

A lively Eco-community in the Jungle

## BETTER IN BELIZE NEWSLETTER



HELLO BIB OWNERS AND FRIENDS WE'RE BACK!

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Welcome back friends to our second newsletter. We had a great response from our first newsletter and everyone loved it. This time around I got a little sidetracked, but with the help from our owners and friends we rounded up some new stories and fun facts.

Let me start this newsletter by thanking everyone who has contributed with stories, facts, and articles for this newsletter. I strongly encourage everyone to participate and provide us with ANY information that will help stimulate our owners and friends at BIB. Please tell us about your recent trip you had to BIB or an experience you were part of in Belize. Give us any tips, facts, or stories that would interest our readers. Without our community contributions this would be a pretty dull newsletter! We are glad we have a group of owners that help make this newsletter interesting.

If you are interested in helping out, simply email me ([DeMarco.gene@yahoo.com](mailto:DeMarco.gene@yahoo.com)) or the HOA board at ([bibhoaboard@gmail.com](mailto:bibhoaboard@gmail.com)) with any current events, tips, information, or interesting facts so that I can include in the next newsletter. Also, we are always looking for a "Featured Owner" so that we can get to know each other better. Our owners are from all over the world and being a featured owner helps us get to know each other better. Please submit a few photos and "Your story" and I will gladly post your story of BIB and how you found this wonderful community.

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# WELCOME NEIGHBOR!

## Lot 47: Doug, Linda & Bev. DeGirolamo

Doug, Linda and Bev are building the first container home here in the BIB community!

We are all watching closely and excited to see the progress on Lot 47. If you are not familiar with Lot 47, it has a 40 degree incline from the street. It also has some 35 degree declines from the edge of the house. This is creating some unique challenges but this is nothing they can't handle.

As of mid-August, all of the cement posts have been put into the mountain anywhere from 9" to 36". This process took a little over 6 weeks. All the post holes needed to be jack hammered into the solid rock. The rebar has been drilled and glued into the mountain to ensure a good earth ground. The lowest column is 16" above ground and the tallest column is 19 feet above the ground



Column completed: Above



Doug states, "We have 5 of the 8 containers we will build with. We are still looking for 3 more containers before we start the actual assembly." He proceeds to say, "All of our shipping containers will be 8' wide and 20' long so we won't have any problems getting the containers down Hydro road. We will get a crane with a 150' boom to put the containers in place without damaging any trees or disturbing the beauty of our environment.

Some stairs were constructed to carry the cement uphill in 5 gallon buckets to construct foundation pylons. (Thanks to the tough workers who worked relentlessly got for several weeks!)

### Doug explains his plans for construction:

"I will weld 16" flat plates to the top of the columns so I'll be able to weld the containers to the plates. Electric will be provided by a 5KW solar system. I will have a 15,000 liter water bladder in the bottom container and all utilities will be in the other bottom container."



“We will be using the Humanure method for human and other organic waste, so no septic system is required.” Grey water will be used to water trees and promote growth therefore using all recourses available to them.

Doug, Linda and Bev are from Louisiana and have decided to move to Belize, in particular BIB full time. Doug has recently (very recently) retired and within 6 weeks have moved to BIB. They are excited to get their home in place and as Doug mentioned, “This is when the fun begins.”

## ABOUT THE OWNERS

Linda, Doug, and Bev (with Oliver front and center)

“Doug and I found BIB when we visited Belize for our 30th wedding anniversary, in September 2016.” Doug had a stroke one year earlier, on our 29th anniversary. What a wakeup call! It was love at first sight at BIB. Shortly after returning to Louisiana, we bought our lot! Our initial plan was to start building in 5 years, but, we decided life was too short to put off our happiness.”

In January 2017, my mother, **Beverly**, moved in with us, and loved the idea of living in Belize, even though she'd never been here before. We brought her down for a 2 week visit in January 2018, and she fell in love with it! BTW; she's 82 years young!

“We officially moved here June 8! Best move we ever made. We love our new BIB family! We love to socialize, Bev enjoys baking and cooking, and we all read ALOT!”

“One thing all of us have found is that our overall health has improved in such a short time. Bev and I have cut back on some of our medications, and have even stopped some altogether, and we have all lost 10-20 lbs. We attribute this to healthy eating and increased activity. Lack of stress doesn't hurt either!” □

“The culture of Belize is so friendly and relaxing. We're enjoying games and dinner tonight with Susanne Jefferson and Jenny Lodes this afternoon, and will have them take some pics of us. Thank everyone for the interest in our story. We love telling others about our happiness!”



## QUICK FACTS/INFO

- **AT BIB, THERE ARE NOW:**

- 25 finished homes

- 1 finished HOA office

- 3 under construction

- 2 incomplete/on hold

- There are almost 20 full/half time residents now, and several vacation time residents, as well as at least a half dozen vacation rental properties
- *“Leaf cutter ants are a torment in my garden!”* someone wrote.....
- BIB now has a defibrillator for the community and are considering getting a second one to serve the upper and lower neighborhood
- At time of publication, the architectural plans are being finalized and submitted for the community center. Once they are submitted to the building authority for approval we will have them in hand and we will re-open bids for construction. Once bids are reviewed and one selected, construction can begin, (Ann McG)
- Watch out for the neighbor “Refer a Friend Program” coming soon from the developer, Better In Belize LTD. Insider Scoop: You can make \$1,000 USD just for referring a friend that hasn’t been in touch with them and if they end up buying a property at BIB.
- BIB roads had some interim work done on most troublesome areas and are in good shape for now. A major road project including engineering for drainage, is planned in the next year
- **HOA FEE DUES:** The 90 day grace period for finance charges ends in September! Hurry so that you don’t incur extra charges on your past due HOA fees.
- We encourage everyone to visit the [bibowners.com](http://bibowners.com) frequently as new content is added on a regular basis and to have some interaction on the forums.
- The Garden is doing great! We're seeing lots of bananas and avocados right now in the Garden Share. Mangos and limes did not produce well throughout the region due to unfortunate rain patterns. We are focusing on perennial fruit and nut trees and plants for sustainability. The committee will be purchasing some short variety coconut palms to plant soon.
- We now have several folks doing boat tours - Laz as well as his brother Joe Martinez, owner of Martz Farm, and Roberto Melendez, our neighbor across the road. Recently a group from BIB did a night tour which sounded exciting.
- Hydro Road was recently graded and is much improved.



Leaf Cutter Ants, heading home from work.

# Help the Belize Bird Rescue

Founded in 2004, Belize Bird Rescue (NGO) operates under license and support from the Government of Belize Forest Department, and is Belize's only multi-species avian rescue and rehabilitation center.

<http://www.belizebirdrescue.com/>

## VOTE

and help the bird rescue win \$1,000 towards the welfare of their cause!

See below...from a staff member

Dear friends,

Would you take a second to cast a quick vote for our amazing photo in the Global Giving competition? We're currently at number 3 (jumping between 2 and 3)

If you can bear to register to receive email updates, your vote is counted 3 times! We stand to win \$1000 US



**Vote here**

<https://www.globalgiving.org/poll/vote/?pollOptionId=1147>

## A Solar Proposition

Renie Brady, Casa de la Tierra, #7

I've noticed that most people who have bought lots at Better In Belize Ecovillage are at least somewhat environmentally oriented. Although to a few, BIB is just a casual tropical getaway, most of us bought lots or came to live here because we admire the beautiful setting and the gentle climate –and probably for something else as well.

For me, that “something else” is the wildlife and the rainforest ambience, the fulfillment of a lifelong dream of Living In the Jungle. Others are attracted to the thought of picking free avocados, bananas and mangos from trees in the yard and sipping margaritas on the veranda while blue morpho butterflies flutter by (I like that idea, too). Some are attracted to the possibility of living out their later years in a gorgeous place they can afford (another winner in my book). And there are many who want to live an ecologically sane life and/or experiment with permaculture projects, and this seems like a good place to try.

So everyone has their own focus, but to be honest, wouldn't it have been cheaper to buy or build a house in a village or town? Since we obviously came here because of the amazingly beautiful rainforest setting, it seems clear that we need to find ways to keep that ambience, the forest and wildlife, vibrant and healthy as we develop into a human community.

One of the problems we run into, though, is the necessity of opening up the forest canopy in order to get sunshine on our solar panels. But clearing out the inside of a forest lot is a major problem in terms of keeping a rainforest viable. If we remove too much vegetation, the wildlife – toucans, howler monkeys, parrots, mot-mots,



foxes and other amazing and beautiful creatures – will abandon BIB and we will become just another housing development.

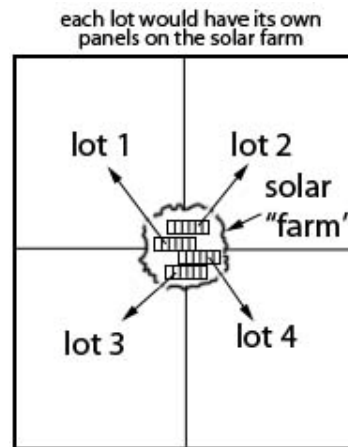
They abandon it for a number of reasons: they lose forest corridors for going from one area to

another; cleared areas don't support their lifestyle; they're shy and don't prosper in close quarters with people; they fear barking dogs. One of the things we can plan for is in the area of the size of canopy openings.

**I propose an alternative possibility** that makes a whole lot of sense, both in terms of preserving the beauty around us, and

financially.

What if, instead of everyone clearing out the trees around and above their individual houses, two, three or four adjacent homeowners were to get together and carve out a single opening and share



it? It would need to be large enough to accommodate solar panels for each household, but would still only require a fraction of space (and cost) that multiple openings would need, and it might be possible to situate the panels in an area unsuitable for building.

It may take some creative management to get adjacent homeowners talking together and pooling resources, since houses are being built at different times and not all in the same area of BIB, but the end results would be a far more

beautiful, un-fragmented forest with homes (maybe with composting toilets?) nestled into beautiful natural surroundings. Even if a lot owner isn't planning to build for awhile – or is planning to sell the lot later – access to a solar “farm” would be a good selling point, as the new owner wouldn't have the expense of removing trees from their lot to meet their solar needs.

Another possibility: if one lot has a good site to put solar panels on and an adjacent lot does not, the panels could be put on the good site and the adjacent lot owner could lease, rent or make some other agreement for using the good solar site.

Perhaps it would even be possible to create a community solar farm, with electrical wires leading off to multiple participating houses. Houses around the two milpas, for instance, could draw electricity off solar panels in the milpas. I have no idea if this last idea is feasible or what it would entail since my knowledge of electrical systems isn't very broad, but I expect several people out there in the community could either pronounce it doable or poke gaping holes in the prospect.

One other reason to limit tree cutting that I haven't yet mentioned is that every time we open up the canopy over a lot, we allow access to high winds blowing down through the opening. When Hurricane Earl hit in 2016, the wind swooped down into the opening that homeowners adjacent to me had made in their canopies and blew a big, newly exposed tree down onto my roof smashing six solar panels and crushing part of the roof over my veranda. No one realized this could happen, so there is no blame involved, but we need to learn from the experience.

In areas with intact canopies, the wind can't blow the trees over. This in itself should be

enough to make us pause before getting too happy with a chainsaw.

An additional reason for minimal tree removal is that on steep slopes tree roots may be the only thing keeping the soil from sliding down the mountain. If you have any imagination at all, you can figure out the rest of that scenario. We have a lot of those steep slopes here at BIB, and on the lots with flush toilets, the slope may be even less stable.

Finally, a well-forested lot preserves the beauty that attracted most of us to BIB in the first place. If trees on every lot are removed for solar reasons, it will change the wild and gorgeous character of this precious place. In addition, it makes a lot of sense to have trees shading your house during the hot dry season, so if you don't have to take out trees to accommodate your solar needs, your house will be cooler and more comfortable.

I'm not trying to be an alarmist – just asking for us all to consider the pros and cons, and possible consequences of our decisions before we take action.

I'd be delighted to toss around ideas with anyone wanting to explore these thoughts further. Stop by my earth bag house, Casa de la Tierra, # 7, next time you're in the vicinity, and we'll chew the fat over a soda or beer, and maybe change the world for the better. Who knows!

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NOTE: from the HOA, lots 1 & 2 share solar panels. Lots 40 and 41 have panels installed in the milpa with underground wiring to their respective systems. And, for a while at least and maybe still, Anellos' and Paris's house shared solar panels.



The flag of my new home country of Belize is very unique. It was adopted on September 21, 1981, the day Belize became independent. It consists of a Coat of Arms on a blue field with red stripes at the top and bottom.

British Honduras obtained a coat of arms in 1907, which formed the basis of the badge used on British ensigns. The coat of arms recalls the logging industry that first led to British settlement here. The figures, tools and mahogany tree represent this industry. The national motto, *Sub Umbra Floreo*, meaning "Under the Shade I Flourish", is written in the lower part of the coat of arms.

At the time of independence there was a question of how the new country's flag should look. The leaders wanted a flag that could rally all citizens. A competition was launched inviting citizens to submit designs for a National Flag.

The winning design selected by the Committee was created by two public officers, Everal Waight (Permanent Secretary) and Ines Sanchez (Chief Education Officer).

The flag of Belize is the only country to have humans depicted as a major design element on its national flag. The two men shown holding the coat of arms are a mestizo man and a man of African descent. It is one of the most intricate flag designs in the world.

Submitted by Jenny Lodes

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## Crayola Katydid

The [Crayola Katydid](#), *Moncheca pretiosa*, is named for its striking coloration — notice its blue head, red snout, green body, orange feet, and the yellow on its wings. When a Crayola Katydid flies, the wings flash brilliant turquoise.

You can tell this one is a female by the long ovipositor (for egg-laying) extending out from her rear end. Katydid is a large long-horned grasshopper — this katydid is known to employ chemical defenses which are effective at repelling bird and mammalian predators. This one was photographed at BIB. It's about 3" long.



photo and information by Renie Brady



# Belize Scholarships

## Dispiriting News from the Scholarship Committee...

The Belize Scholarships committee has been hard at work this summer helping our community neighbors meet school expenses. We were able to pay ALL of the tuition fees, which amounted to the tune of \$1026US and get every kid in our neighborhood registered in a Benque school. This was a big relief to parents, because families have to pay the tuition for the upcoming year to have their children accepted as students. We are so grateful to those of you who were able to help!

We'd hoped to be able to advance families enough money at that point, in early summer, to also allow them to buy school supplies for their kids, and avoid having to sell livestock to cover the costs. This unfortunate situation happened in one family last year, much to our dismay.

But donations didn't come in to allow us to do that, so we sent out a couple more requests for donations. A few very generous folks have come forth to help, and we now have \$800US in the kitty to help the families pay for the children's school supplies, uniforms, and books.



The trouble is, we did some number crunching, and the total needed is \$2,820us. We can help them with barely a third of their expenses. Its possible some farmers will have to sell the livestock to send the kids to school, OR, that the livestock won't be sold and a couple of kids in the less affluent families will be left off the bus, demoted to farmhand status. If that happens even one year, it can mean that the student never makes it to school again. There are young people in our neighborhood that this has happened to, horrifying as it may seem.



## What About Composting Toilets?

Renie Brady, Casa de la Tierra, #7

Designed as an eco-community, Better In Belize has been struggling to make the “eco” part of the dream come true since the beginning. Recycling isn’t easy here, although if you toss a banana peel off the veranda it will compost to nothing in short order. As a country, Belize doesn’t quite have it all together yet with regard to recycling. For instance, the best I can figure out to do with plastic bags is to refuse them at the store whenever possible, then if I end up with some at home, to reuse them as many times as possible. I usually have a line of freshly washed, drying plastic bags on my little clothesline.

In the spirit of being a good neighbor in an ecovillage, I installed a composting toilet in my



house when I built it in 2014. One other house at BIB has a composting toilet, but I think all the rest of the houses built here so far (more than 20) have flush toilets. It seems as though most people are putting in septic tanks, drain fields, and flush toilets. If you haven’t built your dream home yet, you are going to run smack-dab into this subject at some point, so I hope you will give some thought to what I have been pondering for the last few years.

In a nutshell, what is going to happen if the majority of people building their new houses decide to install flush toilets? Then flush.

The earth under our houses is mainly limestone in one form or another with a thin top coat of humus. It’s not the deep absorbent mixture we are accustomed to in other parts of the world. And here it rains huge amounts of water, which seeps down through the thin surface layer of the forest floor then flows across the impervious limestone down these steep hills, carrying along with it much of what it passes through. Walking along the roads of BIB past steep hillsides in a rainstorm, I have heard the gurgling of invisible rivulets flowing down the slopes, and then watched those rivulets appear at the edge of the road and empty into the streams that rush down the ditches alongside the road.

Homes being built are required to have septic tanks and drain fields, but in my opinion, the drain fields are not spectacularly efficient because of the limestone substrate directly below them. In other words, if the overflow from the septic tank doesn’t sink in deeply, the rains may flush incompletely aged effluent down the hillsides, contaminating the occasional springs scattered over the hillsides and eventually the reservoir below. So if a septic tank isn’t meticulously kept up, there may be problems.

With that in mind, I’m suggesting that you think seriously about installing a composting toilet in your new house. Here’s some information about mine, which I have been using for nearly four years now.

# How a Composting Toilet Works

While there are many types of composting toilets, all revolve around one basic concept – liquids must be separated from solids. A central composting toilet sends waste to a unit located in the basement or outside. These can use a 1-pint flush system or be fully waterless. The simpler self-contained version is shown below.

## 1 Carbon material lines the composting chamber

Fill the chamber up to the agitator bar with carbon material such as dried sphagnum moss or coconut fiber.



## 2 Liquid and solid wastes separate

Liquid waste drains into a removable container. Some models may use a heated evaporation chamber underneath the compost area to collect and eliminate liquids. Solid waste drops through a manual flush door into the composting chamber.

## 3 Vinegar keeps things fresh

Is the bowl a little dirty? Keep a spray bottle with a mix of water and vinegar nearby to assist particles down and keep the passage clean.

## 4 Solids mix with compost

Turn the spider handle two to three rotations. The agitator bar will adequately mix the solid waste with the existing compost.

## Once it's full ...

## 5 Empty liquids bottle

Unlatch the bowl and tilt up. Cap and remove the liquids bottle for emptying in a safe manner.

## 6 Dispose properly

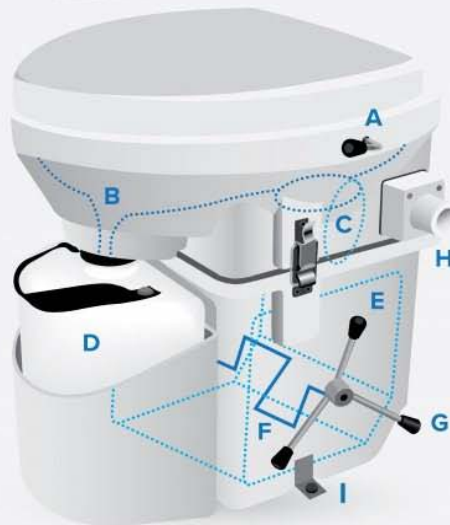
Compost must be disposed of according to state and/or local guidelines. Your state's department of health website is a good place to begin research.

## Assembly parts

- A. Flush handle
- B. Liquids drain
- C. Flush door
- D. Liquids bottle with handle
- E. Compost chamber
- F. Agitator bar
- G. Spider handle
- H. Fan and vent hose (air intake is on opposite side)
- I. Mounting screw

## Does it need power?

Most composting toilets need electricity to power a fan for venting, oftentimes just 12 volts.



## Minimal cleaning

The leftover matter clinging to the sides of the composting chamber helps to kick-start the next round of composting. Cleaning the toilet with chemical solutions inhibits its ability to grow the good bacteria that breaks down waste. Scrubbing with a 1:1 solution of white vinegar and water can freshen it up when needed.

I have a Nature's Head, of 2013 vintage. That's it, shown at left. It separates the liquids from the solids by directing liquid into a plastic jug at the front of the outfit, and solids go into a hole at the rear. When I notice that the level in the semi-translucent liquids container needs changing, I lift it out and empty it out onto the forest floor. One person can fill the container in about a week, and the total amount is about what a tapir would produce at one squat, so I don't feel as though I'm contaminating the forest by just dumping it out into the earth.

My composting toilet used to have a fan which caused the solids to dry rapidly, but I had trouble in this moist climate keeping the fan from rusting out. The fan is the same as those used in desktop computers, and is difficult to get here, so eventually I dispensed with it altogether and while there is still a tube leading from the toilet up to the roof, it mainly serves to waft away any odors, not to dry out the solids.

My composting toilet has a mechanical arm which should be turned every few times you donate a sample, but this takes only a few seconds, and isn't difficult.



The solids (for one person) need to be carried out about once per month, and they get dumped into a little concrete block enclosure and covered with a layer of peat moss to discourage flies from gathering (this works amazingly well, attracting few, if any, visitors), and by the time another load of solids needs to be dumped, a month later, the former load

has, without any help at all, been reduced to the richest, sweet-smelling loam you can imagine. I use it to enrich my landscape plants, house plants, banana trees, and anything else that needs a boost. It's great for starting seedlings.

Not only have I *not* created a sewage problem, but I have also enriched the soil around my house and have beautiful, healthy plants as a result. As a bonus, I don't flush away any water in the process.

Saving water can be extremely important, since during the dry season it may be touch-and-go as to whether you will have enough water gushing from your roof into your cistern to last you through the dry season, especially if you are trying to get landscaping started around your house and want to water it with a hose. Even *without* a flush toilet, one recent year I had to have a tank of water delivered to my cistern.

So I hope you will think about this and research composting toilets when you are planning the construction of your house. I welcome you to come visit my bathroom and check out my system. The bathroom generally has little or no odor (flush toilets aren't always odor-free, either), and my plants are lovely. I never have to buy compost or topsoil, either.

If you find or know of a good composting toilet that would be useful at BIB, please let the rest of the community know by sharing a link to its website. Here's the link to mine, a [Nature's Head](#). Newer models, in the five years since I bought mine, may be improved.

By the way, you might also look into a [Humanure](#) system. I have a little retreat cabin up the road in the deep forest, and there I use a Humanure system which works nicely. The toilet was easily assembled with some plywood, a toilet seat, hinges, a couple of 5 gallon buckets, and some sawdust. The composting area is just as simple.

At least one other BIB homeowner is planning to install a Humanure system at BIB. This, too, will create a welcome supply of enriched composted topsoil, which is expensive and sometimes impossible to buy in Belize. "Topsoil" I bought at an excellent nursery down near Hopkins consisted of heavy dark clay with almost zero organic material in it. I used it to fill a hole.

Please research composting toilets before you finalize your bathroom plans. And whatever you decide to do, happy planning!



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NOTE From Ann McG: Waste treatment - we have a couple of homes, mine included, using the two-stage septic system similar to the Living Machine (tm) that, in the late 1990s, I got an insider's tour of at Findhorn Foundation in

Scotland. <https://theecologist.org/2010/jun/08/living-machine-ecological-approach-poo>

That's just another alternative for those who like to flush.

September 21<sup>st</sup> marks the 37<sup>th</sup> year of Independence in Belize!

<https://www.belizeadventure.ca/september-celebrations-in-belize/>

Click the link above to see the all the happenings!



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## Interesting LINKS:

<https://traveltips.usatoday.com/rainforest-belize-animals-plants-there-57019.html>

<https://www.belizehub.com/42-interesting-facts-about-belize/>

<https://www.belize.com/>

<https://www.cahalpech.com/blog/10-belizean-dishes-every-traveler-to-belize-must-taste/>

<https://belize-travel-blog.chaacreek.com/2016/08/belize-culture/>

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to this newsletter. We hope to hear from more BIB owners with their facts, stories, and anything else you would like to contribute for the next newsletter. Without our contributions we would not have a newsletter.

*BIB newsletter assembled by Gene DeMarco/Owner*