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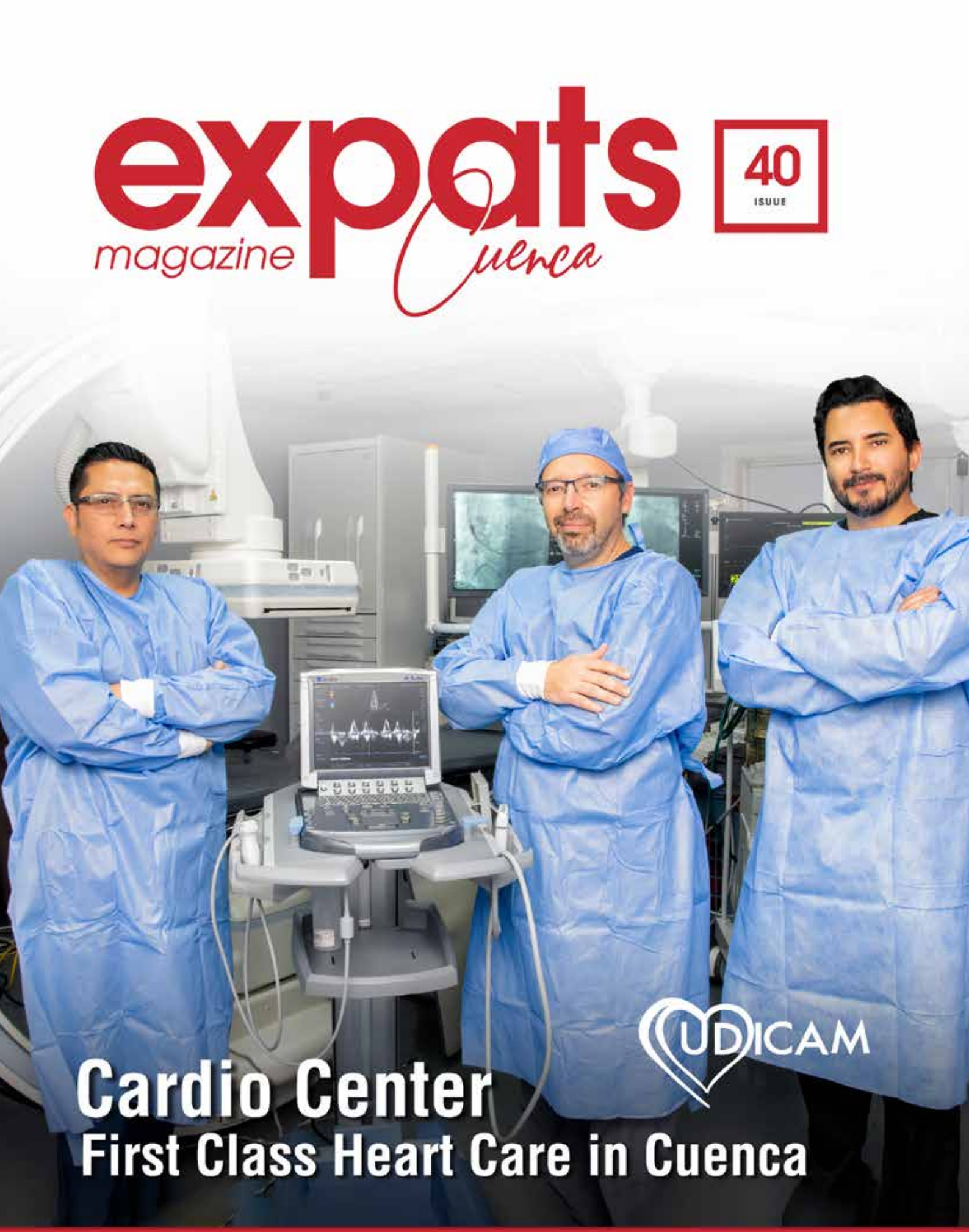

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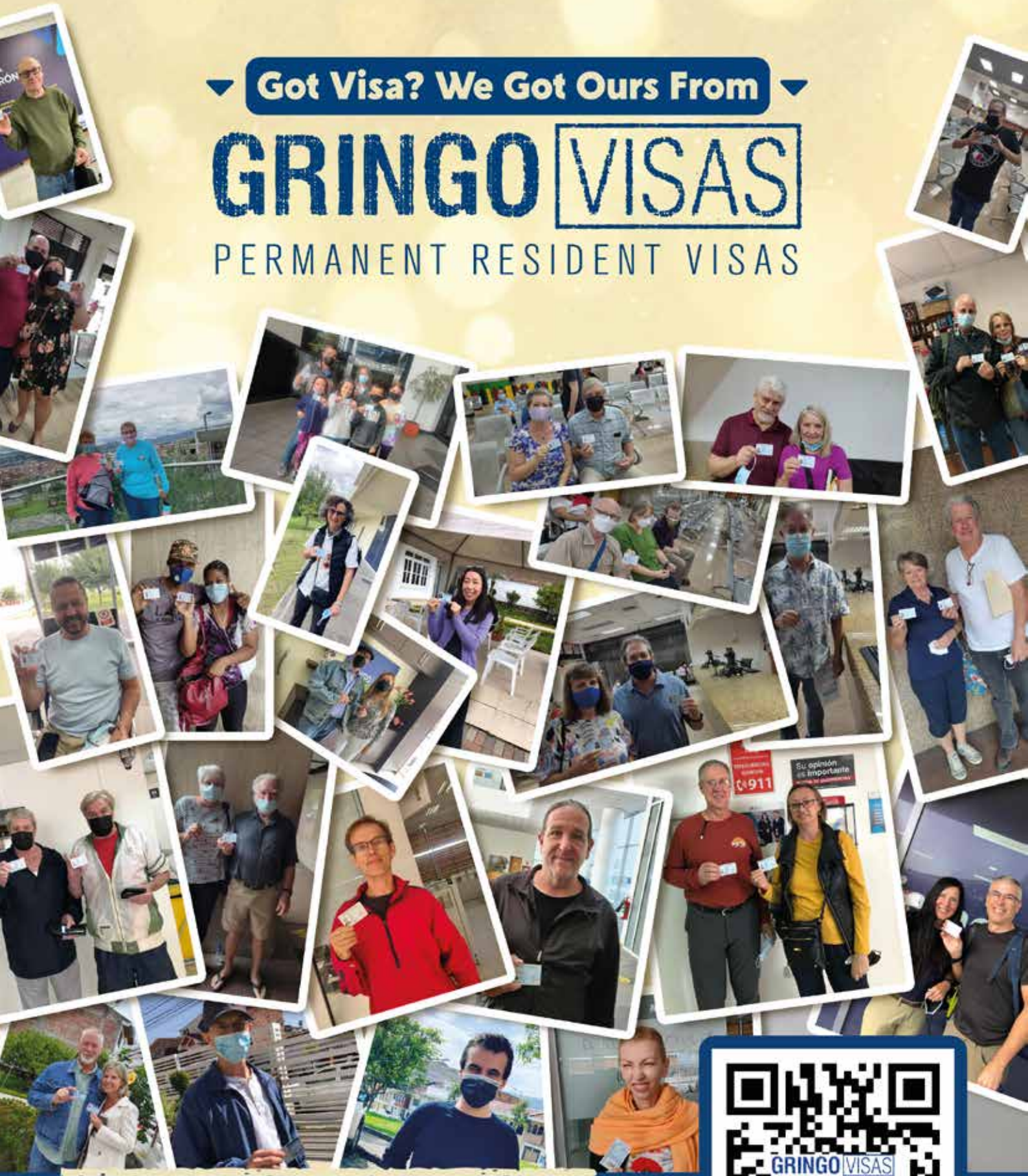

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CÁMARA DE COMERCIO ECUATORIANO AMERICANA CUENCA

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PUBLISHER´S LETTER

HELLO BEAUTIFUL CUENCA!

Wow! I haven't seen this much rain in Cuenca since I moved here almost 9 years ago. Yet, regardless of the daily down pours, people are still getting out to enjoy each other and all Cuenca has to offer. The parks have been full of families on the weekends, and have you noticed the several new restaurants around town? Speaking of new, we have an exciting new announcement for our readers. After a COVID hiatus of 2 years, Cuenca Expats Magazine will be offering the magazine in print version starting this month! Did you know that in North America the leading cause of death is of a heart attack or stroke? Cuenca is one of the few cities that offers world-class heart care at its various Cardio Centers. Enjoy our cover story, as we share the unique services offered and the trained specialists available for all your heart care needs.

There is a new calling service to the US available in Cuenca: JVOIP. It provides its customers with easy options for their calling needs. If you have to make a call to or receive a call from the US, there is no need to buy expensive plans or have two phones. JVOIP has you covered. Read about their easy-to-use app (available for under $10) and about their risk-free trial offer.I, like many of you, have been reading about the inflation rates back in the US. Some are reporting forty-year highs? If you are like me and need more information on how to better protect yourself, then check out "Expats and Their Finances." In our Cuenca Architecture section, read about Jane Hiltbrand's invite by the Montero family to view their unique and beautiful family home. "Casa San Jose," believed to have been originally built in the 1800's, is going through a major renovation. We will be highlighting the renovation progress in future magazines.

Looking for a neat place to visit and relax? Do you love learning about the rainforest and ecosystems? Check out our Travel & Adventure exclusive on the Mashpi Lodge. When you read about this amazing, eco-protected reserve, you will want to book your own trip.Something that none of us want to think about, but should, is End of Life Planning. You will want to make sure your family and you are protected. In Citizen Journalism we share the necessary Ecuadorian documents (very different from back home) you will need to complete planning, and we suggest that you contact Julio Cabrera, General Manager of the MEMPAZ funeral home. Make sure to inquire about financing just for expats. In the Arts and Crafts area, we have a fun article about crochet during the COVID shutdown. Read about the love that goes into each piece, as well as how to have a specialized item made just for you. In this issue, we also continue with Part 2 on the artist Eduardo Segovia. My favorite, all-time best activity to do here in Cuenca is spending spa day with my friends at Piedra de Agua! With that said, it is an honor to announce that Piedra de Agua has been awarded the Winner of the World Spa & Wellness Awards, launched in 2012.

One last, exciting piece of news. We are offering a new feature in this printed issue: QR codes. Just click on the code with your smart phone and you will find a beautiful video on Ecuador and a humorous look at the 10 reasons one expat chooses to live here.
Best regards to all, Melody

Melody J. Crabb

It is with immense pleasure to see Cuenca back to normal, and to announce the magazine is back in print! Because of COVID distribution protocols, we were not able to provide you with a printed copy of Cuenca Expats Magazine over the past two years. Fortunately, we were able to publish the online version during this hiatus and will continue with the online version along with a printed edition. To find your free printed copy of the magazine, we will have the same distribution points in Supermaxi (las Americas, El Vergel and Don Basco), with the addition of the Coral at Batan Shopping—all places most expats regularly visit. There are many new expats who have arrived in Cuenca over the past two years. We welcome all new readers to our community, and we welcome back those who have been with the magazine for the past nearly 7 years.

Thank you for your continued support of Cuenca Expats Magazine.
Best, Ed Lindquist,
Managing Partner, Expats Magazines Group

CONTRIBUTORS

Don Shader. In April, 2021, I resigned from my job at American Airlines after a nightmare restructuring within the IT organization that ruined careers and forced good people to seek other jobs elsewhere. It was time to retire. I sold everything I owned (almost everything), including my condo, car, motorcycle, gave away a LOT of my gear, and a lot of stuff I forgot that I even owned and I moved to Manta, Ecuador. After my arrival, desperately needing things to do, I decided to learn videography, video editing, making YouTube videos and building a channel to talk about my migration and anything else I find interesting.

Edward Lindquist. Successful California-born businessman, Ed is Managing Partner of Expats Magazines Group, parent company of Cuenca Expats Magazine, Coastal Expats Magazine, Quito Expats Magazine, REDBOOK, the Directory of English-Speaking Businesses and Services, and YAPA On-Line. Ed has called beautiful Cuenca his home for the last 8 years.

George and Tara. "We are Georg & Tara and we run our family travel YouTube channel called "Fernweh Chronicles". We are professional photographers/videographers and our channel focuses on authentic cross-cultural connections during international adventures, along with environmental conservation and social empowerment projects. When we aren't traveling, we live in the mountains in Colorado."

Jane Hiltbrand. Moved to Cuenca from Santa Fe, NM in April 2017 after a career in real estate specializing in historic adobe homes. She fell in love with the history and architecture in Cuenca and found herself wishing she could get inside every building! In an effort to accomplish that, she started a blog, "A Guide to Cuenca Architecture." She has a goal of photographing and visiting all of the buildings and sites in Cuenca, which make it a UNESCO World Heritage Site.She also enjoys singing in the Cuenca International Choir.

John Keeble. Has been writing for more than half a century. Today he uses his experience in writing, photography, and videography as a media volunteer helping NGOs and individuals to present their causes to the wider public. In 2016 he came to Ecuador for a year of writing and photography but soon became involved with an animal rescue team after the earthquake caused massive damage along the coast. john.keeble2712@yahoo. co.uk / www.johnkeeble.net

Robert M. Ryerson. Certified Financial Fiduciary. A Forbes contributor and author, Robert (Bob) Ryerson entered the financial industry in 1984, and is currently Chief Economist and Planner at New Century Panning Associates. New Century Planning has open an office in Ecuador to serve the expat community.Bob welcomes all questions from the expat community and will be answering them in future article.Bob can be reach via email at rryerson@newcenturyplanning.com.

Sarah Gunter Cañez. Spent over 25 years in Employee Benefits Insurance in Texas, working in management & sales with large carriers culminatingin the last 12 years owning her own benefits angency. Sarah met her husband, Daniel, in Ecuador in 1976 when both were Peace Corps volunteers, serving in Manabí.

Teresa Drake. Formerly of Florida, has been in Cuenca 1 ½ years with her husband of 11 years, Raymond Drake. Graduated Ferris State University BA with honors, fiber artist, quilter, award winning photographer, former photographer for Great Lakes Lighthouse Festival, published author and writer.

World Class Heart Care In Cuenca

By: Sara Cañez
Photos: Holger Jaramillo and UDICAM

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in North America and 22% of adults over the age of 65 have coronary heart disease (CHD), stroke, or both. Almost 30% of adults over the age of 65 have diabetes and are twice as likely to die from heart failure (HF). All that according to the American Heart Association.

As there are approximately 20,000 mainly North American English-speaking expats in Ecuador, of whom half (10,000) live in Cuenca, this condition and any needed surgery to correct the problem may be a major concern for many expats.

Consequently, the odds are that in the Cuenca expat community 1,100 people may have heart problems, 1,500 people may have diabetes, and many expats may also suffer from both conditions simultaneously. According to these numbers and statistics, it follows that about 100 expats in Cuenca may need surgery to place at least one heart stent sometime during this year or may need to be treated of aortic stenosis.

Expats should have peace of mind for all medical needs in Cuenca due to the presence of world class physicians, equipment and procedures available in Cuenca. Personally, I have had a number of procedures in Cuenca and have also had three major surgeries, all successful, performed by excellent local physicians.

An example of a world class procedure is the state-of-the-art TAVI, available from the Unidad de Diagnostico Invasivo (also known as UDICAM), brought to Cuenca by Dr. Juan Pablo Molina. This nonsurgical option designed to treat, aortic stenosis also be known by the acronym "TAVR" and is currently being performed in Cuenca Hospital Monte Sinai. In Loja the procedure is performed at clinic San Agustin. A TAVR (Transcatheter Aortic Valve Replacement) is a biological tissue valve designed to work like your own heart valve. In this minimally invasive procedure a new valve is inserted without removing the old, damaged valve. These valves are available in multiple sizes to better suit the patient's needs. Various clinical studies have shown that a TAVR procedure will result in a lower incidence of both death and stroke compared with traditional open-heart surgery. A TAVR type procedure has also been shown to shorten recovery time, which allows patients to return to everyday activities sooner and with less pain.

In most cases, patients begin walking within one day of their TAVR procedure. Average length of hospital stay is around 3 days, depending on the patient. Patients are asked to follow up with Dr. Molina at 7 days, at 1 month, at 3 months, and also at 1 year after the TAVR procedure.
Dr. Molina states that most patients may be required to take some type of mild blood thinners like aspirin after a TAVR procedure.

Patients have reported significant quality of life improvements within no more than 30 days, including the ability to easily take care of themselves.

My mother-in-law had three heart valves replaced over 20 years ago, having had the open-heart surgical method. She was very uncomfortable, with numerous external “staples” and internal stitches. It was months before she felt normal due to the difficulty of the surgery, and I wish that this procedure had been available for her at that time. I am also thankful that if I or someone I care about in Cuenca need this surgery that Dr. Molina, his team and his equipment are available to perform a procedure that is much less invasive.

Cardio Center’s Team of Specialists

Each doctor has his unique specialty, and each doctor has received his own training with post graduate studies. Once there is a case (patient), each doctor assumes their role in the procedure.

Dr Molina is the head of the team.

Dr. Juan Pablo Molina - Cardiólogo Intervencionista
Dr. Esteban Figueroa - Radiólogo Intervencionista
Dr. Pablo Quinde M - Cardiólogo Hemodinamista
Dr. Diego Serrano P - Cardiólogo Electrofisiólogo
Dr. Oliver Brasales - Cardiólogo Ecocardiografista
Dra. Karol Guzman - Cardiólogo Ecocardiografista
Dr. Miguel Molina P - Cardiólogo Clínico
Dr. Lucas Ayala - Cirujano Intervencionista
Dra Veronica Vazques - Cardiólogo Intervencionista Pediátrico
Dr. Agustin Vintimilla - Cirujano Hepato Biliar
Dr. German Abdo – Cirujano Neuro - Intervencionista (Quito)
Dr. Franz Duran C - Neuro -Intervencionista (Quito)
Dr. Carlos Calle C – Anestesiólogo
Dra. Sofia Molina – Anestesiólogo

One Expats Successful Experience

"I was referred to Dr. Molina by Dra Karol Guzman, my cardiologist, who had diagnosed me with Severe Aortic Stenosis. After a series of diagnostic procedures, it was Dr. Molina's recommendation that I would be a good candidate for the TAVI procedure. My wife and I received a call from Fernanda for Dr. Juan Pablo Molina, and she provided me with a quotation for the whole procedure, which included trans-arterial insertion of a biological valve and a pacemaker, the latter of which was supervised by Dr. Diego Serrano. It was determined that these procedures would provide me—a 79½-year-old retired professional—the best and safest treatment and the best prognosis. I not only survived the procedures, but I am pleased to report that I feel significantly more energetic and able to pursue activities and studies that were becoming more and more difficult prior to the TAVI procedure. I am indeed lucky and honored to have come across such a competent, organized team, consisting of Dra Karol Guzman, Dr. Juan Pablo Molina, and Dr. Diego Serrano." Sincerely, Richard Berke, Ph.D., retired, Cuenca expat.

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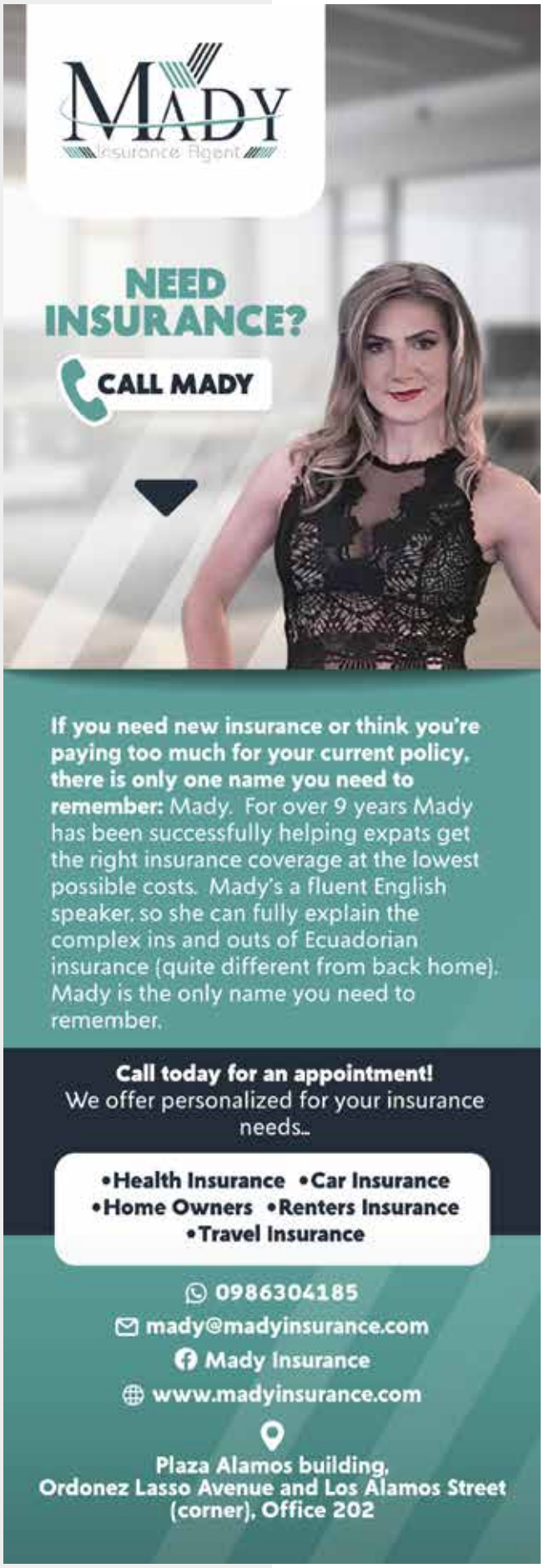
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Connections Made Easier With JVOIP

By: Teresa Drake

When you are in the U.S. or Canada calling all over the country is easy-peasy. However, if you are overseas calling family, friends, or to take care of business, it can be extremely complicated, frustrating, or even difficult. Now you can kiss those problems goodbye as connections are now easier with JVoIP. Josh V. Torres, president, and founder of JVoIP, thought there must be an easier way for people who are traveling, working, or living out of the U.S. to make connections to the U.S. without the need for costly or complicated equipment that you need to take with you. With JVoIP, all you need is your cell phone, their free mobile application for Apple or Android, and a connection to Wi-Fi, which you can find almost anywhere.

JVoIP is a carbon-neutral company founded in 2017. They started focusing on VOIP technology in 2020 when the pandemic gave the technology a kick start with people having to work from home or to telecommute. With JVoIP, there is no contract. Their plans are month-to-month and if you wish to cancel, you simply give them a 30-day notice. You don't need a computer to use it; just reliable Internet or Wi-Fi. You can call US cell phones or landlines with JVoIP and they have a wide range of plans. Two plans that may be of interest to expats are the Freelancer Plan, $9.95 per month or the Upstart Plan, $19.95 per month, and there are several other plans.

JVoIP services does not require you to buy or configure any special equipment—unlike legacy services like MagicJack or Ooma. You can call landlines, cell phones, and even register your JVoIP number with WhatsApp (personal or business). You can also port over your current US phone number if you wish to keep it and you do not need to get a "special" chip or SIM card each time you travel. There are no "per minute" charges for making calls either. With the Freelancer Plan you will get 200 minutes to get you started. If you find that you need more than that, then the Upstart Plan with unlimited calling may be the way to go. With their services you can also text, send pictures, and more. All you will need is their free app.

JVoIP, LLC is located in Charlotte, North Carolina and they provide a service that all expats will find extremely useful and beneficial when traveling or living out of the U.S. For more information, go to https://JVOIP.net or see answers to frequently asked questions, at https://JVOIP.net/faq. They can also be found on FB and the link is located on their website. Just scroll to the bottom of the page for the link. You can also call them at (980) 441-6120 directly or through WhatsApp.

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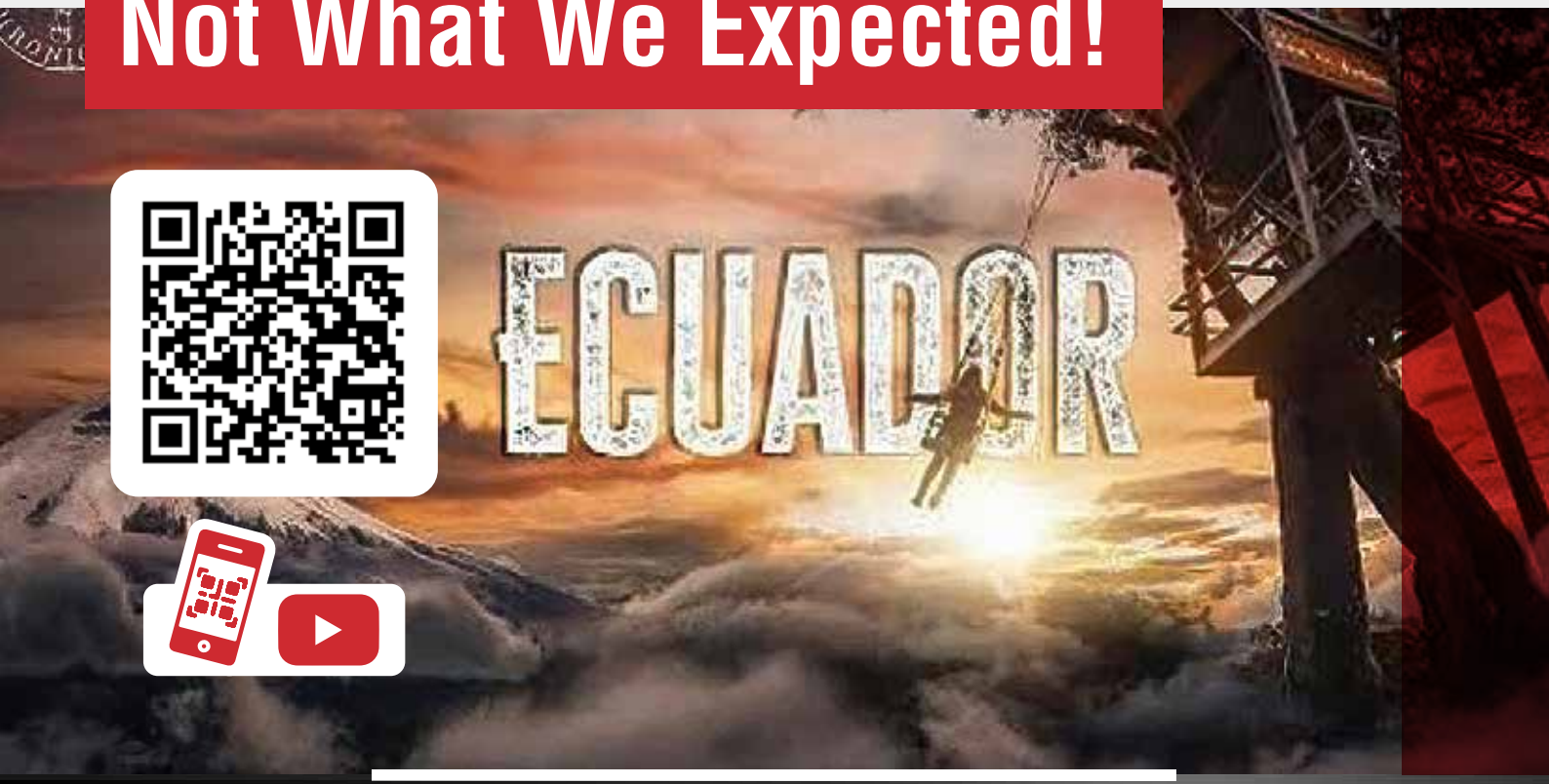

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Casa San Jose
A Renovation In Process

By: Jane Hiltbrand
Photos: Courtesy of Jane Hiltbrand

Cuenca is well known for its gorgeous architecture. A large part of that beauty comes about from the painstaking care taken in the renovations of the Spanish colonial, French Neo-Classical, and Republican era homes. It takes a great deal of study and fine artistry to accomplish this kind of renovation. I was so honored to be invited by the Montero family to view their family home, which is currently in the process of being restored. It is believed the house was built in the late 1800's, or maybe earlier than that as there is no data in the Municipality of an exact date. It initially belonged to the family Delgado Jara, and then it passed to his heirs, who sold it to the family Cordova Vintimilia. It then went to the family Monsalve, and from there to the current owner, the Montero family. The colonial part of the house is made from adobe, and the newer part from brick.

The renovation work is being done by Felipe Urgiles. Felipe is the same person who fairly recently completed the spectacularly beautiful renovation of Casa Del Parque in Parque Calderon. There is so much great beauty in that building, but I am sure many will especially recall the angels in the ceiling in the Turquesa Room of Mansion Matilde, which is on the second floor of Casa Del Parque. That is just one example of Felipe's exceptionally exquisite work.

This house, Casa San Jose, at 5-45 Sucre, is still a work in progress, but some of the renovation is complete. Felipe has very carefully replicated the original murals on the walls, and in the grand sala there was a decision to change the basic color of the walls to enhance their appearance. Felipe also renovated a very large mirror, which hangs in the entryway staircase, to give it the adornment of the times. He has also been in charge of restoring the elegant crystal chandeliers in the home. On a sketch overlay of a photo of the front of the home, he has superimposed angel murals, which will be painted on the exterior walls. Felipe is a truly gifted artist, and a great treasure for Cuenca.

I was so delighted to be invited by the Montero family to a special event in the home. The lovely event included jazz musicians, flowers, wine and candlelight; and the house was full of

friends, admirers, and family. The event was to celebrate a book written by Teodoro Montero—an autobiography of his life. The title of the book, “Desde el Soplo con la Churumbela al Rayo Laser” is referring to the tools used for jewelry making. The Soplo la Churumbela was originally used. The person using it had to blow on the instrument, and it produced quite a lot of smoke, which could be very irritating to the user’s throat. The Rayo Laser is now used for cutting. In addition to being very successful, Teodoro’s business was known for donating to non-profits for children. He and his family used to bring baskets of food door to door in the neighborhood at Christmas time.

Teodoro’s daughter Sandra Montero has continued in the tradition after 60 years and has a store of her beautiful jewelry in the building. Personalized jewelry pieces are also made there. VAZMONT JEWELRY is a fusion of the two last names Vasquez Montero. Included in this article is a photo of Sandra’s daughter, Andrea Vasquez, modeling a “peineta” or jewelry hair piece, which the Vasquez Montero family designed.

The first part of the renovation is complete. The house will be available for special events, such as engagement parties, christening parties, art exhibitions, or important business meetings. I have been invited to check in occasionally to follow the completion of the renovation of this beautiful home. It is such a rare treat to see an actual “before and after” transformation and renovation, the style for which Cuenca is treasured and so well known.

Never Too Early To Begin End Of Life Planning

By: Sarah Cañez

Life in Ecuador is wonderful! However, making health and death directives in Spanish may not be so easy for many expats living in Cuenca, Ecuador. If your spouse dies, what do you do? Or if you are single and find yourself in a hospital unable to direct someone to take care of you, what are your options in Ecuador? The required documents are similar to those "back home," but the process is a little different here. End-of-life directives in Ecuador are written by a lawyer and are called Minuta, which are then legalized by a notary and called The Sworn Declaration. Attorney fees range from $200 to $300 for each person's End of Life Plan.

First, you will need a representative to be in charge of all your directives related to health and death in Ecuador. If you are married, a spouse is the obvious person to appoint as your representative. If you are single and have no family here, you should appoint someone locally as your representative. Anyone can be legally elected to represent you. Next, decide how you want your end of life to happen. Do you want special measures to be taken on your behalf? Or would you rather sneak away without any machine keeping you alive?

Do you want to be cremated? Buried? Cremation and burial services are offered in Cuenca, and they will also facilitate the purchase of a burial plot or a columbarium place in a cemetery for the ashes, depending on the decision of the relatives or those responsible. Cremation and burial services can be purchased at any time prior to illness or death. If you are a member of the IESS, this system offers a basic burial service free of charge. Instructions for repatriating the remains to a burial plot of choice anywhere may also be designated. All these elements will be specified in the Minuta. Will you need an autopsy? If the details of the death are unknown (for example, if you are found unconscious or dead in your home), an autopsy is required. If you have a family doctor, he may be called to come to your home to declare death for a minimal cost. If an autopsy is required, the family or representative is responsible for the cost. After all the decisions have been made and the lawyer has written the directives, the final step will be in a notary to legalize your Minuta as a Sworn Declaration. This legalized document is kept forever at the notary's office, but you will be given an original signed and stamped copy of the document to be used when necessary. And finally, depending on the decision of the relatives or person responsible the procedures can be personally carried out at the Consulate General of the United States of America in Guayaquil, including such things as the death report of an American citizen, processing for the expatriation of ashes to the United States or any place that the person in charge decides, and obtaining 20 legalized death certificates from the Department of the State of the United States; or you can hire the services in Cuenca to obtain consular procedures at a reasonable cost without the need for you to move to Guayaquil and so avoid accommodation, transportation and food costs. The US State Department's American Citizen Services (ACS) strongly recommends end-of-life planning for expats in any foreign country, should the unexpected occur.

MEMOPAZ

Cuenca expats should consider contacting Julio Cabrera, General Manager of the funeral home MEMOPAZ (atencionalcliente@memopaz.com).

MEMOPAZ has been helping the expat community for over 20 years, and Sr. Cabrera who is also an attorney can walk you through all the steps required by Ecuadorian law (very different from the US). MEMOPAZ has also introduced a special reduced priced funeral plan with financing just for expats. So, you'll have the peace of mind everything will be taken care of.

Water Stone Winner

World Spa & Wellnes Award 2022

“PIEDRA DE AGUA” from ecuador wins spa of the year of the americas award last Sunday, April 3, in London, England, the WORLD SPA & WELLNESS award ceremony was held.

Launched in 2012, the World Spa & Wellness Awards, recognized as the Oscars of Spas, honor and reward the work that spas do around the world, honoring the wellness industry in Western Europe and Scandinavia, the Middle East and Africa, North and South America, Asia and Australia. The organizers indicate that this is one of the main honors in the industry, and that the awards recognize excellence in care, sustainability, service and quality, as well as serve to inspire spas around the world, helping to raise the global industry standards; this time Cuenca with Piedra de Agua took first place.

After a long process of selection, documentation and tests with great satisfaction, it was learned that the winner of the SPA of the Year category for LAS AMERICAS went to the ECUADORIAN company, PIEDRA DE AGUA - FUENTE TERMAL & SPA TERMAL, located in the Baños de the city of Cuenca, Ecuador in the category: SPA OF THE YEAR: NORTH & SOUTH AMERICA.

Ing. Pablo Durán, Manager of Piedra de Agua recognizes that this award is not only received by Piedra de Agua, but also by Ecuador and our beautiful Cuenca, as a national pride that reinforces our tourism potential and that places us in the tourist arena. worldwide, he also stated that this recognition will undoubtedly serve to promote the name of our country in all the media dedicated to the tourism industry, wellness and especially health tourism.

Piedra de Agua and Lapinha Spa in the independent SPA category of Brazil, were the only two American companies to receive the award. The World Spa & Wellness Awards, run by the UK-based Professional Beauty Group, have organized spa and beauty industry awards for the last 30 years, giving them a deep understanding of the field, incorporating a process comprehensive and independent evaluation process in which all spas are evaluated by experienced industry professionals.

This event recognizes and rewards the best SPAs in the world in 13 different categories. The winners of the different categories among others were:

- **Fivelements retreat wellness sanctuary spa of the year asia & australia.**
- **The spa at sharq village & spa, doha, spa of the year : middle east & africa.**
- **Eden elements at eden one: western europe & scandinavia**
- **Four season hotels & resorts, spa group of the year award.**
- **Kalloni spa at parklane resort & spa, spa of the year: eastern europe.**

For Piedra de Agua it has been an honor to announce that the Best Spa in the Americas is located between the mountains and hot springs of Cuenca, preserving our natural environment and highlighting the wonders of this biodiverse country. In addition, we are proud to bring this award to each of our visitors for whom we work daily under the best quality standards so that they enjoy an unforgettable experience.

Segovia,

Thinking big and racing against age and Illness

By: John Keeble
Photos: Courtesy of John Keeble

Cuenca ceramicist Eduardo Segovia yearns to take on the big projects that swirl through his creative mind but reflects on his failing physical energy and admits: "I am old and I have not accomplished my goals."

He added: "I am thinking big. Bigger sculptures, monuments, ceramic sculptures. I feel that if I have a meter to walk [in this life] I have walked only five centimeters. My physical energy is failing. I can see that I won't be able to accomplish all that I have thought."
To see and hear the 83-year-old artist, no one would think of him as anything but ready to take on more projects, but he suffers from an incurable illness and he is conscious of his age.

In his studio and home, which he shares with his second wife Cumanda Alvarez, he works almost every day as a ceramicist and painter, always welcoming those who want to see his work and encouraging younger artists.
A disappointment in his distinguished career has been the lack of recognition and acceptance by Cuenca's city council, which has chosen not to take up his offers for the people. Now, in what he sees as his final years, he is giving his designs to a group painting murals in the area where he lives. In a life that started with poverty and disadvantage, Segovia learned to work hard as well as creatively—but he has no doubt that he was meant for his chosen path. "It is in my genes," he said. "My father was a great painter, a man of letters, an intellectual. Even if I had not come to the area of the pot makers, I would still have come to art. I was destined to this."

Destiny can be a rocky road and Segovia found he had his share of rocks on the way. As a young man, he tried to get his work accepted for a public show. "I was mocked." Those who had the authority to give him a show asked: "Why? You should sell this in the market."
"That motivated me to get better. I needed to have my work shown. I worked very hard for a year and then took my work back." "It was never about money," he said, recalling the driving forces in his life. "I never liked money much. I only wanted to have enough to eat and work. All the time I wanted to get better. It was not for other people. It was for my own sake. It was for me to accomplish my vision, but, sadly, I still have not accomplished everything." In his quiet, beautiful room full of his favourite art, he paused to contemplate the past and the future. "I have an illness," he said. "Perhaps it will take me to the other side. I think I will die of old age [rather than] the illness. I feel that soon I won't be here."

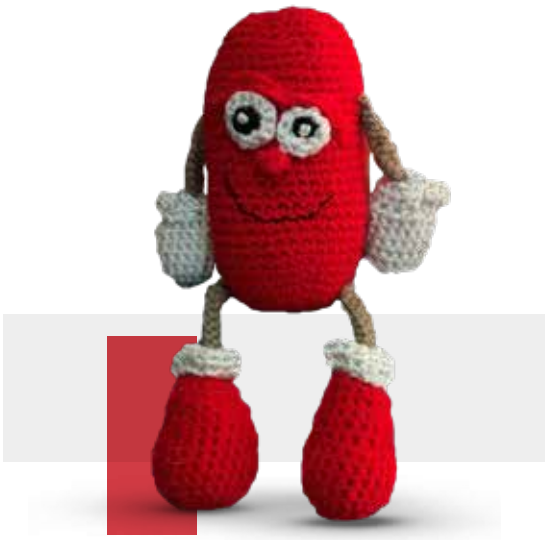
He added: **"When I leave this world and go to that other world, I hope there is clay so that I can continue my work."** Andrés Zambrano, owner of La Guarida restaurant which houses a permanent Segovia art exhibition, kindly gave his time and skills as translator for this article. You can see the exhibition when La Guarida is open, or schedule a private showing by calling 099-806 8071.

You can also see Eduardo Segovia's studio and showroom at the artist's home, on:
Vega Muñoz 22-30 at Luis Pauta, Cuenca.
Visits can be arranged by phone, at 282-4707.

Pure Magic?

Maybe

By: Teresa Drake
Photos: Teresa Drake



In my lifetime, I have experienced the Asian Flu epidemic, which was thought to be a punishment for the evils of the world. Both my sister and I were hospitalized and survived, barely. The threat of polio was ended by the polio vaccine. Then we were faced with Covid-19 and its variants, causing lock-down procedures. Movement and travel were all but non-existent until more recently and masks must still be worn. In the early days of the pandemic, you could see people in hazmat suits with face shields and rubber gloves. No gatherings, nightclubs, restaurant outings or visiting friends or family. Before you could enter a store, you were sprayed with a disinfectant alcohol and only one member of the family could go in. The world had been locked down and seemed to have gone mad.

If you are an artist, you tend to try to be creative. Let me introduce myself, I am Teresa Drake, or Teresita, as my Ecuadorian friends and family call me. I have been living in Cuenca for four years with my husband, two cats and a dog. I am a published author, quilter and fiber artist who recreates pictures and such in fabric or thread painting, which is using colored thread on fabric like one would use paints on paper. However, options for this type of creativity were limited due to fabric shops being closed. Next on the list was painting, which is all well and good, but one can only paint and draw so much before you run out of room.

To keep from going crazy, I turned to a very calming craft—for me—that is almost as old as time itself—crochet. My husband says that what I do is "PFM—Pure Magic." He is amazed at how I turn balls of yarn or thread into Afghans, shawls, wall-hangings, animals, dolls or creatures. Magic? Maybe. My Swedish grandmother tried to teach me to crochet, but the only thing she was able to teach me was a simple chain stitch. Being left handed and she right handed, made her task impossible. She had absolutely no patience and, in the 1950's, there were no books for lefties. Same held true for knitting I am self-taught and while I can read the patterns, my process is considered to be backwards.

For more detailed patterns, such as shawls and Afghans, I sometimes have to do the pattern in reverse, i.e., my row one is read from right to left instead of left to right. It can be very confusing. When I am stressed, or housebound, I tend to crochet animals, such as dogs or cats, or imaginary creatures, such as frog princes or baby yoda.

These creations have been posted on my personal Facebook page and on the Drakes Nest Studios Facebook page. The reaction has been phenomenal. Prices depend on size and complexity, and they range from as low as $2.00 to $20 for the critters. Afghans and shawls depend on size and amount of thread/yarn used..

If you are interested in having a crocheted piece made, please contact me at terrinv@yahoo.com or you can telephone me at 0979265631 or send me a private message via messenger. I am also on WhatsApp. I would love to create something special for you, be it a shawl, an Afghan or a little critter.

Magic? That is for you to decide.

To Follow a Dream

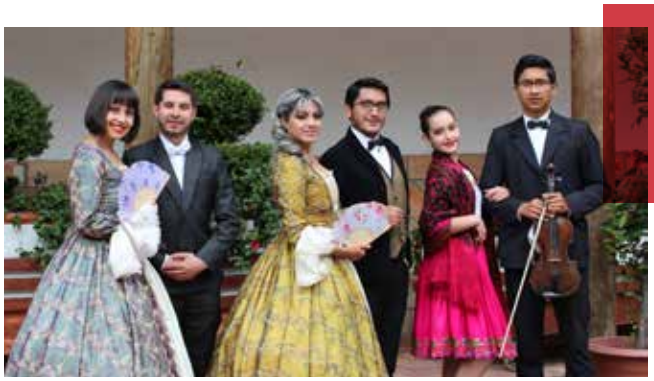
By: Teresa Drake
Photos: Courtesy of Teresa Drake

I recently had the pleasure of watching six very talented young people put on an operatic performance of "La Velada Cuencana," at Kolo Restaurant. It was an amazing presentation and the voices were clear, full of the passion and the kind of emotion you would expect in a well-performed opera. The performance was written, choreographed and directed by 25-year-old Johnny Bravo, who also played the piano to accompany the performers. The performers range in age from 14 to 34 and to hear the quality of their voices, you would not believe they are that young.

La Velada Cuencana translates to "The Cuencana Evening," and is a celebration that takes place after the decoration of Jose Maria Rodriguez as cultural ambassador of the city of Cuenca at the beginning of the 19th Century. The atmosphere was induced by the period dress that the performers wore as well as the location that was enhanced by candelabras located in strategic spots around the floor. The performers, Johnny Bravo, his sister and dancer, Mikaela Bravo, violin player, Santiago Arévalo, sopranos, Belén Campoverde and Gabriela Méndez and bass singer, David Peña were successful in transporting the viewers to old Cuenca. A time when singers entertained their guests or family members and played the piano or violin.

Johnny created "La Velada Cuencana" as his thesis to graduate as a professional in tourism (pre-Covid). In 2020 he approached, several tour companies, including Best Experience Ecuador, to help get his play out there. Pedro Alvarez Iñiguez of Best Experience Ecuador was quite taken by the group. He became the unofficial manager and host, and he performs as a dancer when his time allows. And present a theatrical performance that will introduce people to old Ecuador and its people through music and costumes.

These multi-talented individuals helped to lift the spirits of the people watching them perform and, for one evening, allowed them to forget about the pandemic and its problems and get lost in a time machine to early 19th Century Cuenca. I, for one, am thankful that I had a ticket to ride part of their dream. I would strongly urge you, if you get the chance, to watch these beautiful people perform. Perhaps you know of a place that would welcome a performance or can help get the word out about them and, in the process, find sponsors so they can achieve their dreams.



If you are interested in scheduling a performance or wish more information, you can follow them on:

La Velada Cuencana
@lavelada.cuencana
Contact Pedro Alvarez Iñiguez at
593 99 553 5705 for more information.

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Head In Clouds

Exploring The Rain Forest At The Mashpi Lodge

Part One

By: Ed Lindquist
Photos: Cuenca Expats Magazine

Sponsored by: Metropolitan Touring

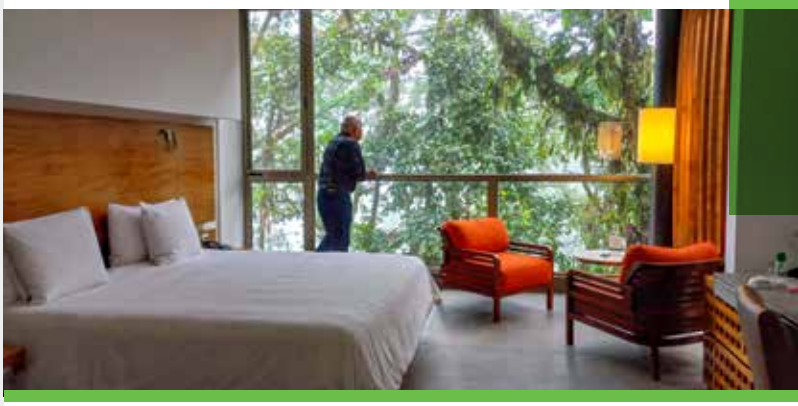
Like most, I first learned about the rain forest in some long-ago forgotten classroom. Over the years, there have been many reports about how the rain forest has been devastated by logging, mining, drilling, and farmland expansion. Much of it illegal.

I wanted to visit the rainforest. I live in Ecuador, and it would be a shame not to see one of nature's wonders right in my backyard. So, I contacted my friends at Metropolitan Touring to arrange an itinerary for me. Their holding group is the owner and operator of an internationally renowned lodge in the Choco Andino, called Mashpi Lodge.

LATAM AIRLINES

My journey began by booking a ticket for the quick 50-minute flight from Cuenca to Quito on LATAM. (I always try to fly with this dependable airline.)

I had reserved a room in Quito at my favorite luxurious boutique hotel: Casa Gangotena. This hotel is located in the center of the historic district and is an excellent choice for visiting the city or as a jumping-off point for excursions to Otavalo, Cotopaxi, or in my case, the rainforest. And, I love the food at the hotel, so I always eat in. Chef Jose Tamayo, who started his career in Buenos Aires prepares "Cocina Mestiza," which is a combination of indigenous and European influences envisioned anew through modern techniques while celebrating fresh, native, and locally sourced ingredients. Take my word for it, it was the best meal I have had in my eight years in Ecuador—food, and service outstanding.



After a great night's sleep in the spacious constable room, I had breakfast and was ready for my adventure to the rain forest. Metropolitan Touring had arranged for my transportation to the Mashpi Lodge. Right on time, Jose from the Mashpi Lodge picked me up from the hotel. He told me it was about a three-and-a-half-hour drive to Mashpi. To my surprise, we did not drive northeast to the Amazon (I thought all Ecuador's rain forest was there), but northwest toward Esmeralda's Coast.

On the way about 26 miles north of Quito we stopped to see the Mitad del Mundo (Middle of the Earth) monument. The monument was built to commemorate the first Geodesic Mission of the French Academy of Science who in 1736 conducted experiments to test the characteristic shape of the Earth. We drove on excellent highways until we came to the little town of Tulipe. I have a degree in archaeology, so I was disappointed that the archaeological complex museum with the ancient Yumbo ruins was closed. After a brief bio-break, we turned onto a dirt road for half an hour and drove straight into the clouds (literally).

Mashpi Reserve is located within the Chocó Andino Biosphere Reserve. The Biosphere Reserve comprises a territory of approximately 287,000 hectares (one hectare is about two and a half acres) of which 48% are remnants of the ancient Andean forests. Its forests have the important function of capturing the evaporation of the Pacific Ocean and generating significant amounts of water that flow through the basins of rivers. It is both rain and cloud forest, and home to 400 species of birds (36 not found anywhere else), 300 species of butterfly and moths, and a load of endangered animals.

Mashpi Reserve itself is 2500 hectares (a hectare is 2.47 acres) in size, and the 24-room Mashpi lodge sits on the site of an old saw mill. There is a large gate at the entrance of the Mashpi Reserve that reminded me of "Jurassic Park." (I was half expecting to see a Spielberg raptor come out of the forest after us!).

To get to the lodge (a boutique hotel in the clouds) you need to take a one-way, winding dirt road up the side of a mountain for 20 minutes. All guests are welcomed with a hot towel before checking in—a nice touch after the long drive. Check-in was quick and easy (as I found all service staff is English-speaking). Luggage was taken directly to the room while I was served a refreshing drink before the orientation meeting started. Marc Bery, the general manager of Mashpi Lodge gave a slide presentation on its history and general information for guests.

Mashpi Reserve was formed in 2001 when a group of Quito businessmen including Roque Sevilla, the former mayor of Quito and chairman of the board of Metropolitan Touring and the Grupo Futuro holding group of companies became concerned about the depleting rain forest. They purchased 800-hectares from a bankrupt logging company, and eventually built the lodge over a two-year period. It was opened in 2012. By that time, another 400 hectares had been added to the property, and in 2019, another 1300 hectares were added to the reserve, making it a total of 2500-hectares.

In the second part of this article in the next Issue 41 will explain about the Mashpi Lodge.

Interest Rates Rising!

(A Reminder of the implications)

By: Robert M. Ryerson

In the first two weeks of February of 2022, interest rates in the United States started to move up appreciably for the first time since August of 2019 in response to reports that showed higher consumer and producer price inflation rates. Both consumer prices (CPI) and producer prices (PPI) reached successive 40-year highs in November, December and January. The 10-year treasury bond serves as a benchmark and reference point for financial assets and loan rates around the world and broke decisively through the 2% level in mid-February.

On February 1, the total public debt of the US exceeded the $30 trillion level for the first time, and the M2 money supply was at three times the level it was when Lehman Brothers failed in 2008. It was at that time, during the crisis of late 2008 and early 2009 that the Federal Reserve first pushed interest rates down to near 0% in an effort to help the economy and banks recover. This policy of artificially low interest rates, known unofficially as Zero Interest Rate Policy (ZIRP), remained in place until just recently, when the Fed chief suggested that they would begin to raise rates in response to the increasing inflation they were seeing in the economy.

Wall Street appears to be skeptical about the Fed's willingness, or even ability to raise rates enough to cut off the rising inflation problem. It remains to be seen how the financial markets will react to higher rates. After all, with a $30 trillion and rapidly-rising debt on which to pay interest, pundits question how high rates can rise without the government starting to "crowd out" other borrowers in the private economy. Also, historically, steadily rising rates create pain and problems in the bond and stock markets. While higher rates would be a relief for long suffering savers and bank account holders, they will cause grief and paper (or real) losses for bond holders, as all bond prices fall as interest rates increase. Also, if rates rise enough, fixed income vehicles such as CDs, fixed annuities, money markets, and savings bonds become more attractive competitors to stocks and mutual funds for a growing number of investors. So, if interest rates rose enough, or spiked higher, that could lead to a market crash, or prolonged period of underperformance. Many economists believe the Fed and other central banks have painted themselves into a corner, with no easy way out—either they risk a market crash or much higher inflation rates, which would also hurt the economy and consumer spending.

It is important to note that the domestic real estate markets have also enjoyed a long and strong bull market as mortgage rates fell to record lows over the past 5- 10 years. If mortgage rates rose enough in response to the Fed's actions or with inflation, housing prices could fall for a while, as it would take more money every month in the mortgage payment for the average buyer.

It is my opinion that the Federal Reserve's long period of artificially low interest rates, intended to "stimulate" the economy, has instead led to distorted and artificially high prices for real estate, stocks and bonds, and that the average investor needs to be on high alert at this time, in terms of paying attention to where interest rates go. We are in strange and even uncharted waters at this time, so caution and cash should be in everyone's portfolios. If now is not the time to sell bonds, or take lots of profits on stocks and real estate . . . when will that be?

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