

# ATENAS TODAY



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***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 350 email addresses. To get on the distribution list or to submit material, please send an email to Fred Macdonald at [fredmac222@yahoo.com](mailto:fredmac222@yahoo.com).*

*Compositions from back issues are archived by category on the Atenas Chamber of Tourism and Commerce website, [www.atenascatuca.com](http://www.atenascatuca.com). Click on the English version and then [Atenas Today](#) on the business page.*

Atenas Today Interviews Mercedes Solano  
*local artist*

Mercedes Solano is the woman who is single-handedly changing the face of the rocks leading to and from the Garita Bridge. She in an incredibly energetic and vivacious personality who took time out from her busy day to answer our questions:

**AT: Mercedes, how long had you been planning on painting the rocks?**

MS: The idea came to me about two years ago. I talked about it with a few people and one day (on my birthday, actually) I was energized. I packed up my equipment and my son and I headed out to check out the site. That was in February.

**AT: Did you have any sponsors?**

MS: At first, I began all alone, donating my time and materials. Then I approached the Chamber of Tourism (CATUCA) and they donated 30,000 colones towards materials and are very supportive of the project.

**AT: What motivated you in the first place?**

MS: I felt that the rocks looked very sad, that the whole area could a face-lift and that people coming and going all day deserved to feast their eyes on something beautiful. I felt it was a quality of life improvement.

**AT: Well, Mercedes, you certainly have improved our landscape! Tell us, have you encountered any problems?**

MS: In the beginning, two of the rocks were stolen and another three were marred with some red paint. I contacted Channel 11 (Informe 11) and they sent a reporter who brought attention to the project and to the fact that neighbors believed they knew who was vandalizing. This has deterred other acts of vandalism, for which I am very grateful.

**AT: How do you decide which rocks to paint?**

MS: I try to look for big ones, and smooth ones are best. But I will try to give the others a try too.

**AT: What about the themes you paint, how do you choose them?**

MS: I usually bring samples of my own previous work but I am often inspired by just contemplating the 'canvas' which will always suggest a scene to me.

**AT: What kind of reaction are you getting from the public?**

MS: The public has been incredibly enthusiastic, often stopping and chatting with me as I am working. In addition, I have been contacted and asked to paint murals and rocks in other places. This makes me very happy because I feel the recognition that I didn't have before.

**AT: When do you paint these rocks?**

MS: I usually start at 5 a.m. and stop at 10:30 a.m. because the sun is too strong later. I  
Can be found on Sundays but not the next two Sundays because I am going on a road trip.

**AT: Mercedes, do you offer classes?**

MS: Yes, I paint and I also teach and receive lessons constantly. In addition to that, I  
participate in an artist's cooperative and we sell our things at different fairs during  
the year.

**AT: Do you speak English?**

MS: I am afraid not but it is something that I would like to learn in the future. It is  
something I consider important because now I can only communicate with English speaking customers in  
sign language!

**AT: Do you have a studio?**

MS: Yes, it is called "Galeria Nicholson" and it is located in the Rio Grande area....from  
The cruce (Y), 1 km east on the main road to San Jose. My phone is 446-5754 or  
Cellular 834-1675.

**AT: Why is your studio called Galeria Nicholson?**

MS: Years ago, I read a book and it mentioned an artist by the name of Nicholson who  
Was kind of unknown. I was inspired by that.

**AT: Well, Mercedes, thank you so much for your time. We hope that you will get  
more sponsors so that you can continue to beautify the country and inspire others to share their  
own creativity.**

MS: Thank you very much.

Interviewer's note: Mercedes is reaching out for donations. If you are interested in helping her, please contact  
her.

## Costa Rica's Tentacles

*by Elizabeth Gonzalez*

It has been my experience that something happens to ex-patriots when they have resided in Costa Rica for a certain amount of time. The days turn to months and months into years and one day, people find that while they once thought they would never adjust to life in CR, their hearts are now completely wrapped in this tiny nations' tender tentacles.

When does that moment come and how aware is the victim? Perhaps it is the day he finds himself no longer impatient when he arrives at the bank and sees the long line. Instead, he sits in the chair and moves up and up until his turn comes and he and the teller exchange a moment's pleasantries before conducting his transaction. Or maybe she suddenly realizes that she is no longer aware of the rooster's crow at odd hours but can distinguish the hummingbird's wings or the cricket's sounds announcing the time and she takes a moment to listen.

Costa Rica has been blessed with peace for many decades. Our not having an army has made it imperative that we use other means of settling our differences with our neighbors, be they next door or thousands of miles away. It seems that the whole world is in turmoil. Wars of one kind or another are taking place and destroying any hope of long-term world peace. And yet, here we are, most of us quietly going about our lives with little thought of the horrors being committed elsewhere.

It is true that the anonymity of a large city can be liberating, especially when one is young. However, the feelings of isolation that often accompany that freedom are detrimental to mental health, as evidenced by an increase in affective disorders in many industrialized countries. Here in Costa Rica, old-fashioned values remain the norm, despite the influx of new technologies and their sometimes de-humanizing effects.

We are in the midst of a crucial period in our existence: whether or not to approve CAFTA. It remains to be seen which way the popular vote will go, but one thing is for certain, it will be done peacefully and it will probably take longer to come to referendum than was first mentioned; that seems to be another Costa Rican tradition we are loathe to extinguish!

I ran into an ex-patriot friend the other day. He used to complain about everything in Costa Rica, in loud tones and with negative expressions. When I asked how he was doing, he sheepishly confessed he was thinking of relocating another relative here.....I guess those tentacles got him! What about you?