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Newsletter of the Rotary Club of Atenas



A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of. ~ Nelson Mandela

Meeting Highlights

We welcomed several guests: Joy, soon to be a member, Vera, Denise and Roger, who are neighbors of Holly and Bruce.

Eric inducted Joy as a new member. She's now welcome at any Rotary Club around the world. Joy has lived in Costa Rica for two years and has worked for thirty-five years as a licensed therapist. She's currently working on a project at the local park by the school. We're so pleased to have Joy in our club.



Eric announced that we have some new progress on the Bingo fundraiser. He'll be sharing details with the board and report back soon.

Guest Speaker

Today we were joined by the Chief and three members of the Atenas Bomberos squad. They discussed prevention of fires and a lot of tips on safety. This is a particularly good time for them to talk about this, as fires during the dry season are common in the Atenas area.



The Bomberos emphasized the importance of community meetings to share strategies for preventing and fighting fires. They explained that everyone can assist by identifying risks where they live and taking action to mitigate these risks. For example, keeping the area within ten to fifteen meters of one's home clear of brush. A swimming pool with a hose pump is an excellent addition. Sometimes the fire trucks can't enter the area close to a house and they have to use a swimming pool hose pump to fight the fire. (Marcela at Lomas del Paraiso has information on buying the pool hose pumps). The Bomberos can provide additional recommendations for any equipment we might want to purchase.



They reminded us to call 911 when smoke is spotted since there are English speakers and they can dispatch assistance most efficiently. In response to a question, they also explained that if no one can get access to open a gate or fence in front of a house, the law allows them to break it down to fight a fire. The Bomberos welcome opportunities to visit properties and identify risks and suggest improvements. Email is the best way to set up an appointment with them: atenas@bomberos.go.cr.

Working together as communities to share information helps the Bomberos to beat the fires. Our longer, hotter summers with low quantities of water and high winds are a perfect set up for fires.

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Since the fire department is a separate entity, we can't donate money to support them. Therefore, the best contribution is fire prevention. You can also supply food and water at specified locations. Having equipment available that they can use in our communities is what they would appreciate most. Talk with friends and neighbors about fire prevention. All expat communities need to coordinate.

Upcoming Events

- Nancy announced that we'll have a Spring Fling at her home on March 30.
- For Halloween we'll have a costume party at Holly and Russ's home.
- We're looking for hosts for end of Rotary year party (in July and to induct new officers) and a holiday party in December. Let Nancy know if you can host.

Next Meetings

Breakfast meetings - 8:30 at Tica's café / Lunch meetings - 12:20 at Iguanas

- On February 5th we'll meet at El Toledo Coffee Farm for a short tour at 9am. Donations for tour will be accepted.

- **On February 12 we'll meet for BREAKFAST. The district governor will be visiting us. Please try to attend!**

- On February 19 we'll have LUNCH. Heather Tracy, who runs a program called The Bridge Supportive Gap for young adults, will be the speaker.

- On February 26 we'll meet for BREAKFAST where we'll hear about interesting excursions and experiences in Costa Rica from Robin Sabeen.

Visit to El Toledo Coffee Farm

Thursday, February 5, 2023



Eric, Lynn, Rosie, Chris, Betty, Joy, Nancy P, and Nancy R. enjoyed a lovely visit and conversation with Gabriel, who along with his family, runs El Toledo Coffee farm. Gabriel shared that over thirty-five years ago his father had been very sick with cancer. Believing that it was the chemicals they used to spray the plants, the family decided to switch to organic farming. The shift was necessity-driven, not ideological. The transition caused a 75% drop in production and required side jobs to survive. Even though it took several years of recovery, his father regained his health and has been well since the switch to organic farming.

Gabriel explained that during that transitional period the Costa Rican Government and environmentalists initially promoted organic farming, reaching 8% adoption. However, lack of farmer education and support led most to revert to chemicals; now there are less than 1% organic farms. In Costa Rica there are strict laws for animal welfare and tree cutting, but little regulation on chemical use in agriculture. Costa Rica now uses more agricultural chemicals in farming than any other country in the world. One of the biggest challenges of organic farming is that right now it costs the farmer more to be organically certified than it does to use chemicals. El Toledo has reversed that trend through using all parts of the coffee, more efficient procedures, and a biodiverse approach in growing other crops and using them for profit and things such as fertilizers and pest control. They are now more profitable than before they became organic.



In discussing ways to encourage organic farming, Gabriel suggested that the government should create policies, such as taxing chemicals and subsidizing organic, to encourage organic farming. Previous attempts to go organic in Costa Rica failed as the farmers received little education about it and their profits decreased.

We finished the visit by blind tasting four different types of coffee. We started by tasting each and deciding on our favorite. Then we paired them with some jam and biscuits. Gabriel demonstrated how paring food with coffee gives them a different flavor, and several of us switched our favorites when we ate food with the coffee.

We are hoping that Rotary and El Toledo can one day collaborate on education initiatives about nutrition, food waste, and sustainable agriculture. There may be opportunities to expand educational outreach to schools, health professionals, and the broader community.







