

# 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 Rita Rodriguez and Maurice Hamel

*owners of: Doctor of Swimming Pools and more*

**AT: Maurice, tell me about your background before you came to Costa Rica.**

Maurice: I was born in British Columbia in 1956. After 10 years of school, I began working in a lumber company. I started at the bottom, but eventually became a marketing manager for sales in the North-eastern United States. Financially I did very well, but the job was very stressful.

**AT: How did you deal with the stress?**

Maurice: I dealt with it by changing my life. I resigned my position, sold everything, got on my motorcycle, and headed south. It was February 1, 2000.

**AT: Everyman's dream. No wife, no children, no mortgages?**

Maurice: I was divorced with no children, and I had saved enough money to be able to retire if I wanted to.

**AT: Did you have a destination in mind?**

Maurice: No, just south, away from the cold. I went first to San Francisco, and then spent two weeks going south on the Pacific Coast Highway. Nothing inspired me, so I kept going into Mexico.

**AT: How long were you in Mexico?**

Maurice: About four weeks. It was a wonderful experience. But I wanted to keep exploring, so I kept moving south. However, as I got into Central America I became uncomfortable.

**AT: How so?**

Maurice: I was one guy alone on a motorcycle, and there were some pretty rough characters around. Every time I had to cross a border—Honduras, Guatemala, San Salvador, Nicaragua—I was delayed and hassled.

**AT: Even coming into Costa Rica?**

Maurice: No. There was a huge difference when I arrived in Costa Rica. The people at the border were super friendly and helpful. That was when I first thought I might have found a place I would like to live.

**AT: How did you pick Atenas?**

Maurice: I came first to La Garita and made that my base for exploring the country. For six months I traveled all over, but the Atenas area appealed to me the most. The lots in Vista Atenas were available, easy to buy, and had water and power. I decided to buy one and build myself a house.

**AT: Were you fluent in Spanish?**

Maurice: Hardly. But I could get by, and I knew enough about construction to feel comfortable managing the project. At that time very few lots in Vista Atenas had been cleared, and I had to spend several days chopping weeds on my lot before I could see what I had bought.

**AT: What about your stress level at this point?**

Maurice: Zero. I felt great.

**AT: How did you meet Rita?**

Maurice: Once I had settled in Atenas I got on the internet and signed up on Udate.com. Rita and I began exchanging emails.

**AT: I think it's time to hear Rita's side of things. What did you think of this guy you were corresponding with?**

Rita: Of course I was leery. I wanted to keep emailing, but after a month, Maurice insisted that we meet if we were going to continue to correspond. So on Halloween, October 31, 2002, we met at a restaurant in San Jose. Seven months later we were married.

**AT: Another great success story for internet dating. Tell me about your background and what you were doing before meeting Maurice.**

Rita: I was born in Costa Rica in 1967 and grew up in the Escazu area. My family is still living there. I attended the University of Costa Rica in San Pedro for seven years and received a doctorate in pharmacology. After my time at the university I worked in the Children's Hospital, and then later as a pharmacist in a drug store.

**AT: Your English is excellent. How did you learn it?**

Rita: Mostly in school. But I also took an intensive one year private course in conversational English.

**AT: Have you ever lived in an English-speaking country?**

Rita: No. My few visits to the U.S. have been short ones.

**AT: What were you doing when you met Maurice?**

Rita: My last job was working as a sales rep for a drug company. Just like Maurice, I was doing well financially, but did not like the pressure. I was ready for a change.

**AT: So you left the big city to live with Maurice in Atenas. How did you two get into the swimming pool business?**

Rita: I wanted to do something creative, and we were determined to do something together. We talked about a lot of different options, but with Maurice's background in construction and mine in chemistry, this business seemed a good fit. We rented a store and opened for business in January of this year.

**AT: What experience had you had with swimming pools?**

Maurice: My first experience with a pool was when I was house sitting for some friends in Vista Atenas. They were away for a month, and shortly after they left the pool began to look like green Jell-O. I asked some pool owners what to do, and they said it needed to be shocked with acid. When I did that, it turned into blue Jell-O. At that point I began to study the chemistry and gradually taught myself.

**AT: What have you learned?**

Maurice: I have learned that pool chemistry can be very tricky. The water around Atenas varies considerably in its make up. Simple chlorine and PH tests are often insufficient. Over-dosing with chemicals can be as bad as under-dosing.

**AT: Did you get any specialized training before you opened your business?**

Maurice: Yes. We work with a manufacturer of pool equipment named Hayward, and they gave us courses on pool construction and maintenance. And Rita's in depth knowledge of chemistry was a big help.

**AT: What other specialized knowledge is needed in your business other than water chemistry.**

Maurice: Water mechanics. You would be surprised at the complexity of the issues involved in circulating water. Pipe size, pump size, filter size, drain and return locations, pump house location, water pressures, etc. I have done a lot of research in this area.

**AT: I know you sell pool chemicals and equipment. What other products and services to you offer?**

Maurice: Basically anything to do with water. Pressure boosting systems, well pumps and controls, heating systems for pools and domestic hot water, fountains, artificial ponds and waterfalls, hot tubs, etc. We believe that we have the largest inventory of water handling equipment in the area, and we are constantly adding new items.

**AT: What about pool construction? Do you build pools?**

Maurice: Yes, we have built three complete pools in the last year. In addition, I will work with other contractors as a consultant and supervisor for pool design and construction. Many people want to have their house contractor build their pool at the same time, and I will work with the contractor to specify the construction details and then oversee the work. It is very easy to end up with a disaster for a swimming pool if it is not built properly. Also, we sell ceramic tiles for pools.

**AT: What about pool maintenance?**

Maurice: Of course if you buy your pool equipment from us, we will provide parts and service during the warranty period, and we will always provide free consulting. In addition, if you buy your chemicals from us, we will analyze your water and recommend corrective action when necessary.

**AT: What geographic area do you serve?**

Maurice: We go as far east as Poaz, and as far west as Naranjo.

**AT: And has business been good?**

Maurice: We are still new, but already we have had to expand into additional space. The Atenas area is growing, with many swimming pools, and we feel good about the future.

Atenas Today Reader Gives \$150 to Help Abandoned Animals in Atenas



*Fred Macdonald delivers \$150 donated by John Regnier, an Atenas Today reader now living in Saint Louis, to members of the Foundation for Helping Abandoned Animals in Atenas. The money will be used to pay vet bills and help find homes for about 30 dogs.*