

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 Jeff Feldman

Developer of Kopali Communities

AT: I was surprised to find such a large, nice office right across the street from the gas station. What do you do here?

Jeff: Thanks! It's nothing fancy, but we like it here. We are developing 'ultra-ecological and sustainable communities' here in Costa Rica. Something unique. Something special. It's not just another collection of houses or yet another homogenous, master-planned subdivision. It's the future of development and we're setting the bar...very high, I might add.

AT: Is there such a community in Atenas?

Jeff: Not yet, but hopefully someday. I really love Atenas; it's a very special place. Our first community is in San Mateo on 45 acres on the beautiful Rio Machuca. We also own a large finca on the shoulder of the Miravalles Volcano in Guanacaste which we plan to develop beginning in 2009. It has 8 hot springs, 5 cold springs, rivers, a large waterfall and views like Napa Valley. It's really incredible. It will be a first-of-its-kind, world-class, super-ecological and sustainable "spa-community."

AT: What is your goal for these communities?

Jeff: Our goal is to provide the setting and infrastructure for residents to live in a genuine 'community' while using natural resources in an honest, respectful and sustainable manner, all the while, living a comfortable, modern and contemporary lifestyle. The development is centered around clean, chemical-free drinking water (from an underground spring) and food production. In our communities a large percentage of the resident's food is grown right there on the farm. Throughout the entire community we will have 100s of varieties of fruits, vegetables, nuts, teas, roots, herbs and medicinal plants as well as fish, shrimp, chicken, eggs, goats, milk, cheeses, etc. As an example, we have over 60 varieties of bananas alone! We will be using alternative energy sources such as solar, hydro-electric, wind and geothermal power in our communities. Structures will be built using sustainable and renewable building materials. We need to be 'net givers' and not 'net takers.' Our business model is breaking the mold of conventional land development.

AT: Are you planning to sell lots in this community?

Jeff: Yes. We have 41 lots, varying in size from 1,200 to nearly 3,000 square meters, and they will be ready for sale starting in June of this year. There are also plans for a ten to fifteen cabin hotel, restaurant and community/yoga center where we will have yoga retreats, educational workshops, cultural gatherings and so on. We are looking for a partner/buyer for the hotel site now.

AT: Tell me about the property.

Jeff: It is magnificent! The land is gently rolling and is perfectly suited for both farming and housing. The climate is truly tropical with cool mornings and evenings, comfortably warm afternoons and a constant breeze. It's in the best fruit growing region in all of Costa Rica if you can imagine that! There are thousands of fruit trees, grassy fields for community areas and playgrounds, massive amounts of rock for use in building, an amazing clean river and several ponds. You really have to see it to appreciate it.

AT: Is the idea that people who live here will adopt a more primitive life style and give up the conveniences that are wasteful of natural resources?

Jeff: Definitely not. Quite the contrary in fact. This will not be a “hippie” community of idealistic people with visions of grandeur. Nor will it be a socialistic type community. We want to show that modern and contemporary people can live the same type of lives they are now, only in a much more healthy sustainable way, living in harmony with nature and with each other.

AT: How do you intend to do that?

Jeff: One of the big differences between what we are doing and what has been done in other so-called ‘ecological communities’ is that we are well-funded, and we have the experience and the team to provide state-of-the-art, cutting-edge eco-technology which interacts with nature in a truly sustainable and environmental way, while at the same time providing people with the standard of living to which they are accustomed. We do not wish to live like Indians and revert into the distant past, but quite the opposite – we endeavor to move into the future while living with the wisdom and lessons of our ancestors.

AT: Give me some examples?

Jeff: A big one is energy. When we use electricity from the local power grid, much of it comes from the burning of non-renewable and harmful resources like oil from the Persian Gulf and coal. In Costa Rica, much of it comes from Arenal which is dependent on rain water levels. Blackouts are a norm here. Our electricity will come from harnessing free, renewable and sustainable sources like sunlight, wind, geothermal gradients, and falling water. Another major example is the safe and secure treatment of human waste. We have a system being designed and built by the world-renown Dr. John Todd. All of our residents and guest’s waste water will be treated at an on-site super-ecological waste water treatment plant which utilizes gravity to collect the water and plant-life to purify the water. It’s completely ecological and biological process and requires very little energy and maintenance. It ultimately becomes an amenity because the pond systems the process relies on will be beautiful, rich with all manner of flora and fauna. It’s really something incredible.

AT: Can you really get enough electricity at a competitive cost using these techniques to power 41 homes and hotel, all with modern appliances?

Jeff: Initially the cost of electricity to the homeowner will be slightly higher because they will be purchasing solar panels and they will be discouraged from using high power devices like clothes driers and dishwashers. However, if they conserve electricity, they can have all the items most people consider to be essential, like good lighting, refrigeration, television, computers, etc. at a low cost. Remember, these are people who want to live a sustainable lifestyle and who are willing to put in the five minutes it takes to do dishes. Also, here in Costa Rica, we hang our clothes outside to dry.

AT: It sounds almost too good to be true.

Jeff: You have to realize that our company has embarked on new and unique development program. We will be using new techniques and learning more as we go, and we want to create a successful model that can be replicated in other places, not just here in Costa Rica but around the world. And not just by Kopali, but by the entire development industry as a whole. We always want to push the cutting-edge.

AT: Does that mean that you will be subsidizing this community during the learning phase?

Jeff: We are not a non-profit or research project, so to speak. Our goal is to make a profit, while at the same time improving the lives of all the people with whom we interact and sustaining and improving Costa Rica, the environment and our planet.

AT: So if I were interested in living in your new community, what could I expect in terms of cost of living, compared say to living in a typical “gringo” house in Atenas?

Jeff: I understand that the cost of a modest, modern house in a good location in Atenas is around \$250,000. Our prices will be comparable. And because we will be growing most of our own food, our living costs will be lower.

AT: Will you be building houses for people, or will they build their own?

Jeff: We have our own architects and builders. People can work with them to develop their own designs, but they will have to conform to our strict green design/build restrictions on building materials and techniques.

AT: What kind of restrictions?

Jeff: We want to use sustainably harvested wood wherever possible. Other materials like bamboo, which is another very sustainable material, will also be used. Concrete, for example, is a non-renewable resource and requires a tremendous amount of energy to produce. It will be used only for underground foundations. There will be other restrictions like home sizes, location of houses to protect privacy of neighbors, and so on.

AT: What about glass?

Jeff: Glass will be used minimally I would think. If even used at all. It’s just not necessary with proper tropical architecture. In our climate, if you design a house sufficiently and in accordance to its physical and natural environment you can minimize the need for glass. Also, with its tremendous heat load, glass actually heats the house up. We expect to have a model house completed this year to show the public.

AT: What about water?

Jeff: Our drinking water comes from underground mountain springs. We have a well at the top of the farm and will gravity feed lines to each home-site. Storm water runoff from the local mountains is channeled into a series of ponds to prevent erosion. The idea is to stop water from running across the property and to have it crawl through slowly. We also have designed another series of ponds for aquaculture where we raise fish like tilapia and freshwater shrimp and where plants are introduced which clean the water before it goes into the river. This storm water system is nearly completed and can be seen now by visitors.

AT: Tell me about your company. Where did the name Kopali come from?

Jeff: Kopali comes from the Spanish word, copal, which is a resin that is burned as incense in Mayan ceremonial and traditional gatherings. Our company is a private U.S. corporation, based in Miami and in Costa Rica. We have 34 incredible investors.

AT: How did you personally get involved in this?

Jeff: It all started with our family dentist in Miami. About 12 years ago his son followed a girlfriend to Costa Rica. Things didn’t work out with the girlfriend but he fell deeply in love with the country and founded an eco-tourism company with his sister. He ended up creating a 100 acre ecological and sustainable community in Punta Mona, south of Puerto Viejo on the Caribbean. His father, the dentist, kept my family up to date on what was happening, and after our family came here on a vacation, my father and I committed ourselves to the ideals and principles which are the foundation of Kopali Communities today.

AT: What is your background?

Jeff: I was born in 1976 in Florida and grew up there. In 1998 I graduated from the University of Florida where I majored in Health Science and Business Administration. After college I moved to Los Angeles and worked for the LA Dodgers, FOX Sports Net, and finally General Electric – selling of all things big generators. In 2004 I moved back to Florida, and in 2005 my father and I founded Kopali Communities.

AT: What are your interests besides ecology?

Jeff: I love the outdoors and sports. Right now I am training for my first Olympic Triathlon. I would surf every day if I could.

AT: Do you have a family?

Jeff: No, I've never been married, but it's on the agenda.

AT: You obviously are also passionate about your project here. Is there anything else you would like our readers to know?

Jeff: Costa Rica is a magical place, and I want to be a part of a movement that respects this country and treats it right. We all came here generally for the same reasons—because it's beautiful, the people are amazing, the food is wonderful, the climate is spectacular, and with all that, it's affordable!

However, it's a country in a period of critical change. All these new people are adding to some of the major problems the country faces—shortages of water and energy to name two of the biggest. We have to be more sustainable. We have to be more respectful of THEIR culture and customs and not force OURS upon them.

Kopali Communities is here in Costa Rica specifically to do all of that for those of us who wish to come to Costa Rica and live an authentically Tico, healthy, and sustainable lifestyle.

AT: How can people find out more?

Jeff: They can visit our website, www.kopalicommunities.com, and they can email me at jeff@kopali.com, or call me at 391-2818 or 446-3701 to arrange for a tour of the San Mateo property. I love to show it off.

Thoughts on Electricity

by Fred Macdonald

Here in Costa Rica we have a lot more power outages than we are used to. In the U.S. it was a novelty and an excuse to have a romantic evening with candles. We welcomed the unexpected change to our routine, except of course when widespread and prolonged outages caused real hardship, like the time I was stranded in Manhattan overnight with no hotel rooms available.

But here it happens often, usually for only a few hours, but just when you want to watch your favorite TV program, or use your computer, or turn on a light to read a book. It is not a fun novelty. The fact is that we have come to depend on electricity in almost all phases of our life. If we didn't have it we would have to restructure fundamentally how we spend our time.

All this got me to thinking about the nature of electricity, and how it was a resource that remained hidden from human beings for so long. Our planet is rich in materials and sources of energy that were relatively easy for humans to discover. Lightning showed us fire, and flint allowed us to create it at will. Hard stones could be shaped to make tools. Clay could be baked to form containers. Copper and tin could be taken from the earth and combined in a hot fire to form bronze. Then we found iron deposits that we were able to melt and shape into tools.

Electricity, however, is different. You can't find it in the woods, or in the earth. You can see it in the form of lightning, but so far no one has come up with a way to harness lightning. It's like nature kept this really big secret from us.

I did a little research to learn when and how we uncovered the secret. The Mesopotamians got the first hint of the existence of a mysterious force when they noticed that if you rubbed a piece of amber with cat's fur, you could cause light objects like feathers to move toward the amber. In fact, the word "electricity" comes from the Latin "electricus", which means "like amber".

The ancients did know about magnetism, because there are naturally occurring minerals, like magnetite, which are magnetic. They thought that rubbing the amber somehow made it magnetic in a special way so that it attracted non metallic objects. For literally thousands of years no more was known about nature's secret.

Finally in 1600 an Englishman named William Gilbert conducted a careful study of magnetism, and he concluded correctly that the "amber effect" was not magnetic. He postulated that there was some other, completely different kind of force involved, but he had no idea what it was. He and others observed that if you rubbed the amber hard enough and put it close to a metal object embedded in the ground, then you could get flash of light (a spark) much like lightning.

In the U.S. we are taught that electricity was “discovered” by Benjamin Franklin. This is not quite true, but Franklin’s famous experiment with a kite in 1752 did show that lightning produced sparks just like amber. He flew a kite with a wet string into a thunderstorm. On the other end of the string was a metal key and he saw sparks jumping from the key to the back of his hand. This experiment was widely publicized and stimulated the later scientists who gradually unraveled the mystery of electricity.

In 1800 Alessandro Volta developed the chemical battery, consisting of alternating layers of zinc and copper. Now scientists had a means of generating electricity that could be used for other experiments. No more rubbing amber or flying kites in thunderstorms.

People like Andre-Marie Ampere, Michael Faraday, and George Ohm, discovered that you could use electricity to generate a magnetic field, and that if you moved a wire in a magnetic field, electricity would flow in the wire. If you reversed the process and put electricity into the device, you could create an electric motor. It must have seemed like magic.

In 1864 James Clerk Maxwell worked out the mathematical relationship between electricity and magnetism. The secret had now been uncovered and fit into the grand harmonic scheme that is all of nature. From then on it was a matter of electrical engineering to harness “the servant of man” and change the way we humans live.

Are there other fundamental “secrets” in nature that are gradually being revealed by man? Nuclear energy would certainly fit into this category. We observed the nuclear power in the sun much like we observed the power of static electricity in amber for thousands of years before we were able to understand it. Now there are questions about the dark matter in outer space, the nature of basic particles, time travel, and many other things, not to mention the biggest mystery of all: “what happened before the big bang?” It seems like nature has an endless supply of secrets.

All this because I was thinking about what life was like before electricity

Art for Health

Dear fellow artist:

Art can produce different emotions depending on the theme, figures, size and the colors expressed by artists. Artists have a tremendous power because of their ability to communicate ideas through the hands and eyes. The members of this committee would like to create an atmosphere of happiness and hope in the Atenas health clinic through art. In March 2006, we initiated the first on-going project which is a permanent collection of art and craft in the waiting areas and in the clinic hallways. We know this idea is working because we received many wonderful comments from the workers and patients in the clinic. We currently have 9 artworks donated by foreign and tico artists (professionals and non-professionals). We are looking for more artists and craftspeople to expand this collection and hope that we can count on you. It is an opportunity to do something wonderful for your community without investing much money but with lasting results.

Some things to keep in mind:

1. We are looking for art with the theme “Art to Improve Health”. It can be existing art that fits the theme or something created especially for the clinic. We are looking for paintings, prints, photos, poetry (preferably in Spanish) lettered in calligraphic style, masks, relief or any other type of art/craft work which can be hung on the wall.
2. Size of the art. No larger than 36” wide x 36” high, including the frame and should not weigh more than 10 lbs.
3. The art should be ready to hang. Framed paintings or other art work should have hooks or wire in place for hanging. Please put your name, title of the work, its value and techniques and materials used on the backside or bottom of your work.
4. We are going to hang the art in the clinic during the last week of April 2008. The art work should be ready by April 15, 2008. You can call one of us on the committee to let us know of your intentions, to pick up your work or if you have any further questions.

Many thanks for your kindness and your donation.

Art for Health Committee:

Director of the Atenas Health Clinic:

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