

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.

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

Atenas Today Interviews Rick Mazza

Owner of Rick's Internet Café

AT: "Where are you from, Rick?"

Rick: "I was born in Hollister, California, and grew up in California and Texas."

AT: "When did life start to get interesting?"

Rick: "Well, my family life wasn't the greatest, so at age seventeen I dropped out of high school and joined the Marines. I am now fifty three, so that would have been in 1972."

AT: "So did you get sent to Vietnam?"

Rick: "Oh yes. Of the eight and half years I was in the Marines, I spent six and half of them in Southeast Asia. I participated in the evacuation from Saigon in 1975."

AT: "Did the Vietnam experience play a big part in your life?"

Rick: "Still does. I am one of the thousands of walking wounded. I spent over a year in a VA hospital."

AT: "What did you do when you got out of the Marines?"

Rick: "I bought a small farm in Mexico and grew corn and strawberries. Plus I ran some cattle. That lasted about a year and half."

AT: "What happened?"

Rick: "I learned what can happen to you when you invest in a foreign country. All my money was in an account in the one bank in this little Mexican town. One day the Mexicans elected a new president, who decided to nationalize all the banks. The bank employees now worked for the Mexican government. I went to see the president of my bank, who was a personal friend, and asked about my account. He said: 'What account? I don't know you, and there is no record of your having an account here.'"

AT: "You lost all your money?"

Rick: "Absolutely all."

AT: "What about the U.S. Embassy? Couldn't they help?"

Rick: "Ha. It was happening all over Mexico."

AT: "That's terrible! (thinking of my account in Costa Rica)"

Rick: "Well, it was time to move on anyway. I had driven race cars off and on in California, and I had a good reputation. A guy I knew introduced me to a car owner in California, and I drove for him for a while. Then I went to Europe and drove in the big endurance races, LeMans, and others."

AT: "An exciting life. Did you ever go back to school?"

Rick: "Yes. I got my high school GED in the Marines, and then going to college part time I got degrees in Computer Science and Marketing."

AT: "This was in California?"

Rick: "At U.C. in La Jolla."

AT: "When did you get interested in Costa Rica?"

Rick: "That's a story. In 1984 a friend called me to come here to look at a great real estate opportunity. He was selling half of the land around Jaco for one dollar a meter."

AT: "I take it you didn't buy any."

Rick: "Couldn't see it. Too hot. My wife didn't like it."

AT: "Too bad. Speaking of wives, I don't see one."

Rick: “Unfortunately, no. I have been married twice, but not now. Wouldn’t mind doing it again though.”

AT: “Well, there are sure lots of attractive Ticas in Atenas, not to mention the Gringos. You are a very visible businessman, in a great position to meet people.”

Rick: “With the Ticas I think that’s a disadvantage. It’s a small town, and everyone knows what everyone else is doing. They don’t want to be seen stepping out of their community in such a visible way.”

AT: “All you need is one.”

Rick: “Yeah. We’ll see.”

AT: “So in 1984 you passed up the chance to come here. What made you change your mind?”

Rick: “A few years ago I had a serious back problem and spent a considerable time in a wheelchair in a VA hospital. When I recovered I had to make a fresh start doing something, somewhere. Fortunately, even though I was only fifty, I was able to collect my social security on medical grounds. If I got a regular job in the U.S., I would not make that much, and I would probably screw up my social security. So I did a rigorous analysis of countries where I could live cheap and be happy, and came up with Costa Rica.”

AT: “What appealed about Costa Rica?”

Rick: “I liked the stability of the government and treatment of foreigners. I liked the fact that there was a large middle class, a high literacy rate, and no army. I liked the weather in the mountain towns, and after I had been here a few weeks, I loved the people. The family in Atenas that rented me a cabin turned out to be the best people I have ever met, anywhere.”

AT: “How did you come to own the Internet Café?”

Rick: “From the first day I was in Atenas, Jose began trying to sell me this business. I was interested, but he was asking for a ridiculous amount of money, and he had absolutely no records to show me. I had to guess at the sales.”

AT: “What happened?”

Rick: “I waited him out. It was clear he really wanted to sell. Finally we agreed on a deal that seemed fair to me, but it was still a crap shoot in terms of whether the revenue would cover the costs.”

AT: “How has it turned out?”

Rick: “It’s close, month to month. But I really like it. It has been good for me.”

AT: “I noticed that you remodeled the place right away.”

Rick: “I had not planned on doing that until I knew more about the business. But when I took over, the roof was leaking. The landlord agreed to fix the roof if I closed the business for a few weeks. It seemed like the ideal time to remodel the insides.”

AT: “What are the things that you like about running this business?”

Rick: “The most important thing to me is the community aspect. It’s a meeting place for gringos, tourists, and the local kids. I like supporting community activities like the orphanage and health care services. Every other Saturday night I put on a free movie for the local young people. The Ticos don’t patronize my place very much, but they go out of their way to let me know they are glad I am here and support me.”

AT: “With your super extroverted personality you must have made a lot of friends here. I know that you really make your customers feel welcome in your café.”

Rick: “Thanks, that’s what I try to do.”

AT: “Tell me a little about what you are offering that our readers may be interested in.”

Rick: “In terms of the Internet, I have high speed ADSL running at 2.48 gigabytes. You can bring your own laptop and plug into my network, or use one of my computers. I have a scanner and a photo quality color laser printer. You can also make international phone calls.”

AT: “What about food and drinks?”

Rick: “I serve American style lunches and breakfasts six days a week. On Tuesday and Thursday nights I have grilled steak dinners. For 6,000 colones you get a 10oz New York Sirloin, with potatoes, salad, and a drink.”

AT: “What are the hours of these dinners?”

Rick: “From 5:30 to 7:30. You don’t need a reservation, although it helps me if you call if you are coming with a group. My cell phone is 887-0101.”

AT: “What about alcoholic beverages?”

Rick: “You can bring your own. I don’t have a liquor license and really don’t want one. My intention is to keep the place as a café, not a bar.”

AT: “Local people like to bring their own anyway, to save money.”

Rick: “I encourage that.”

AT: “Best of luck to you, Rick. Your business is truly a community resource, and you deserve all of our support.”

Notes on Dengue Fever

by *Atenas Today* staff reporter

Recently my friend and great information source, Marietta Arce, sent me an article about dengue fever. She reminded me that with the rainy season approaching, the dengue mosquitoes are coming. Last year there were many cases in Atenas.

Here are some notes I got from her article and from some internet research.

1. Dengue fever is a viral, flu-like disease transmitted from human to human by the bite of a particular type of mosquito, called the *Aedes aegypti*.
2. The *Aedes* mosquito can be recognized by the black and white stripes on its legs and abdomen.
3. The *Aedes* lives and breeds in urban areas in water filled manmade containers, such as old flower pots. Old tires are especially bad.
4. The *Aedes* likes lower altitudes; it is very rare above 4,000 feet.
5. The *Aedes* bites people only in the daytime; it is not active at night.
6. The average time between the bite of an infected *Aedes* and the onset of symptoms is 4 to 6 days, with a range of 3 to 14 days.
7. An infected person cannot spread the infection to other people, but can be a source of the virus for other mosquitoes for about 6 days.
8. Dengue fever usually starts suddenly with a high fever, headache, pain behind the eyes, and pain in the muscles and joints.
9. A rash usually appears 3 to 4 days after the start of the fever.
10. Nausea, vomiting and loss of appetite are common.
11. The presence of the dengue virus can be detected by a simple blood test.
12. The severe portion of the illness usually lasts a week to ten days, but complete recovery can take a month.
13. The only treatment is rest, plenty of fluids, and acetaminophen (avoid aspirin).
14. If there are no complications, there are no long term effects from the disease.
15. The most dangerous complication is a progression to dengue hemorrhagic fever. People who have already had dengue fever and are infected again are more susceptible to this complication.
16. Dengue hemorrhagic fever causes the blood vessels to start to leak, resulting in bleeding from the nose, mouth, and gums. Bruising can be a sign of internal bleeding.
17. Dengue hemorrhagic fever is potentially fatal and must be treated promptly after the first symptoms by replacing lost fluids, and sometimes having blood transfusions.
18. Dengue hemorrhagic fever is fatal in about 5 percent of cases, usually among children and young adults.
19. There is no vaccine to protect against this virus. The only way to avoid the possibility of contracting the illness is to avoid being bitten by an infected *Aedes* mosquito.
20. Insect repellent should contain at least 30% DEET to be effective. Strong repellent like this should not be inhaled or put on the hands of children, where it could find its way to their mouths.
21. Mosquitoes can bite through thin clothing, so apply repellent to clothing as well as to exposed skin.
22. There are likely to be many more infected mosquitoes in the downtown Atenas areas than in the outlying areas. If you live in Atenas Centro or Barrio Los Angeles you should have screens and eliminate all potential breeding sites around your property.