Atenas is centrally located on the new road, and it makes sense to expand our fire department.

AT: How many call outs do you have in a typical month?

Carlos: It averages around 40, with more in the dry season.

AT: Is it mostly grass and brush fires?

Rafael: At the end of the dry season, yes. But we respond to many auto accidents and animal problems.

AT: Animal problems?

Rafael: Snakes in homes, cats stuck up in trees, "killer bees", you name it. When in doubt, people call the fire and rescue department.

AT: What about car accidents? Do you have what you need to extract people from wrecks?

Rafael: Yes. We have the “jaws of life”, as well as a telescoping ram and a hydraulic metal cutter.

AT: If you did get more people and equipment, do you have the space to expand?

Rafael: Fortunately, yes. We own the land behind the fire house.

AT: Where do you get your water to fight fires? I do not see many fire hydrants around Atenas. Is that a problem?

Rafael: Definitely. There are now laws that require new developments to put in hydrants, but there are none in Vista Atenas, Roca Verde, or Pica Flora. We have to rely on sucking water from creeks and swimming pools.

AT: What can the residents of Atenas do to help you?

Carlos: The best way to fight fires is to prevent them from happening. Keeping grass and brush cut is the most effective preventive measure.

AT: Can you force property owners to do that?

Carlos: There are laws on the books that say you have to do it, but as you know Costa Rica has many laws that are not enforced, and people ignore them.

Rafael: In the future if we are called to a fire caused by high grass, we intend to file a complaint with the court and the property owner will be fined. But this is an “after the fact” measure.

AT: To report a fire or bad auto accident what number should people call?

Rafael: Don't call the fire station, because we might be out on another emergency. You can call 911, or even better, 118, which is the central fire and rescue dispatch emergency number in San Jose. There should be English-speaking operators at both of these numbers.

AT: If residents wanted to make a donation to the Atenas Fire Department to help you purchase some needed equipment how could they do that?

Rafael: This year is the 50th anniversary of the Atenas Fire Department, and what we would really like is to be able to make improvements to our fire house. Our water and electrical systems need to be

upgraded, and walls and floors need to be repaired. However we have no money in our budget for this, and we are not allowed to accept monetary donations, so it is a problem.

AT: Suppose we set up an account in your name at Vargas Hardware and made donations to that account so that you could get the supplies and materials you need? That would be great.

AT: We will do it.

Note: An account has been established at Vargas in the name “Headquarters Renovation .

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Pictures from the events this month at the sports plaza in front of the school.



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Mangos



by Gaby Teufel

Sweet and juicy, mangos account for approximately half of all fruit produced worldwide. They are rich in essential vitamins A, C, E, and dietary minerals. In addition to eating mangos raw, they may be preserved as jam, dried, made into nectar or wine, utilized in sauces and chutney, and used to flavor ice cream.

In Central America, big flashy fruits are *mangas*, consumed in fruit salads, cakes and custards. Costa Ricans love to eat mangos unripe, sprinkled with lime and salt, a combination called *mango cele* (green mango).

The majestic evergreen mango tree is a member of the Anacardiaceae family of flowering plants, including the cashew nut tree, poison ivy, and poison sumac. That's why some people get "mango rash" if they eat raw mangos, which are not properly peeled or washed.

The long-lived mango grows rapidly and may attain a height of 100 ft (30 m). It makes a handsome landscape specimen and

shade tree, as can be seen, for instance, in Alajuela's Central Park. The tree is densely covered with glossy leaves, bearing thousands of small fragrant flowers in dry season. Variable in size and color, mango fruits reach maturity three to six months after flowering. The yield varies with the age of the tree. A 20-year-old mango may produce more than 200 oblong luscious fruits, hanging from long stalks.

The mango tree's scientific name, *Mangifera indica*, indicates its origin to India, where it has been cultivated and praised for over five thousand years. Persian traders spread mango cultivation to the Middle East in ancient times.

Portuguese and Spanish colonists took it to the New World, introducing the tree to Brazil and the West Indies in the 16th century and later to Mexico. Throughout the centuries, more than 1000 horticultural varieties have been developed, and the mango is now cultivated in many tropical and subtropical areas of the world.

Equivalent in importance to the apple of Europe and North America, mangos are a vital food source for millions of inhabitants of the tropics. India, China, Thailand and Mexico are the leading producers of mangos, while North America, Europe and the Middle East are the major importing regions of the sweet and juicy fruit.

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OUR COLUMNISTS

Raising Children in Manhattan



by Marietta Arce

Raising children in Manhattan, New York is a unique experience that I will always remember. Even though it was very short-lived in our case (we moved to Costa Rica when our children were still very young), I treasure the many vivid and fond memories of those days.

The pace of big-city living requires imagination, organization and a certain amount of courage to negotiate the different challenges that arise.

One of the biggest challenges was finding safe, clean, local playgrounds where my children could be free to use their ‘outdoor’ voices and run wild, thus ridding themselves of the extra energy every child possesses! We went to places with unusual names like “The Asphalt Green”, where every effort was made to answer the needs of a growing segment of the population.

It was during these years that we participated in the ‘play date’, an arranged social interaction between children of similar ages that usually took place at one of their homes, for a specific amount of time, often after school. It worked out nicely, freeing up one or more of the mothers or caregivers for a little while.

One day, it was our turn to host a classmate. While we waited outside his building for his mother to bring him down (apartment living!), I casually asked my son, who was five years old at the time, what he would like to be when he grew up. He turned to me and answered in the simple manner only a child could muster: “Why do I have to *be* anything? *You’re* not anything!”

I remember being surprised (and stung!) by his words until I realized that all he had ever seen me *do* was be his mom, something he took for granted and obviously didn’t think much of! He was not aware of the 18 years I had worked prior to his birth, nor should he have been. He was busy being a little boy! I envied him in that moment.

My son’s visible impatience while waiting for his friend prompted me to suggest he get out of the car and move around a bit. I instructed him to stay where I could see him, since we were in a “No Parking” zone and I couldn’t leave the car with his young sister asleep in her car seat.

A few minutes later, I found myself observing my little boy take off his winter jacket, put his arm around a tree that had recently lost its leaves and begin to twirl kicking up the leaves on the ground.

From the corner of my eye, I saw a woman approach him. I became very excited when I realized it was Lauren Bacall, the actress. Imagine my surprise when she stopped and talked to my son. A million thoughts raced through my mind as I watched him answer her and continue to twirl around the tree. They chatted another minute and suddenly his friend arrived, putting an end to any chance I might have had to run and meet her, sleeping child or not!

When my son got back in the car, I asked him about his exchange with Ms. Bacall. He told me she had asked: “Young man, aren’t you cold?” to which he replied: “Nope!” Then she parroted, “Nope?” and he replied, “Nope, not a bit!” At this point, she laughed and moved on.

The one thing I had always loved about living in Manhattan was the ever-present opportunity of celebrity sightings. This was a particularly special one for me since Ms. Bacall had actually talked to my child! I felt special somehow and I’m sure my sleeping princess was privy to my excitement!

I unreasonably asked him if he **knew** who the woman was. He shrugged and answered simply, “I don’t know, just some lady.” I turned to his friend and posed the same question. He answered, equally simply, “Yeah, she’s a lady who lives in my building.” I think it was at that precise moment when I realized that even if you *do become* something, not everyone is aware of it at any given point! Isn’t it great to be a kid?



from The Shadow of the Wind, by Carlos Ruiz Zafon

“A good father?”

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One morning, the husband returns the boat to their lakeside cottage after several hours of fishing and decides to take a nap.

Although not familiar with the lake, the wife decides to take the boat out. She motors out a short distance, anchors, puts her feet up, and begins to read her book.

Along comes a Fish and Game Warden in his boat. He pulls up alongside the woman and says, 'Good morning, Ma'am. What are you doing?'

'Reading a book,' she replies, (thinking, 'Isn't that obvious?')

'You're in a Restricted Fishing Area,' he informs her.

'I'm sorry, officer, but I'm not fishing. I'm reading.'

**'Yes, but I see you have all the equipment.
For all I know you could start at any moment.
I'll have to take you in and write you up.'**

'If you do that, I'll have to charge you with sexual assault,' says the woman.

'But I haven't even touched you,' says the Game Warden.

**'That's true, but you have all the equipment..
For all I know you could start at any moment.'**

'Have a nice day ma'am,' and he left.

MORAL:

Never argue with a woman who reads.

It's likely she can also think..

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Preparing for Medical Emergencies



by Lois Craft

Okay, here we go again. In January, I wrote an article for *Atenas Today* following Dorothy Dessarzin's sudden death, about what we need to know about death and dying in our adopted country. Not a pleasant subject, but one that we need to be prepared for, in case...

Last month, Fred Macdonald reported on the accident in Atenas that our good friend suffered. That accident resulted in a crack in her back that was, unsuccessfully, repaired. At this writing, she is still in CIMA, after two additional surgeries to correct the first one. Her accident was on April 9th, and today is the 15th of May.

I will wait to let her tell the whole story in her own words, but the bottom line is that she was totally unprepared for this life-altering accident that happened in seconds as she was running errands. She is a very responsible person, lives quite independently and attends to her own affairs, including having CAJA, as well as supplemental insurance from INS. Upon her 70th birthday, her INS insurance dropped from \$200,000 a year to \$60,000. A month of hospitalization, in addition to 3 major operations, depleted the \$60,000, so INS increased her coverage to \$120,000. God bless them for that! But, that, too, is depleted.

It is our hope that she will be discharged soon, as the daily ca-chings continue, but the fact of the matter is that she now has two rods in her back and four screws to stabilize her spine, but she is unable to walk or care for herself, and the doctors are unsure about her future capabilities.

As her close friends, we have explored options in the near term for her continued care and physical therapy, and the options are woefully few in Costa Rica. There are many surgical retreats that specialize in after-care following surgery, but they are rather pricey on a daily basis and do not have full-time doctors, nurses or physical therapists.

One that I am personally aware of is *La Mas de Provence* (tel: 2289-3767: *Petra* is the general manager and a lovely person) high in the hills overlooking Escazu. The price per day is \$99, including 3 meals and nursing care. Physical therapists can be brought in at additional cost, but La Mas will provide part-time PT and nursing care.

Another option was Linea Vital, which can provide full-time skilled nursing care in your home. The cost for this 24-hour service with doctor support is around \$3500/month.

What does the CAJA provide? Not much! We contacted Casa Canada to find out, and were told that the CAJA will provide Physical Therapy at their hospital, if the patient has a means to get there. Period. No provisions for after-care beyond that. In our friend's case, transportability is a bit problematic and expensive. So much for that.

There is also a very small nursing facility in the La Garita area that serves 14 people. Openings are infrequent, but the number to have, if needed, is 2443- 1649. The name of the facility is *Villa Alegria*, and Diana Abrego Romero manages. *If you check on*

the internet, the testimonials are glowing. The cost is between \$1700 and \$2000 per month for a private room. This seems the only viable option for our friend in the short term.

Another option, if you have family in the States, is to be transported back there, especially if you qualify for Medicare. This might be a good choice to plan for in advance. Medicare, Plans A & B will cover most hospital and doctor costs, and it might be a comfort to be close to family. It is my understanding that INS insurance will cover up to \$20,000 for medivac assistance, but it would be a good idea to check your policy.

Another good idea is to make your medical records available to the people who may need them to help you in a sudden emergency. You can go to [Google.com/health](https://www.google.com/health), and you will be guided through a form that will allow you to list your medical history, current medications, allergies, etc. You will be asked to input the email addresses of the people you want to have access to these records. In that way trusted family members and friends here in Costa Rica can make the information available to doctors in an emergency. Also, friends who have filled out this form entered a note expressing their wishes that no extraordinary measures be taken if their situation looks hopeless. The medical staff will have this information immediately available if you are unable to convey your specific wishes.

Additionally, it is important that someone have a medical or general Power of Attorney to oversee your care and make important decisions if the need arises, especially if you do not have a spouse or significant other, and you are not capable to making decisions on your own. You do NOT want unknown doctors making these decisions for you!

The point is that we aging boomers - and indeed younger, non-boomers - need to have information and put plans in place in case of an unexpected emergency. 2010 has been fraught with shocking developments that have made us aware of just how unprepared we are for the unexpected in a country where we may not have our compass in sync with our needs.

As much as I hate having my column address so many unpleasant subjects, it is my hope that we will be better prepared to take care of ourselves.

In summary, some things to think about in planning for emergencies:

- Family telephone numbers to call in case of emergency;
- Medical/General Power-of-Attorney with a trusted friend here in CR or a family member;
- Google Health for your medical history, current medications, and any information as to your specific wishes that could be accessed by someone trusted for the doctors;
- Research on facilities that you would find acceptable for short or long-term care, including being Medivaced to your home country, for long-term care;
- Financial planning for an emergency: who can access your accounts in the event that you are unable to direct your own finances;
- Plans if you don't make it: who to call for arrangements. Make sure local friends, Linea Vital or your local doctor, as well as your family know your specific wishes for the final act;

- Make sure you have a will here in Costa Rica, outlining your wishes for the disposal of your Costa Rican properties. Send a copy of this to a trusted family member, who will be the chief beneficiary; Some pre-planning will make things far easier, if life hands you an unwanted surprise.

Pura Vita and Salute. I hope you will file this information away, but never need it!

Reflections



By Fred Macdonald

As we retired older people enjoy our golden years in Costa Rica, we are prone to reflect on the big events in our lives. It is interesting to me to look back and try to identify those life-changing events that put my life on a new track. These were not necessarily the most dramatic or even the most important episodes, but they resulted in my going off in a new direction as surely as a train veering off the main track when a switch is thrown.

For example marrying someone after five years of courtship would be an important event, but not one that diverted you from the course you were already on. However, a chance meeting with a new person that resulted in your breaking your engagement would be a game-changer.

Sometimes these milestones are triggered by external factors over which we have no control. Other times they are the result of decisions made by us or by others.

In my case I have identified fifteen such events, any one of which could have turned out differently and set my life going in a different direction. Whether that new course would have been better or worse will never be known, but it is interesting to contemplate.

What have been the “track-switchers” in your life?

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Contact: Janell Gehmlich
janellonthebeach@gmail.com

The Jeep Wrangler can be seen by contacting Constantino Bustillos at 2446-3732 (home), or 2221-8351 (work). The other items can be seen at Maggie and Constantino Bustillos home in the Fatima section of Atenas. Please call them for directions and to set up an appointment. Neither of these individuals speak English, so you may need a translator to help.

by *Gordon Klatt*

XP Security Updates To End

Microsoft has announced an end to Windows XP security updates. If you are currently using Windows XP, you should be sure you have updated to Service Pack 3 (SP3). To see what version of XP is on your computer, right-click on 'My Computer' and select 'Properties'. A screen will appear showing you information about your system, including the version of Windows you are running. If it says 'Service Pack 2', use Windows Update to install Service Pack 3. Security updates will be provided by Microsoft for XP SP3 until 2014, but you must install SP3 by July 13, 2010.



Data Execution Prevention (DEP) Problem

A faithful reader sent me an email describing her frustration with this security feature in Windows Vista. Designed to prevent malicious software from operating in system memory, it can sometimes get in the way when you try to run software that isn't designed for DEP. Here is an article that explains what DEP does and how to disable it:

<http://www.vistax64.com/tutorials/120778-dep-enable-disable.html>

If you disable DEP, be sure you are using anti-virus software and that it is up to date.

How Fast Is Your Internet Connection?

I have ADSL internet service provided by ICE, with download speed up to 1 mbps and upload speed up to 512 kbps. I say 'up to', because the speed can vary a lot. Here's a web site that will measure your actual connection speed:

<http://www.speedtest.net/>

Here are the results of a test I performed. You'll see that my download speed is a little better and upload



speed is a little slower than what it should be.

Slingbox, TV Over The Internet

In the past few months I've met a couple of guys who use a slick little device to watch US television here in Costa Rica. It's called Slingbox. You connect it to a source, like a cable or satellite receiver, and Slingbox streams the content over the internet, allowing you to watch it anywhere in the

world. It requires a fast download connection where you want to watch, and more importantly, a fast upload speed, at least 512 kbps, where the Slingbox is located. Learn more about Slingbox here:

<http://www.slingbox.com/>

Battery Back-Up (UPS) Revisited

I've written before about the importance of having a battery back-up for your desktop computer. The constant outages and inconsistent power we experience here can wreak havoc on your computer's power supply and other components. The most common PC repair I do is power supply replacement.

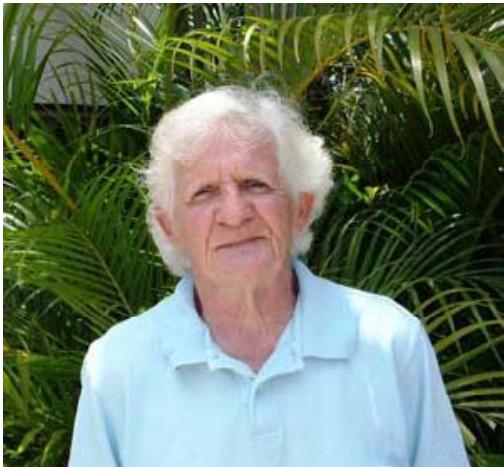
I recently bought a new UPS at PriceSmart made by Tripp-Lite. It has an LED display that shows the actual voltage being delivered. At this moment it shows the power is fluctuating between 114 and 118 volts. It rarely shows 120 volts. Occasionally the voltage exceeds 120v, sometimes as high as 125v, and the UPS emits a humming sound, indicating it is stepping down the voltage to an acceptable level. So in addition to providing battery back-up in the event of a power failure, most UPS's also do some degree of power conditioning.

And get one for your new flat-screen HD TV that you paid way too much for if you bought it here.



** If you have a question or suggestion for a future column you can write to me at gkklatt@live.com.**

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We are a Bilingual Bi-cultural family with many years of experience. For this reason, we make no claim of knowing it all, or even much of it. We simply know where to look.

Those who claim to "have it figured" often find their contacts MIA or with other interests...weeks maybe, into the project.

A Latino Environment is always in a state of flux. The man who built your house yesterday may not be the man to build the next. Be sure to consult with people who know the difference.



Paul, Gaby and Andre

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Private Lot on River

This 5400 square meter lot is in Finca Zacatal, a 9 lot community located in San Isidro de Atenas, approximately 5 kilometers from town. Huge trees and a stream border the property, which is completely private with no other houses visible. Water and electricity is installed to the property line. Two other houses have been constructed in the community, and a caretaker house at the entrance provides security.



PRICE REDUCED TO \$44,000 !!

Contact Fred Macdonald, 2446-0440, 8848-7632, fredmac222@yahoo.com.

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