

# 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 200 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.

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## **Thank God for Lineal Vital** *by Fred Macdonald*

A few weeks ago a friend was entertaining a visitor at a restaurant in Atenas. Suddenly the friend slapped his arm and killed a small bee who had stung him. The dead bee fell to the floor.

“Are you OK?” my friend asked.

“Sure. It was nothing.”

Half an hour passed. My friend noticed that the visitor was becoming pale. Then with no warning he crumbled in his chair and passed out on the floor. The restaurant manager rushed over, took one look, and hurried to the phone to call for the Red Cross ambulance. He was told they would come as soon as they could, but that there was an accident on the highway and they were very busy.

They waited for 15 minutes. The visitor regained consciousness, but his blood pressure was very low and he seemed near death. With

no sign of the ambulance, my friend decided to call Linea Vital. Fortunately he was a member of their health service and had their number on his cell phone. They were there within five minutes.

The visitor's blood pressure was 60 over 40. He had had a severe allergic reaction, and was in crisis. The Linea Vital paramedic had the right medicine in his ambulance and gave him a shot. Then he was taken to the Linea Vital clinic and kept under observation until he was fully recovered. A tragedy was averted.

Are you a member of Linea Vital?



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## Mystery Building

Thanks to the readers who have reported that two of the tenants of this building will be another appliance store and an office of Scotia Bank.

We shall see.



Atenas Today Interviews Danna and Travis Bowman  
*Website Designers*



**AT:** **What? You moved to Costa Rica with two young children and had never been here before?**

Danna: Yea, crazy. And we don't even consider ourselves to be adventurous people.

Travis: It was a case of wanting to try something new and tired of the same ole 'making more money...for what? Bigger homes? We wanted to make a big change.

**AT:** **Did you have friends here?**

Danna: Not really. I had corresponded with an American/Tico living in La Garita whom we rented a villa from for our first 10 days in Costa Rica. He met us at the airport in the middle of the night with two trucks. Ironically, he has now moved back to Dallas.

**AT:** **You brought all your earthly possessions with you?**

Travis: In 17 suitcases, plus two computers. It cost us \$500 in extra luggage fees.

**AT:** **Incredible! Let's start at the beginning. Where did you come from?**

Danna: We both grew up, went to school, and worked in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Until we came here we have never lived anywhere else as a family.

Travis: On August 27, 2008, my 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, we landed in Costa Rica. Nice present!

**AT:** **How old are your children?**

Danna: Wyatt is 7 and Savanna is 4.

**AT:** **Do you have them in school?**

Travis: Yes, they are both in the Colina Azul, a Spanish language school that goes through the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. It is on the main road on the eastern edge of Atenas.

Danna: They absolutely love it. Wyatt is already fluent in Spanish and there is always lots of singing and dancing!

**AT:** **Why did you choose Costa Rica?**

Danna: Well, it had to be someplace different, but not too different. It had to have good weather. We were sick of the Texas heat. It had to have a low cost of living. I had read a popular book called "Living and Retiring in Costa Rica" that made it sound very attractive. And

when we mentioned Costa Rica to people, a surprising number had been here and absolutely loved it. Plus, there was SKYPE and SKY TV (with the NFL package). Mandatory for a major movie and Cowboys Fan.

**AT: Where did you stay when you first arrived?**

Danna: We are not as crazy as we may seem. I had done a ton of research on Costa Rica on the internet, and had selected Atenas based on the location, the weather, and the fact that it was a small town. We leased our house in Texas and lined up a rental of a great house in Pica Flora.

Travis: Schools were a major issue. Wyatt was just ready to start first grade, so it was a good time to move before he got involved in a particular school and activities.

**AT: Are you still living in Pica Flora?**

Travis: No, it's really expensive. It was perfect for our start here; we made a lot of great friends and the location was perfect for us. We stayed there five months, and then moved to a caretaker's house on a property in Santa Eulalia. We help take care of the property and pool and the rent is now more than affordable.

**AT: Congratulations. You have stumbled into the best place in Costa Rica, possibly the world. What happened to make you decide on this major life change at your ages? Usu-**

**ally it's us old folks who come here.**

Danna: It's a long story. We were running a business that my parents had started. It was called "The Arrangers Casino Company". We managed functions—parties, fund raisers, corporate events, etc. My parents had pioneered the concept of "casino nights" as fundraisers, and it was very successful.

Travis: We were following the standard formula of working hard, investing our savings in our house, selling the house and buying a bigger one, then doing it again and again. And, nicer cars and nicer clothes. The norm for anyone living in the states, basically. "The American Dream"...supposedly.

Danna: But wondering where it was all going and why we were doing it. One year we put on 275 events. We made a lot of money, but it was crazy and we were so busy. We were at the point where if we wanted to expand our business, we had to invest a lot of money in employees, trucks, etc. in order to keep going. We were tired of chasing the carrot. We wanted a wonderful life, without the fuss and stress.

**AT: Did you come here with the idea of starting a business?**

Travis: Yes, but we didn't know what. We wanted to learn the culture and the language, first. We wanted to come with an open mind. We thought about a car wash, a

tow truck service, a self storage warehouse, etc.

**AT:** **What did you find?**

Travis: We found that things are very different here in terms of business economics. Labor is cheap, but equipment and other things are expensive. Our original ideas might not work immediately.

**AT:** **You must have been very apprehensive in the beginning.**

Danna: Not really for me. I was excited about new friends, opportunities and beauty.

Travis: I'll admit to being a little apprehensive, but it has been better and more wonderful than I could have expected.

**AT:** **What were your first impressions of Costa Rica?**

Danna: Well, you have to realize that we came from an area in Texas where everything was new and master planned. In the beginning Costa Rica looked to me like a third world country, not a country on the verge of social and economic breakthroughs. But I see things differently now and that's why I came here I think, to see things in a different light. The people were amazing and have been right from the very beginning and I think this is one of the best countries on earth.

Travis: Well of course the scenery, after all we came from Texas. But I love the people, and I love the fact that the people here are so self-reliant. If you fall in a hole in the sidewalk, it's your own fault. You don't blame someone else or start a lawsuit like people would in the States.

Danna: Back in Dallas you could hire someone to come "baby-proof" your house so that there was no way your baby could get hurt on open electrical outlets, stairs, etc. Here a "baby proofer" would pull their hair out.

**AT:** **For sure. So what have you decided in terms of a business?**

Travis: We both had experience in marketing and design. In fact we met each other when we were both working for a direct marketing company.

Danna: It was a secret office romance, kissing in the lunch room and everything.

Travis: And I bought her a water and an orange every single day from the 'roach coach'. We decided to set up a business in Atenas designing and hosting websites. Most Atenas businesses don't have a website yet. Our plan was to offer a very low cost way for them to join the internet world. Discount Web Design, what a concept.

**AT:** **What would it cost?**

Travis: We can set up a basic website for \$350, and host it for \$5 a month.

**AT:** **How is it going?**

Danna: It's just getting started, but we have done four or five already. Also we have set up an Atenas website as a demonstration. If you go to [www.TODOAtenas.com](http://www.TODOAtenas.com), you will see informative articles and business listings, plus eventually a live webcam

showing pictures of the park, hopefully sponsored by ConfiTicos.

Travis: One of the things we can offer is our ability to generate original art for a client's website. We can make a site look very professional, not just a picture of a business card. And all at a heavily discounted cost.

AT: **How can people contact you?**

Danna: Our business is called "The Tico Web Factory", and you can contact us through [www.ticowebfactory.com](http://www.ticowebfactory.com). Or you can email us directly at [ticotravis@gmail.com](mailto:ticotravis@gmail.com), or [sassydanna@gmail.com](mailto:sassydanna@gmail.com).

AT: **I wish you success. It would be great to have more young gringo families here.**



### THE GREEK AND THE ITALIAN *submitted by anonymous*

A Greek and an Italian were sitting in a Starbuck's one day discussing over triple lattes. Who had the superior culture,

The Greek guy says, "Well, we have the Parthenon", arching his eyebrows.

The Italian replies, "We have the Coliseum."

The Greek responds, "We Greeks gave birth to advanced mathematics."

The Italian, nodding agreement, says, "But we built the Roman Empire."

They went back and forth until the Greek comes up with what he thinks will end the discussion.

With a flourish of finality he says, "We invented sex!"

The Italian thinks for a couple of seconds and replies quietly, "That is also true, but it was the Italians who introduced it to women."

## The Atenas Organic Coop

by Jean Alexander and Genevieve Codere



CAOA, the organic cooperative of Atenas, has found a new home. After having used the Red Cross building at its beginning and then the Spanish/English Fun porch, the members of the coop now receive their goods at the house of Genevieve and Alex, two new Atenas inhabitants. Their home is located 150 meters south of the Red Cross, in the Oasis, straight up the hill on the right hand side. It is currently run by Chiqui Fonseca and Genevieve Codere, with lots of help from Melanie LeSuer, the wonderful baker.

But what exactly is CAO? It's an organization that permits its members to receive organic goods produced in Costa Rica. Anyone can become a member. Each week, members place their orders at the coop. Then, the organization places orders with the different producers or distributors. We try to use as many local products as possible and we order everything that cannot be found locally through a distributor coming from the organic farms in Zarcero. A wide variety of products can be ordered, from fruits and veggies to chicken, goat cheese and goodies like homemade pastas and German breads and pastries, these last two items baked fresh by Melanie.

Each Friday, between 10 and 12 noon, the goods are distributed to each member and after paying for your weekly products, an invoice is given to each to show how af-

fordable the prices are. Genevieve has done some comparison shopping at the public market and found cilantro, for instance, at the same price as the CAO sells organic cilantro. Jean has found that pound for pound the whole chickens are slightly more expensive than chickens in the public market, but the organic chickens are larger, averaging 2.1k, compared to the normal 1.5k chicken. And the taste of organic, free-range poultry is wonderful. And the organic eggs - the yolks are more yellow, the whites firmer, the shells are harder - there really is a difference! And the papaya - we who have become used to the organic papaya say there is none sweeter.

New members are always welcomed. We are poised to grow and the more orders we have for these products the more we help grow the market for organic, thus showing the farmers that they can make money at it. If you are interested, you can call Genevieve (Gen) at 2446-5768, write her at [genevieve@micasamicostarica.com](mailto:genevieve@micasamicostarica.com), or show up on Friday morning to have a look at what it feels to be part of a group who cares about the food they give to their families, and the environment in which that food is grown..

We are always interested in meeting new producers also. If you have organic products, you can contact Gen to propose them. She speaks French, Spanish and English.



## Mayor Holds Meeting with Ex-pats

On Friday of last week the mayor of Atenas, Wilberth Martin Aguilar Gatjens, hosted an informational meeting at the town hall (Municipalidad) for the ex-pats living in Atenas. The meeting was organized by Mario Kroon, an expat living in Santa Eulalia, who got to know the mayor while working with him on a community project. In spite of the lack of publicity about the event, about 40 ex-pats came to meet the town officials and hear about future plans.

The mayor and others said that they welcome all the ex-pats who have chosen Atenas, and emphasized that we need to all work together for the good of the community. They plan to have more meetings in the future to discuss specific opportunities for people to get involved.

A slide presentation revealed the following interesting facts about Atenas. The population in the year 2000 was 22,700, spread over an area of 1075 square kilometers. Eight major districts make up the town: Centro, Jesus, Mercedes, San Isidro, San Jose, Santa Eulalia, Concepcion, and Escobal. At present 86% of the town roads are paved, and there are plans to pave the remaining ones over the next five years.

Show below are pictures of some of the town officials.



Wilberth Martin Aguilar Gatjens  
Mayor



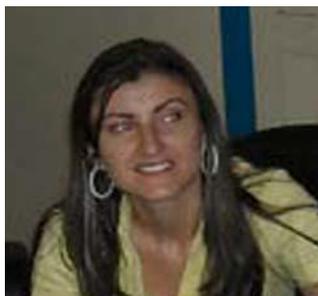
Patricia Castro Solorsano  
Mayor's assistant



Patricia Calvo Araya  
Planner



Christian Arias Guerrero  
Town lawyer



Jaqueline Avila  
Psycologo

## Our Columnists

### Baseball in Costa Rica



by *Marietta Arce*

We love baseball in our family. It's a good thing since we spend a great deal of time traveling to practice or ball games on weekends. Baseball in Costa Rica is not exactly like the baseball I knew as a New Yorker, but things are improving. There are now fifteen teams playing regularly and baseball has become a viable option for many young boys who don't feel passionate about soccer.

This past Sunday, we went to Jacó to watch a double header between my son's team, The Rookies, and the home team, Garabito-Jacó. The bus with the players left much too early, so my daughter and I followed by car at a more reasonable hour. We were encouraged to bring our own chair, sun block and food. I was given directions (Tico-style) and we eventually arrived somewhere near our destination.

I had not been to Jacó for almost nine years. The "tico" directions I remembered were simple: 25 meters east of the Police station, "you can't get lost, just ask anyone". We got to the center of Jacó and I promptly stopped to ask someone who didn't know anything about baseball but

did know where the Police Station was. We went there and were immediately aware that baseball could not possibly be played on the sandy beach!

We went back to the center and asked someone else who asked if we were sure we didn't mean soccer. I assured him that Jacó had a baseball team, which was in pretty good standing. He was surprised but helpfully directed me to the location of the OIJ (like FBI) in the vicinity to see if maybe that was near the place we sought. Upon arriving there, I knew again that no baseball would be taking place there.

I finally did what I should have done in the first place; I sought out a taxi driver and asserted that he would surely know where we needed to be. He laughed heartily and said he thought he had seen the place they used for baseball, in fact it was 25 meters east of the **Municipal** Police Station and I should have no problem finding it, just ask anyone!

In the meantime, my daughter was sighing next to me, stating her frank opinion that we should have left with the bus hours before since she knew I always got lost! I countered that I had no idea Jacó had so many different types of Police and asked that she look for the stadium lights while we drove around. This was a fruitless endeavor and I was desperate while I flagged down a motorcyclist. This kind man suggested we follow him since he was going our way. Two minutes later, we arrived at the right destination and found that the first game was already in progress. We were losing 4-0.

We were asked to wait until a break between innings to go to our team's cheering section. While we waited I took the opportunity to size up the opposition and noticed that all the local players and fans were Nicaraguan. My ears were assaulted by the repeated taunts of a heckler who seemed determined to make the game unpleasant but I did my best to ignore him.

I looked around the stadium and saw that it will one day be a proper place for baseball, but right now it is a makeshift one with no stadium lights, bleachers, or dugout. It felt like we were in a sauna because the day was hazy, humid, hot and there was no breeze. The repeated comments from the heckler did nothing to improve the heaviness in the air, but everyone was determined to enjoy some baseball. When there was a break in the action, we promptly rushed to our team's side, arriving there with our shoes all muddy and grateful that we had brought our chair, sun block and snacks.

I was suddenly aware that about 80 percent of the league players that make up the 15 teams are Nicaraguan and probably the reason why baseball is growing in popularity in Costa Rica. I thought about Nicaraguans and the specific role they are playing in the construction of the large, upscale towers that are springing up everywhere. I wondered if they will go back to Nicaragua when their work is over or whether they will have formed new bonds that will keep them here for the rest of their lives, but always longing for things 'back home'.

I think about Nicaragua and all the hardships it and its people have known for so many decades. I remind myself often that we are blessed in this country and don't appreciate it enough to safeguard all that we have. We take so much for granted (peace, freedom of speech, democracy) because we have not really known anything

else. Not one of our writers can claim a prize for his heart wrenching accounts of torture or war. We have other problems, but that is a story for another day.

We lost both games on Sunday. Our team was understandably disappointed and hopeful that the rest of the season will allow them to gain some ground. I gained much from my observations, however, and came home with a desire to learn more about Nicaraguans and the specific reasons they have for leaving their country behind and bravely beginning a new life here. Most of them are good, hardworking people who just want what we all want: to live a long and peaceful life surrounded by family and friends. It seems like such a simple desire yet not one always within their reach. Baseball isn't the solution but it is providing an opportunity to share our cultures and perhaps deepen some friendships.

## Missives from an Old(er) Feminist



*by Diane Holman*

### *Third, a Polemic*

This column will not be free of stridency, so if the straight talking of a woman bothers you, I encourage you to turn your attention elsewhere.

Today President Barack Obama will be delivering a commencement address at the University of Notre Dame. Many of the Catholic bishops in the United States are strongly protesting his appearance at Notre Dame, because Obama does *not* oppose birth control and the right of a woman to choose whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term.

Could there be two more fundamental rights for a woman than these, two rights more basic in determining how she chooses to live her life? Women get pregnant. Women give birth. Women—not men. And yet for centuries men have been telling women they have no rights with respect to their unique role in the reproduction of the species.

Why?, you may ask; and the bishops will solemnly intone: 1) Because the purpose of sex is reproduction and 2) Because to choose not to carry a pregnancy to term is tantamount to murder.

This is lunacy, but unfortunately it is backed by power. The Catholic bishops are telling the President of the United States: you should not come to the University of Notre Dame and deliver an address because we believe that women's control of conception and birth is one of the greatest evils confronting the world today.

That the Catholic bishops of the United States are trumpeting this nonsense in 2009 is *un*-believable to me. It is also sobering. After all the good work of women in the late 60's and early 70's, this male conclave of celibates still thinks it can cloak the most oppressive of beliefs under the guise of *holiness*.

## A Special Poem



*by Fred Macdonald*

My father died 25 years ago this summer. We were very close and I took comfort in going through everything he had left—pictures, family papers, newspaper clippings, and old compositions that I did not know existed. Tucked in an old file I found this untitled, hand written poem. I typed it up, put in a small frame, and hung it in my office. He was a wise man.

We are all, the human race,  
Like the drops of water in a great river that flows on,  
Each so close to the other and yet so far apart,  
A nameless flood to the sea.

When all things last so short a time,  
And nothing matters very much,  
It seems pitiful that men,  
Attaching an absurd importance to trivial things,  
Should make themselves and one another so unhappy.

*---Ted Macdonald*

### **Mirador Happy Hours and Dances**

Happy Hour at the *Mirador Restaurant* is every day from 4 to 6 pm. Come and get two drinks for the price of one. The second Saturday of every month there is dancing from 5 to 11pm.

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