

CUENCA experts magazine

issue
eight

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Sebastian, Pedro & Xavier
of the new restaurant Anima

celebrating life together

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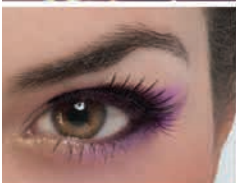
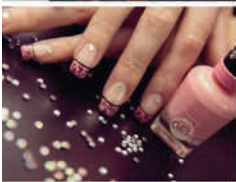
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CUENCA expats

magazine

ISSUE
8

Cuenca Expats Magazine
Cuenca, Ecuador

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Last night I met the newly confirmed United States Ambassador to Ecuador, Todd E. Chapman. This job of mine has its perks. I even had my picture taken with him. I was very impressed. This is a smart man; he has a lifetime of experience from all over the world, and on top of everything else, he is a very well-spoken gentleman.

All the seats were full at the Cuenca Chamber of Commerce. There were many questions asked to the Ambassador, and they were all answered to the full satisfaction of the audience. But there was a question that stood out for me. This well-dressed lady stood up and voiced her concern. She asked if our government thought less of expats because we had chosen to retire in a foreign country, and were no longer living in the United States.

The Ambassador's answer was very welcomed by the

group. He said that our country loves all of us, because we are all ambassadors in our own right, as we represent the USA while living in Ecuador.

These types of concerns seem to come up now and then. A friend asked me a similar question a few weeks ago.

She was concerned about the possibility of her social security check being in jeopardy. She was nervous that this would be the first thing that would be canceled if there were drastic budget cuts back in the states. Again, that assumption that American expats, that love adventure and travel, would be targets because they chose to retire and live in a foreign land, is just unfounded.

The answer to this concern is the same as the answer that was given above by the Ambassador at the town hall meeting. We should not be worrying about such things.

Just keep doing your best at representing our nation here in Ecuador, and enjoy and be grateful for the wonderful journey that you are on.

We are the trailblazers. We are the adventurers. No fear my friends.

We are the lucky ones.

George

www.ecuadorgeorge.com

letter from founder



When we started Cuenca Expats Magazine, we were looking for the perfect "Ambassador". We had a list of four or five people but only one name was at the top of the list, George Forgues, affectionately known

as Ecuador George. I was reminded of how we used a little deception to get a meeting with him and "pitch" him on our idea of making him the "Ambassador" of our magazine. He said he was honored we asked, but that he needed to think about it. I left the meeting full of hope, but looking at the other names on the list and thinking, while each would make a good representative, only George would make a great "Ambassador". I had a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach when he called me back, but that quickly turned to elation when he accepted the position.

We were right - George is the PERFECT

"Ambassador" and member of our team. He has also, in the last 8 months, become a perfect friend. Recently his blog won the Best of GringoPost award. This is the second year in a row and I am not going to lie and say this wasn't one of the reasons we wanted him on the team. Business is about strategy and our long-term strategy included having George as our Publisher. While many of you wrote us in for "Best Printed Media", we were not acknowledged. But, we feel that because George won...we won and so we want to say Thank You! Perhaps next year there will be a different contest with different awards. Until then, enjoy!



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Story By Kristen Sawyer
Photos By Marcelo Lopez

ANIMA

The Spirit of **Gastronomy**



Photo By Philip Ruffolo

This is the story of three men who were never destined to work in an office. The three gentlemen behind Anima Restaurant, General Manager and Co-owner Xavier Martinez, Chef/Owner Sebastian Martinez, and Sous Chef Pedro Vivar, all grew up in Cuenca, Ecuador. Since they all attended the same schools, they frequently all hung out. They all liked playing chess in their free time while the women in their lives—mothers, aunts, grandmothers—grilled BBQs, "las parrillas". Their childhoods passed in aromatic waves of Sunday pork, steaming rice and loco de papa with avocado and cheese, but as happens with so many young adults, Xavier and Pedro, three years older than Sebastian, left their flavorful world for the world of responsibilities.

Law school. It was a destiny never meant to be fulfilled. Neither of them made it very long before they decided to find career paths in different realms. One could possibly trace the idea of Anima back to this moment, this initial decision to taste freedom while pursuing passion. For Pedro, the passionate path was obvious. He decided to enroll in gastronomy school. Though it is atypical for young Ecuadorian boys to spend time in the kitchen, Pedro was inducted into the culinary world by his six aunts who all helped raise him. The kitchen became his play area. While his aunts prepared delicious BBQ, he would craft his own candies and "petit fours" and conduct culinary experiments. His innovative tendencies as a boy influenced the direction of his own studies years later.

At the same time when Pedro left the law office, Sebastian finally caught up with him in academic studies. They decided to enroll together in a culinary school in Ecuador. They completed their programs in two years, but then the allure of the world captured them both. They decided to learn from other cultures. Of that decision, Pedro explains,

"Here, you are limited in teachers but when you go to other countries, you learn more techniques, more products. We had the passion but we wanted to learn more. That's why we hadn't started our restaurant yet. We still needed more experience."

Pedro went to Buenos Aires, Argentina for his Master's Degree in Gastronomy. While there, he encountered what he proclaims to be "the best dish in the world." World-renowned chef Ferran Adria visited a local "parrilla", El Pobre Luis, in Buenos Aires and recommended one dish above all others: gizzards. Pedro had to try the dish for himself, and upon tasting the delicacy he declared it to be the best thing he had ever eaten. He was so enraptured with the food at El Pobre Luis that he worked there in his spare time, learning from the best.

Sebastian decided to pursue his master's degree in one of the most renowned culinary schools in the world, the Basque Culinary Center in San Sebastián, Spain. It was there that he learned to experiment under the direction of famous chefs like Enrique Fleischmann. Separated by an ocean, both of these men, in their early twenties, were training with the best in the world and working towards a dream that hadn't yet been fully realized.

Meanwhile, Xavier was in Mexico finishing up his Master's Degree in Business, earning awards as a top-performing student. All three men came to the end of their degrees at the same time, presenting the perfect opportunity for their paths to finally reunite. From Argentina, Mexico and Spain, they all returned to Cuenca to introduce a concept that the community had yet to experience: an innovative restaurant with local products that would inspire its customers to set down their forks and say, quite simply, "Wow."

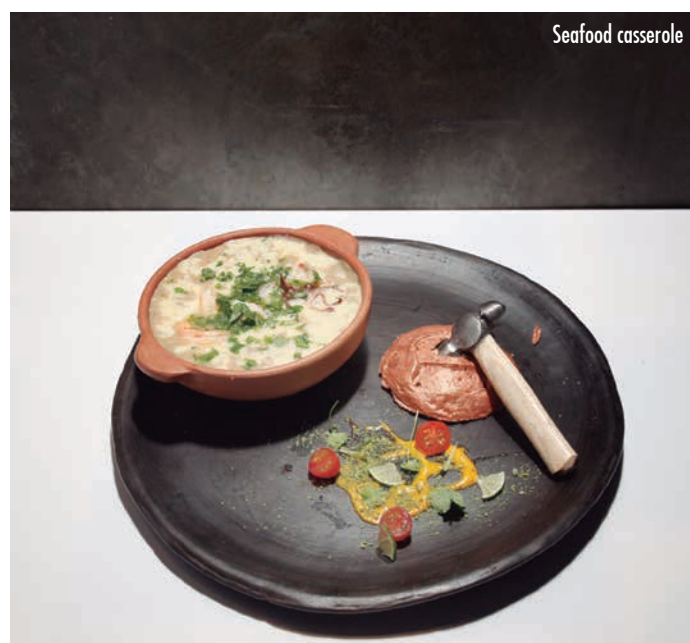
Anima opened on February 12, and Xavier and Sebastian serve up fifteen plates, ranging from appetizers to desserts,



Red peppers stuffed with tomatoe and onion



Causa limeña with shrimp in American sauce



Seafood casserole



Risotto with mushrooms



Prawns in american sauce with tigrillo and citrus salad

for lunch and dinner. The word Anima comes from the Latin root meaning soul or spirit. The name of the restaurant is an integral part of its existence. Both chefs subscribe to the *cocina del autor* cooking philosophy, a style that prioritizes innovation above all else. Soul seeps into the flavor of every dish, into the stone-crafted plates made from local rocks, and into the partnerships with organic farms. Ever experimenting, the two chefs will change their menu every five months in response to what is seasonally available. Each cycle of dishes has a different theme. The current theme is *El Silvestre*, The Wild. When you dine at Anima, expect plates from the land and the sea, combinations you have never before seen, and presentations that will evoke all of your senses.

One example of such a dish is *La Fertilidad*, The Fertility. It is a seafood

platter covered by a salt-cookie face. The symbolic fertility face comes from the Valdivia, a pre-Columbian indigenous group native to Ecuador. As the servers explain the concept behind the dish, something they do for every plate served, the customer must break the face with a little hammer before tasting the delicacies beneath. Senses of sound, touch, and sight are all invoked before you even get to taste the food, to feel its consistencies.

For months, these three men had worked tirelessly to prepare for the launch of Anima and now, with a steady stream of customers already, they are living the beautiful and crazy dream. Xavier says that you must have perseverance to do this job. "It is a marathon, a long career. There are difficult moments but you have to continue with the same force and passion." Pedro adds: "This business takes time and life commitment. We can't

remember our last party." The twenty-eight-year-old laughs and shakes his head while saying this.

Moving forward, they have big goals of culinary expansion. They want to attract more locals and expats to Anima as they continue to experiment and prepare incredible dishes. "Come prepared for an experience," Xavier says. Sensorial cuisine evokes emotion, and Sebastian and Pedro want their food to excite the customer, to make us happy, and to encourage us to rethink what we assume. Their inspiration for their plates? Everywhere and everything, they state simultaneously. By distilling this inspiration into a restaurant experience, all three men hope that the creations of Anima will surprise you deep down in your soul, and that your senses will ignite in a way that you cannot find in other restaurants in Cuenca.



Grilled oysters



Stuffed chicken with cheese served with potatoes and red pepper, egg and pea puree

restaurant review

ANIMA CULINARY ROCK STARS

By Dave Johnson

There are many sensational restaurants here in Cuenca. It seems a new breed of chefs is entering the market place with the singular goal of outdoing all others. Lately, just when I thought I had found the “best food” in Cuenca, another restaurant opens and I find myself not only eating better food but also my words. While I have been impressed with many of the local eateries, I have yet, until recently that is, been completely blown away. The new restaurant Anima is destined for greatness. I have yet to find a restaurant where I can't easily get a table, but I am confident that Anima is going to become one of the first in the city where you have to “know someone” in order to eat there. The three gentlemen behind this very unique concept are rock stars and, like I was, you will be mystified by the experience, from the Manhattan-esque minimalistic décor to the creative presentation of each dish to the extraordinary service.

The meal began with a test tube of fruit juice with a cork stopper. This is designed to prepare your palette for the taste bud extravaganza you are about to experience. The second thing brought to the table was a box with a hinged lid. I can safely say I have never been presented with a box at any of the hundreds of restaurants I have eaten in before. Inside the box was freshly baked bread and a sauce to dip it in. If you know anything about mythology, you know that Pandora's box, while riddled with evil, had one final gift...hope. Such was the case with this box. In my mind I was thinking, if they went to this much effort to present the bread, which was delicious, the rest of the meal is going to be sui generis.

Next to arrive was a piece of pork loin cooked to perfection, topped with slices of

roasted red pepper and a small caramelized onion. It was served on a dish made from a hollowed out stone with a fitted glass top. The pork melted in my mouth and the garnishes perfectly complimented the taste. With this came mashed potatoes - a hybrid of extraordinary potato salad and traditionally mashed potatoes...they were amazing.

The main dish, served on a piece of slate, was almost too beautiful to eat – it was more a work of art than a meal, but that was the case with everything we were served. A medium rare filet topped with a cooked egg yolk, and a silver basket of fries. The sauces looked like the digital readouts from a stereo equalizer the way they were placed on the dish. I don't know how the fries were cooked or what type of potato they started with (there are over 200 species of potatoes and tubers in Ecuador) but they were delicious. If they pay this much attention to the French fries, certainly everything they prepare will be sensational.

The meal concluded with a dessert I am unable to adequately describe. It was served in hollowed out stone bowls. There was a nut, made from delicious chocolate with a chocolate mousse filling served on a bed of ice cream and finely chopped fruit. My description doesn't do the dessert justice, suffice it to say it was a wonderful amalgamation of tastes - I was tempted to lick the bowl, or stone in this case.

Every dish was meticulously prepared and presented and the taste of the food was extraordinary. If you are looking for a dining experience that is unique and refreshingly different where the food is an absolute culinary and gastronomic masterpiece, Anima is the perfect destination.



Focaccia with smoked eggplant sauce



Mini grilled



Beef hamburger with french fries



Nut cracker

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Body Care Spa & Gym

First Class Facilities with **Excellent** Professional Instructors

By Sherry Johnson



Located high on the hillside on the way to Turi is a futuristic looking building, shaped like a spaceship with beautiful glass windows. Inside the luxury facilities you will find the most modern gym in the country, a full-service spa, a beauty salon, and a restaurant that overlooks the beautiful city of Cuenca. With first class facilities and excellent professional instructors and therapists, this is the ideal location to work on improving your health and wellbeing.

The gym is equipped with state of the art fitness machines, with top-level instructors to help you reach your personal fitness goals. Many of the instructors speak English and are trained in both physical education and nutrition. There are fitness classes conveniently scheduled throughout the day to accommodate your schedule. These include spinning classes from 05h00 to 10h00 and 18h00 to 21h00; aerobics (hard body, step, tae-bo, dance, iron tech, samurai fit) from 06h00 to 10h00 and 18h00 to 20h00; functional training (total body training) from 06h00 to 08h00 and 18h00 to 20h00 on Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays; Pilates classes from 08h00 to 11h00 and from 17h00 to 19h00; and cardio and weight training is open all day with instructors at all times from 05h00 in the morning. The Gym is open from 05h00 to

22h00 Monday through Thursday, 05h00 to 21h00 on Friday, and Saturday they are open from 07h00 to 13h00.

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Venga Gastro Bar

an out-of-this-world **dining** experience

Story By Dave Johnson

In Spanish the word venga has several meanings, but loosely translated it means 'come on.' In the markets here in Cuenca, the meaning of the word venga when used by the merchants has a more profound, and almost endearing, meaning. Because the merchants genuinely want to serve you and make you feel welcome, they use the word venga as an inviting way to get your attention so you will come and try, or see, whatever it is they are selling. It is for this reason that Javier Patiño named his restaurant Venga. Welcome is exactly how you will feel when you enter Javier's Venga Gastro Bar. Although a little challenging to find, it is well worth the effort.

Javier graduated from Cordon Bleu in Lima, Peru and earned his Chef Instructor certificate as well. From there he went to work at Lima's best restaurant, Central. Central was recently voted the best restaurant in Latin America and 4th in the world by The World's 50 Best (www.theworlds50best.com). Javier then went to Spain and worked for two of the top restaurants there, Martín Berasategui, (Michelin 3-star rated) in San Sebastián, and Coque (Michelin 2-star rated) in Madrid. In short, Javier perfected his trade at two of the finest restaurants in the world.

"But, can he cook?" you might be wondering. That is like asking if Michael Jordan can play basketball or if Tiger Woods can play golf. But using the word 'cook' somehow just doesn't do justice to the food that emerges from Venga's kitchen.

I was fed until I couldn't eat any more. Even though I was given small tasting portions of each item, I think I tried just about everything

on the menu, which is small so it can be changed regularly (every three months). For an appetizer, I had the Aceitunas Maceradas & chips. It was a bowl of olives and chips, with onions and ham, served with four different sauces. Like everything at Venga, the chips are homemade and they are delicious. The Seafood Tsunami was well named – copious amounts of seafood served in a delightful sauce in a small piping hot skillet. Javier told me the entrees are served in a regular sized cast-iron skillet because he believes the food tastes better prepared in cast-iron, and stays hotter longer served right out of the pan. He is right – my food was not only delicious, but stayed hot from the first bite to the last.

Earlier I mentioned the word "cook" seemed inappropriate for Javier's food. The word I was looking for is Magic. In one short year (Venga is about to celebrate its first year anniversary), Javier's food has earned him the impressive number 26 spot on Trip Advisor out of 360 restaurants rated. His average rating is 5 stars and I can comfortably say after eating there, he deserves every single one of them. To celebrate the first year anniversary, Javier is hosting two other chefs in a "pop-up", where they will showcase six unique dishes for their guests.

In addition to the restaurant, Javier is also launching a cooking school. He will host three-hour classes where people can come with friends, learn to cook a full meal, and then eat it afterward. For a small fee of \$30 per class, this additional service is sure to become as popular as his restaurant. So if you are in the mood for an out-of-this-world dining experience, Venga will not disappoint.

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A TRIP

Story By Andrew Johnson
Photos By Dave Johnson



An indigenous woman hand spinning sheeps wool

Ed. Note: We thought it would be refreshing to read about the first Cuenca Expats Magazine Travel Club trip from the perspective of a 17-year-old. The reality is, if you want to know anything about either of the two places we visited, Ingapirca and Devil's Nose, there are hundreds, if not thousands of blog posts written by adults. Our goal at Cuenca Expats Magazine is to feature unique content that isn't available anywhere else. In order to achieve this, we tasked Andrew Johnson to tell us about the trip from his viewpoint.

My name is Andrew Johnson, and I would like to tell you about a trip I took recently with my family and friends.

We took a tour bus ride to a place called Ingapirca. Although I hadn't heard much about it, except that it was some old ruins we would be taking a look at, being as interested in history and mythology as I am I was psyched to go. On the bus to the ruins our tour guide, Wilson, gave us the history of the area, and I must say that I didn't know there was so much going on right outside of Cuenca history wise. It was a great learning experience, but that wasn't the best part, we took a detour through the mountains and saw the beautiful pictures Wilson's words painted, with very small houses intermingled and a community blooming on its own without interference from the outside world. Don't get me wrong, it's not like they didn't have any technology, it just wasn't a metropolis.

After such an amazing view and the great cookies provided by George, our publisher, I was excited to see the ruins and hear of their history and the people that once lived there. I wasn't

disappointed. When we arrived, there was another tour group full of exchange students from Europe going to take the tour before us, and they went on their way a few minutes before we did. When we entered the grounds, we were met by a peculiar tree with beautiful flowers and oddly shaped fruit. Apparently the flowers could be used as a "Mind control" type thing if ground and processed correctly, there were a few jokes cracked at this statement and then we learned about the fruits, which are apparently poisonous.

Our group then moved to a higher vantage point overlooking the entire layout of the ruins, which are in the shape of a jaguar because the Cañari believed it to be the strongest animal and that it would give them power. As we toured the ruins, we entered a very small house. The walls were made of adobe, a building material made of mud, clay or sand and various organic materials. Inside the house there was no floor, the roof was made of straw and branches and in the walls there were indents where the Cañaris would put clay idols of the Gods they worshipped.

Next on the tour we saw where they



"Angel's trumpet" flower



Ruins at Ingapirca



Replica house made from adobe

TO THE PAST

buried their high priestesses in a circle made of rocks next to their "Clock." A device made of stone that they used to tell time and seasons. We continued on to the sun temple, whose shape originates from the rock it was built on. Apparently this was where the Prince lived and worshipped the Gods. It's also where he would send his messengers off. The messengers had to be able to run 2,600 kilometers within a set amount of time to deliver the messages. Every 2,600 kilometers, they had waypoints and rest stations for the runners to stop, pass on the message to a new runner, who would continue on. This made the trip easier, but it was still brutal, I imagine.

We finished up at Ingapirca with photos and snacks, and headed to the Devil's Nose train ride. When we got there, we had about 30 minutes to explore the town, so my dad and I went to grab a piece of pepperoni pizza from a local vendor. It was surprisingly delicious. After we got our tickets and everything set up, we boarded the train and headed off. I would like to say that I had no troubles with the train, but that would be a lie. I honestly got pretty nervous when we would pass a bridge or when the land dropped off and I could see nothing but

the bottom of a ravine. It was still a great ride with pretty cool scenery, and the reason it's called Devil's nose is because many years ago when they were mining with dynamite the miners fell very ill with yellow fever, Malaria, and who knows what else. Safe to say, they stopped mining and instead named it "Devil's Nose." When we got to the bottom of the railroad there was an area to explore, a coffee shop, a museum up a huge set of stairs, and an area with dancers who were apparently the local people of the area, and every day after working and dancing they would go home by climbing up the mountain. Quite a hike I must say. When we got back to town, we had dinner at a local restaurant and then got back on the bus. The ride home was full of stories, jokes, and some out of tune singing, all in good sport. When we arrived in Cuenca and got off the bus, we all said our goodbyes, waved and went our respective ways.

All in all I really enjoyed the trip, we learned a lot about local history, some not so local history and we got to explore ruins and take a train ride down a mountain and back up it.

I look forward to seeing you all on the next trip, goodbye for now!



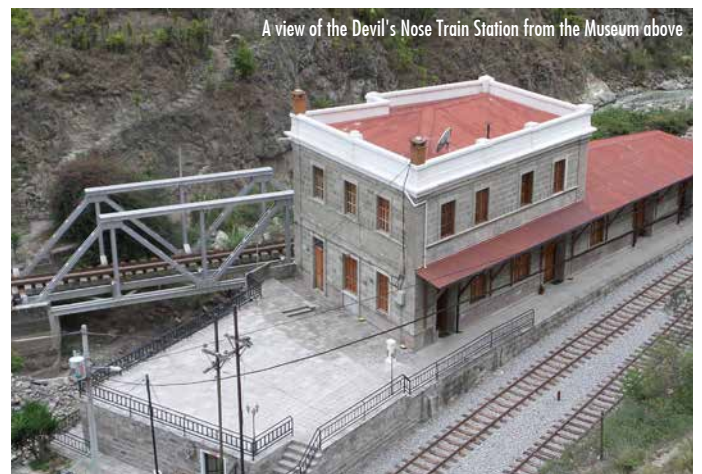
The cars of the Devil's Nose Train



Ecuadorian Dancers



A llama for hire?



A view of the Devil's Nose Train Station from the Museum above

Refugio Del Mejor **Amigo**

Caring for Cuenca's 'Homeless' Dog Population

By Staff Writer

No place in the world is perfect. Every place has things that make it unappealing. While Cuenca is very close to perfect in my estimation, the one big thing that really bothers me is the large population of stray dogs. Being a dog lover and treating my dogs in the same manner that I treat people, it breaks my heart to see dogs wandering the streets, dirty and unwanted, having to scrounge for food. If I had the money, I would buy a large farm and welcome all of my stray four-legged friends.

One person here has done just that. In 2011, after the death of her husband, Trish Tiura moved to Cuenca with her son, Eamon. Being a dog lover, Trish decided to do something about the large number of homeless dogs and started Refugio Del Mejor, which became a safe haven for homeless dogs. As the number of dogs Trish rescued grew, so did the need for space so she purchased two adjoining pieces of property in Miraflores in 2012

and early 2013. This safe haven was named Refugio Del Mejor Amigo (a refuge for man's best friend). Her property, which has become refuge to about 100 dogs, is now approximately one hectare in size (approximately 2.5 acres).

As anyone who has attempted it can attest to, starting a non-profit organization here in Ecuador is very difficult. For the last four years Refugio Del Mejor Amigo has operated as a private organization that has been funded primarily by Trish. Currently she employs three people full time to operate the Refugio. She also has a very generous veterinarian that she works with, Dr. William Palaguachi, who treats all the dogs at no charge.

Because the Refugio has been self-funded, Trish finds herself in a tough position – she has just about run out of money. Although the Refugio Del Mejor Amigo has started the paperwork to become a legal foundation in Ecuador, they have a long road ahead of them

before they become recognized as such. In the meantime, Trish has actively started fund-raising initiatives to help cover the approximately \$4,000 in monthly expenses.

It has always been my belief that you meet people at the exact moment time you are meant to. I met Trish completely by accident (if you believe in accidents). Because one of Cuenca Expats Magazine's primary goals is to support as many philanthropic organizations as possible, we are committed to helping Trish (and all other Expat organized charitable organizations) raise awareness and promote her cause. Obviously, in the case of stray dogs, there is a tremendous need for organizations that offer services related to finding them quality homes and care. It is Trish's and Refugio Del Mejor Amigo's goal to lead the way in Ecuador and South America by establishing programs and standards for quality care of all dogs through the following programs:



- Care-Ensuring that the dogs are vaccinated, treated for parasites and have routine and quality care.
- Custody-Creating a responsible adoption program that helps find good homes for homeless dogs.
- Control-Reducing the number of homeless dogs through sterilization and licensing.

Currently all of their dogs are vaccinated and are in the process of sterilization. "As of 9/15/15, all of our males have been neutered!!", says Trish. Refugio Del Mejor Amigo provides a safe, loving environment for all of their dogs with the hopes of finding all of them a loving, responsible, 'forever' home.

Like any charitable organization, Refugio Del Mejor Amigo is in need of money. They are in the process of creating an "Adopt a Pet" program that will work much in the same way that "Adopt a child" programs work. This program is perfect for those who cannot have or do not want to have a dog of their own. For a nominal monthly donation, it will provide the necessary resources to care for the "adopted" dog. It is Trish's hope that this and other fund raising initiatives will provide the funds necessary for her to have a long-term sustainable organization that works toward the elimination of the 'homeless dog' challenge in Cuenca and the rest of Ecuador and South America.



The Refugio



DOG OF THE MONTH



Molly is our dog of the month from Refugio Del Mejor Amigo. Molly was abandoned a few months ago due to a skin infection. Under the care of our vet, Dr. Wiliam Palaguachi, she is healed and looking for her forever home! She is about 1 ½ years old and has a mellow and loving personality. She is happiest when she can snuggle next to her favorite person! Molly does well with other dogs and doesn't seem to mind cats, either.

If you are interested in adopting Molly, please contact us at info@rdmacuenca.org

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PUPPIES FROM 4 MONTHS OLD

ADULTS FROM ANY AGE AND BREED

Robyn Luck

Originally from North Miami Beach, Florida, Robyn is a world traveler, massage therapist, owner-operator at Marina Montañita Organic Skincare and mother to her daughter Alana.

WHERE WAS THE LAST PLACE YOU LIVED BEFORE MOVING TO CUENCA?

Montañita

WHY CUENCA?

I came here to create a better life for me and my daughter.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT LIVING IN CUENCA?

It has a big city feel without being in a big city while at the same time, having small-town charm. I also love the culture - old clashing with the new.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROFESSION BEFORE YOU RETIRED?

I am not retired. I am a licensed Massage Therapist and I have a line of organic skincare products. Before that I was a professional dancer and choreographer.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME, WOULD YOU DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT AND IF SO, WHAT?

Not exactly different, but I would go back to the 30's to New York and dance with the greats of modern dance... Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan, Ruth St. Denis and more...that was a great era for dancing.

WHAT'S THE MAGIC FORMULA FOR SUCCESS?

Never lie, cheat or steal.

IF YOU WERE PRESIDENT, WHAT'S THE FIRST THING YOU'D DO?

I would rather be a street sweeper than President.

WHO'S YOUR FAVORITE AUTHOR, WHY?

Isabel Allende - she has a way with words and manages to weave history and fiction into a beautiful fabric.

WHAT'S THE MEANING OF LIFE?

I'm not sure so I am still searching.

HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A GOOD MENTAL ATTITUDE?

It is difficult at times, but I focus on the positive things in my life and if that doesn't work, I eat pizza - pizza makes everything better.

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT DAY OF YOUR LIFE?

May 14th 2014, 5:25pm - the day my daughter Alana Marina was born.

WHAT ACCOMPLISHMENT IN YOUR LIFE ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Creating and running my dance company, Hard Luck Dance and giving birth to my daughter.

WHAT ARE YOU READING LATELY?

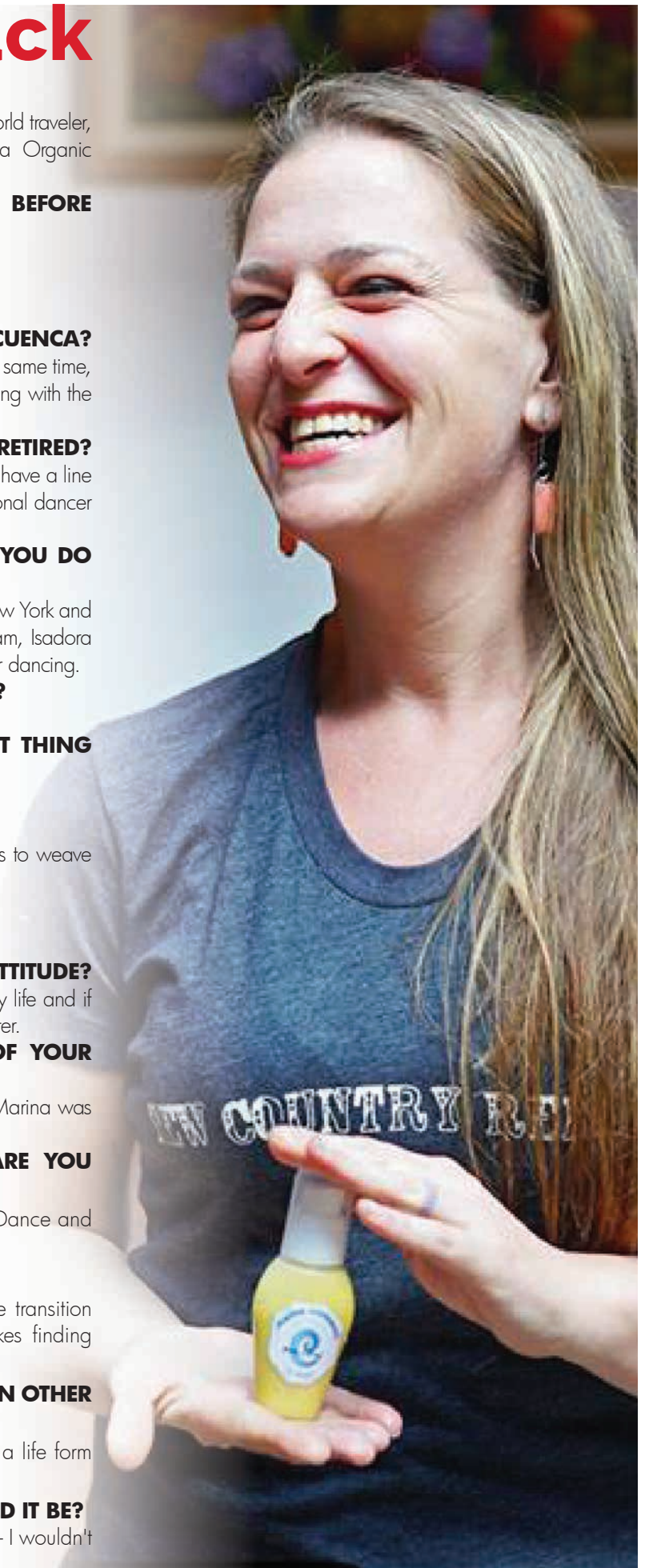
Anything I can get my hands on - I haven't made the transition to a Kindle because I prefer "real" books which makes finding something to read a little more difficult.

DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS INTELLIGENT LIFE ON OTHER PLANETS?

Goodness, I hope so. I would hate to think there isn't a life form out there more intelligent than humans.

IF YOU COULD BE ANYONE ELSE WHO WOULD IT BE?

I have worked really hard to be me and I like who I am - I wouldn't want to be anyone else!



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Evelyn Johnson

A Relentless Pursuit of Excellence

By Dave Johnson

Photos By Burt Johnson

There is an urban myth about an art history student whose assignment was to write a 2,000 word essay on Michelangelo's statue of David. As the story goes, he pasted a couple of pictures onto a piece of paper and wrote the following: "It is said a picture is worth a thousand words. Here are two of my favorite pictures of the Statue of David." The myth goes on to suggest that the student received an A for his creativity and outside-the-box approach to the project. This story has inspired me and I have used the premise to guide my career. Whether or not it is true is academic – the premise is dead on.

I was thinking of this story as I climbed the stairs to interview local expat artist Evelyn Johnson. I had met her briefly a few weeks prior on a bus trip to Ingapirca and Devil's Nose. I had heard from others that know her that she is a brilliant artist. I had seen her art on her website (www.mindstormphoto.com/art) and while I thought it was good, I wouldn't have gone as far as saying it was brilliant. But then too, rarely do pictures of artwork accurately portray the depth and emotion behind each brush stroke. And never do they tell the story of the artist that painted them. In my 25+ year as a journalist and magazine publisher, I have had ample opportunity to interview artists, but in all my years I have not had an ethereal experience equal to what I felt when I first laid eyes on Evelyn's work up close and personal. Part of me wants to stop here, tell you that her art transcends words and leave you with a few pictures. This, however, would not even begin to tell the story because, as I discovered, there is such an intense amount of depth and emotion in Evelyn's art

that really needs to be experienced. Understanding this, I will do my very best to share mine with you.

I would be remiss if I did not mention Evelyn's husband Burt who is, in his own words, a hobbyist photographer. After seeing his photography, referring to him as a hobbyist is akin to referring to a Ferrari as a car. Burt's travel and studio photography are some of the best I have ever seen. I bring this up because Evelyn uses Burt's and her own photographs as the foundation of her works of art. Because both Burt and Evelyn have an uncanny way of capturing the raw emotion of their subjects in their photography, it is abundantly obvious and equally poignant when transferred to canvas via brushstroke. This emotional transference, in my humble opinion, is what makes Evelyn's work absolutely brilliant. Each and every piece from the blue-footed boobies to the roosters to the indigenous people she paints evokes emotion. Combine this with the mesmerizing way she combines colors and I was almost waiting for the subjects to walk, or in the case of the tortoise and crabs crawl, off the canvas and into the living room. Life-like is a term thrown around by those that review art, but in the case of Evelyn's work the term doesn't quite fit. Sure each has a life-like quality, but her way of bringing the subjects to life is more surreal or dream-like.

Perhaps Evelyn's background explains why her art is so exceptional. She grew up in a traditional Chinese family where the folly of an artistic career was discouraged. In school, Evelyn was allowed to pursue art and even won awards, but her artistic ambition was put to the side for a more practical



career that included working at Apple Computer. It was during this time when Evelyn experienced Steve Jobs' relentless pursuit of perfection. As the head of Apple's real estate department, Evelyn witnessed Jobs scrap a huge project midstream at great cost to go in an entirely different direction, which was closer to his idea of perfection. Combine her professional career with growing up poor, and her desire to become successful despite her upbringing, and one realizes where her drive to be exceptional in everything she does comes from. Add passion that grew from not being able to pursue her dream and the result is, as I experienced, art that is truly brilliant.

Evelyn has shown her art in shows with other artists but she has never had her own show, until now. Her exhibit, Visions of Ecuador: Landscapes, Animals and People (Visiones Del Ecuador: Paisajes, Animales, y Gente) opens at Galería Larrazábal (located on Calle de San Sebastián 1-80 y Mariscal Sucre, Parque de San Sebastián here in Cuenca) on Wednesday, March 9, 2016 from 6-9 PM. If you missed the opening, you can still "feel" her art first hand until her show ends on April 5, 2016 (the gallery will be open Monday to Friday: 9:00 – 13:00 / 15:00 – 18:00 and Saturdays: 10:00 – 13:00). Evelyn is the first North American expat to have been invited to show at this prestigious Ecuadorean gallery.

At this point I could include that she has studied with renowned master artists in many mediums, including oil, pastel, charcoal, acrylic, watercolor, and clay sculpture. I could tell you that she is currently working with Alberto Soriano, a master Peruvian artist. However, standing before her art and experiencing it on emotional level, as I did, somehow makes these things unimportant. Certainly the journey is relevant, but in Evelyn's case it is eclipsed by the sheer magnificence of the end result, her art. As the character in the urban myth suggests, a picture really is worth a thousand words. In Evelyn's case though, if you stop there, you will miss out on the visceral experience her art will surely provide. But don't take my word for, see for yourself.



Shared Responsibility: The **Integration** of Refugees in Cuenca

By Purvi Patel, Associate Durable Solutions Officer
ACNUR/UNHCR



We live in a world where the drama of people fleeing war and persecution has reached unprecedented levels. In this context, where refugees and those forcibly displaced from their homes face growing challenges in seeking safety and reclaiming their dignity, Cuenca still provides a framework for local integration.

Ecuador remains the country with the largest refugee population in Latin America, some 60,500 people according to government data. We know that since 2000, around 190,000 people (95% of Colombian origin) have come to this country seeking asylum; and at least 500 people still cross the border each month in search of security, dignity and inclusion. Thanks to a positive policy of humanitarian reception from the Ecuadorian government, these families now mainly live in cities, like Guayaquil,

Quito and Cuenca.

Ecuador provides refugees a long-term solution to end the cycle of forced displacement through its constitutional framework and the National Plan for Good Living (Plan Nacional de Buen Vivir). As the governing body on the matter, the Vice Ministry of Human Mobility, in coordination with other institutions such as the Ombudsman of Ecuador or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), work for these families so that they can act as full citizens in this country and enrich society with their experience, background and resilience.

Access to sustainable livelihoods is key to build a future in a new country. In Ecuador, 79% of refugees arriving are women and men at working age, showing an interest in working to improve their situation and contribute actively the country's development. All of them have great potential,

skills, ability to contribute to the State and the Ecuadorian society.

In Cuenca and the other southern provinces, the majority of refugees and asylum seekers come from Colombian urban centers such as Bogotá, Medellín, Cali and Armenia. The level of education tends to be higher than in other parts of the country (with 60% attending high school and about 15% proceeding to higher education).

Even though the canton of Cuenca has one of the country's highest rates of coverage for basic services such as drinking water, electricity and sewage, the high cost of living means that 4% of the population of concern lives below the poverty threshold and 6% lives in extreme poverty (monthly per capita income of below \$46.27, INEC 2015), even if they have access to basic services.

In this context, society as a whole can play a part in helping these men, women, and children resume their lives in peace and contribute to the development of Ecuador. Everyday actions that promote inclusion in the labor market, assist with learning English, increase participation in neighbourhood activities and schools, open up new opportunities for these families. We all can contribute to the search for a better future for those who had to leave everything in order to survive.

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is a global organization dedicated to save lives, protect rights and help build a better future for refugees, forcibly displaced communities and stateless persons. With nearly seven decades experience working in 125 countries, and thanks to some 9,700 professionals, UNHCR supports about 55 million people in its struggle for survival, to regain hope and find a home again. In Ecuador, we work in the field for over 15 years, in favor of people fleeing conflict and those who welcome them. Through collaboration with the State, at various levels, as well as civil society and the communities, we contribute to the refugees build a better future.

If you want to learn more about UNHCR in the world and Ecuador, visit: www.unhcr.org www.acnur.org



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David Fagerlie and Yao Ratanasopa

By Susan Herron

How did you meet?

D - My job was to allocate funds to organizations supported by the United Way in Seattle.

Y - I examined the financial health of agencies and advised people like David.

D - I guess you could say we met via memos and reports.

Y - We didn't really know each other, just to say Hi in passing.

When did you have your first date?

D - I can't say it was a date, but in 1985 we were on the same plane going for continuing education at United Way and didn't realize it until we had landed.

Y - We shared a taxi and met later for dinner.

D - Communication was difficult, I could understand very little of what Yao said. Yet, I thought she was interesting.

Y - True. I learned to read & write English but didn't speak much until I came to Seattle in 1975. In 1983, on a visit to my family in Thailand, my dad died so I stayed for two years and during that time, lost most of my English speaking ability as I didn't use it.

I understand your relationship had an

interesting beginning.

D - Yes. In January 1987 I thought, I like Yao and Thailand would be an interesting place to experience through her eyes.

Y - He asked if he could go with me on my next trip in December. I thought he was very forward but asked my mother who agreed.

D - Then I started thinking about traveling to the other side of the world with someone I hardly knew and spending six weeks.

Y - He suggested we get together one day each weekend for three months to see if we were compatible as traveling companions.

Tell me about the visit to Thailand.

D - By summer, my girlfriend at the time and I became just friends.

Y - David and I were spending more time together.

D - Labor Day weekend of 1987 we spent a romantic weekend together, and I realized I had met my soul mate. By the time we went to Thailand in December our relationship was what most of Yao's family already assumed it was.

Y – We traveled through Thailand as well as introducing David to my family.

D – On the second night there the women left after dinner while the men questioned me, all the while enjoying Thai whiskey and telling jokes I couldn't figure out. I told jokes they didn't understand. After a couple of hours the women took over and questioned me for almost three hours. That was the end of the "inquisition" and I guess I passed.

Y – We became engaged in February 1988 and were married July 1988.

When did you first think about living overseas?

D - About 15 years ago I suggested Thailand as we could retire earlier and live better.

Y – I said, "been there, done that." I didn't want to live in Thailand, but retiring early and living overseas sounded appealing.

D – About 10 years ago I started looking in earnest at places and the logistics of a move.

Y – My job was to plan the finances.

What made you look at Ecuador?

D - We went to an International Living conference in October 2014. Panama was at the top of our list. Ecuador was second, but we had never heard of Cuenca.

Y - Panama City was too hot and humid. Boquete was too remote.

D – I signed up for the conference in Quito in February 2015 and added four days in Cuenca.

Y – I couldn't attend for work reasons but eventually got to Cuenca and really liked it.

What made you decide on Cuenca?

D – Cuenca is a vortex of climate, beauty, size, culture, and amenities

Y – A "small big city." We both love how "walkable" Cuenca is.

D – We love outdoor adventure and Ecuador has plenty of that.

Y – And I was excited about learning another language, my third.

When did you actually move to Cuenca?

D – We originally planned on moving when I was 68 and Yao 66.

Y – At the retirement conference we talked with a Social Security expert and realized we could retire 5 years earlier.

D – We retired in August 2015.

Y - After visiting friends and family we arrived on September 25, 2015.

What does Date Night look like for you?

D – We don't really have "date nights" but we do enjoy going to movies and the theater.

Y – I love to volunteer, garden, paint and learn new art skills.

D – I am a published writer and photographer and would like to merge those loves into photographing and writing about culture and travel. I also collect music and look forward to learning about the music of Latin America.

Y – We love going out to eat and sharing meals with friends.





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Andrew and Arnold



Lorn and Diane



The entire group from Cuenca Expats Magazine Travel Club's first trip to Ingapirca and Devil's Nose.



George w/ fans from Europe



Tom, Bob, Roger and Marilyn



Burt and Evelyn



Kristi and Kevin

We Are All **Ambassadors**

By Ed Lindquist

As you may have heard by now, there is a new U.S. Ambassador to Ecuador, Todd C. Chapman. After a distinguished 25 year State Department career, including overseas stints in Brazil, Afghanistan, and Mozambique; the new Ambassador arrived in Ecuador in January, and after presenting his credentials to the Ecuadorian government began his new assignment in February.

Cuenca Expats Magazine caught up with the Ambassador during his first trip to our city and had a private sit down in the beautiful Mansion Alcazar. As with other State Department representatives we have met over the years, Consul General Tricia Fietz and her hard working crew in Guayaquil come to mind. We found the new Ambassador very approachable, articulate, and someone who will be an outstanding representative of the U.S. government in Ecuador. To our surprise, instead of us interviewing him, the time was spent with the Ambassador asking probing questions about expat life in Cuenca. He was especially interested in hearing stories of how expats are making a difference in Cuenca not only with their financial support of the many fine charities, but also how people everyday are giving back to the city through a wide range of volunteerism.

The next day we were part of the capacity crowd at the Chamber of Commerce building as Ambassador Chapman addressed Cuenca expats for the first time. As expected, those in attendance immediately warmed to the new Ambassador, and many were heard to say how refreshing it was to get candid,



Ambassador Todd C. Chapman, David Johnson and Ed Lindquist

straightforward answers to a wide variety of important questions. Questions ranging from the current state of U.S. - Ecuadorian relationships to the practical issue of how does one go about voting in the upcoming election?

One remark that stood out was when the Ambassador noted most interaction between countries are between people, not governments. Just as the new Ambassador represents the most powerful, wealthiest country in the world, we as expats do the same. There are

more than 5,000 of us in Cuenca. And pretty much all of us are pegged as from North America. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we are all ambassadors. For many Ecuadorians, we may be the only U.S. citizens they will ever meet. What kind of an impression are we making? What kind of view will local Cuencanos have of the U.S. based on how we interact with them? Are we making the new Ambassador's job easier or harder?

I had the privilege of attending a recent fund raising event for one of the expat supported charities in the area - Helping Kids in Ecuador (see the cover story of its Medical Director in Issue 7 of the Magazine). As the highlight of the evening, two young boys who had lifesaving surgeries funded by the charity were introduced along with their parents. I doubt there was a dry eye in the place. These parents see their children living today because of the generosity of US citizens working hand in hand with Ecuadoran medical professionals. Do you think these families have a good impression of the United States? You bet!

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