

# Development of Conscience

TR reveals the secrets to success of Atlanta Internet and real estate developer Charles Brewer

By Jennifer Tomasio

**Charles Brewer has a habit** of taking the unconventional approach. The founder of MindSpring who later became a progressive real estate developer has always forged his own road to success driven by a simple desire to do something meaningful and to do it well.

After earning his MBA from Stanford University in 1987, he moved to Atlanta without a job. "That was not a normal thing for a Stanford MBA to do," Brewer admits. He spent the next year and a half researching business investment opportunities before placing a classified ad in the "Business Opportunities Wanted" section of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. His ad received more than 100 responses, "two-thirds of which were certifiably insane, but a number of them were worth checking out and one of them was AudioFAX," Brewer says. He became the chief financial officer and eventually the chief executive officer of AudioFAX, a company that created an interactive voice response system and which Brewer describes as a precursor to the Internet.

In 1993, Brewer left AudioFAX to start his own company, with the ultimate goal of doing something different and better than average. "I'm not materialistically or status-driven, but I am pretty driven to accomplish something that I think is important," Brewer says. As he researched business opportunities, he developed a set of core values and beliefs for his future company, including operating with honesty and integrity, living up to commitments and respecting the individual. "I didn't really care what we were going to do as a company," Brewer admits. "We could have been a cheese manufacturer, and that would have been fine with me."

But as history can attest, cheese production was not in the cards for Brewer. At that time, the Internet existed in the academic world, but was virtually unreachable by the normal desktop computer user. While this inaccessibility frustrated Brewer, it also provided an opportunity out of which MindSpring was born. "There may be no better motivation for an entrepreneurial business venture than the frustration of a consumer," he laughs.

From its beginning, MindSpring made a commitment to superior customer service, "which was not that profound, but very important, and other companies weren't focusing on it," Brewer says. Through word-of-mouth, MindSpring quickly grew to be a major Internet service provider. In 2000, it merged with EarthLink, becoming the second-largest ISP in the world. Soon after the merger, Brewer's continuing desire to create a product that was different and worthwhile drove him to leave the company to seek new challenges.

An outdoor enthusiast and nature-lover, Brewer wanted his next business to benefit the environment. He was introduced to New Urbanism, a movement that advocates against sprawl, and "it hooked me, so

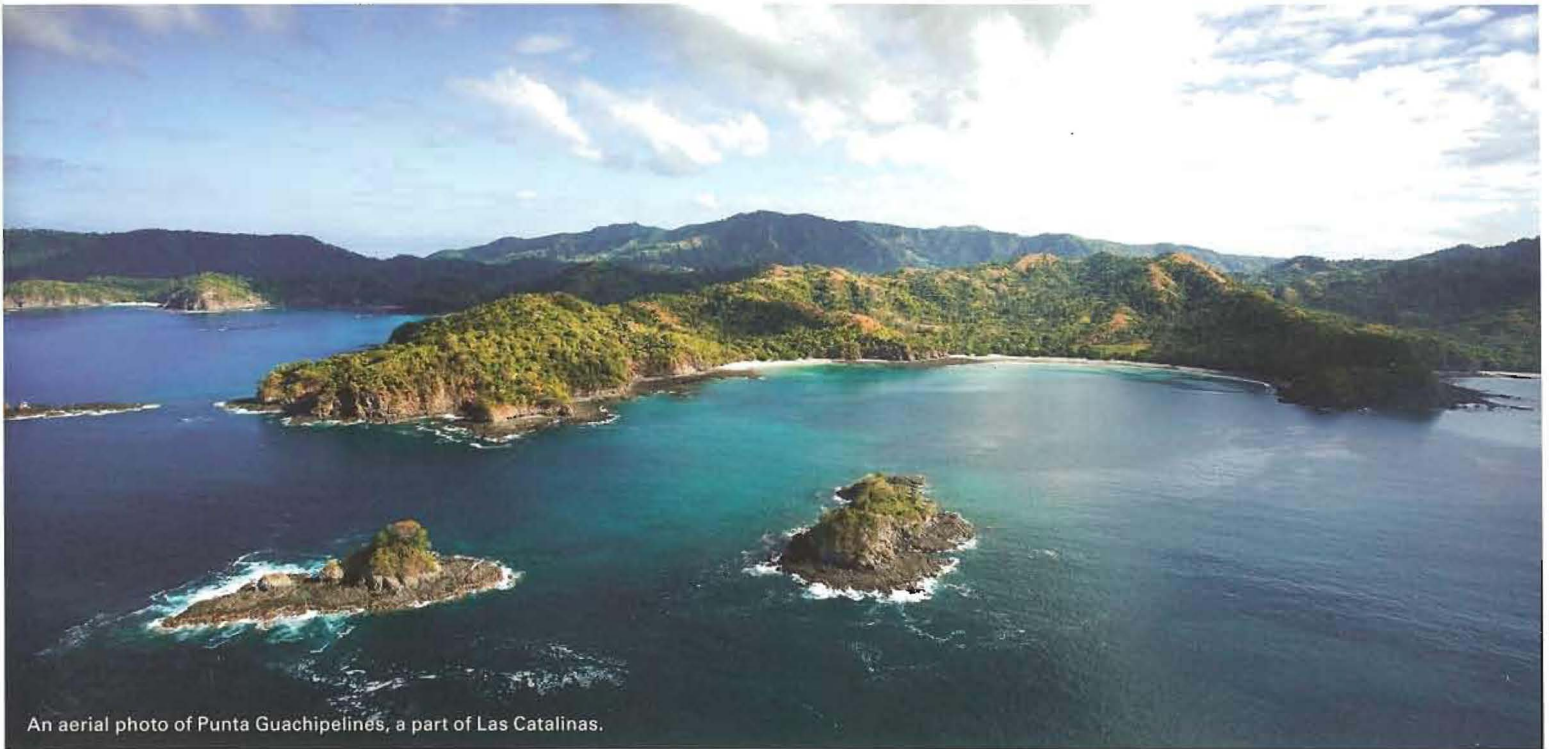
without much of a second thought, I decided to pursue it," Brewer says. In 2001, he and partners Walter Brown and Katharine Kelley formed Green Street Properties to build livable, sustainable urban properties.

Green Street's first and primary project was Glenwood Park in East Atlanta, a mixed-use community of houses, townhomes, parks and retail space. Rather than adopting the standard model of development, which, at the time, was to quickly build a multitude of average-quality houses and buildings, Brewer took the opposite approach. The company built high-quality, one-of-a-kind homes, townhouses and community parks. "We paid attention to the details, and probably overthought things that more experienced developers might have thought were crazy," he says. But once again, Brewer's attention to detail paid off, and, today, Glenwood Park is considered one of the most progressive, eco-friendly and sustainable communities in the United States, earning a slew of awards over the years.

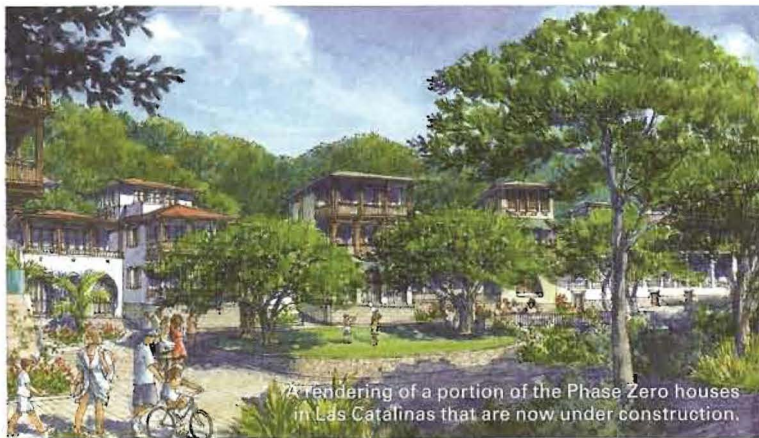
When it was time for his next development, Brewer looked outside Atlanta. "Land in the city was 10 times more expensive than it was just a few years before, and everybody was building thousands of condominiums," he explains. By that time, his family had been vacationing in Seaside, Fla., for a number of years. "Seaside is just so much more appealing than any fancy hotel," Brewer says. Although he loved the beachside town, its cold winter climate left him wanting, and he craved a more exotic local culture and a richer natural environment. Once again, his frustrations sparked the idea for his next venture. At the end of 2008, Brewer withdrew from Green Street to concentrate on his newest project: building an entire town in Costa Rica.

Called Las Catalinas, the town is modeled after the pedestrian hill towns of the Mediterranean. Currently under construction, it is located on a hillside surrounded by acres of pristine, tropical dry forest overlooking crescent-shaped beaches. "I chose Costa Rica for its wonderful nature and wildlife, fun activities, appealing climate, and beautiful land," Brewer explains. "But most of all, because of the great people there." Cars will not typically be allowed in the village, which will consist of a mix of private homes, small inns and retail businesses interlaced with inviting walkways, gardens and plazas.

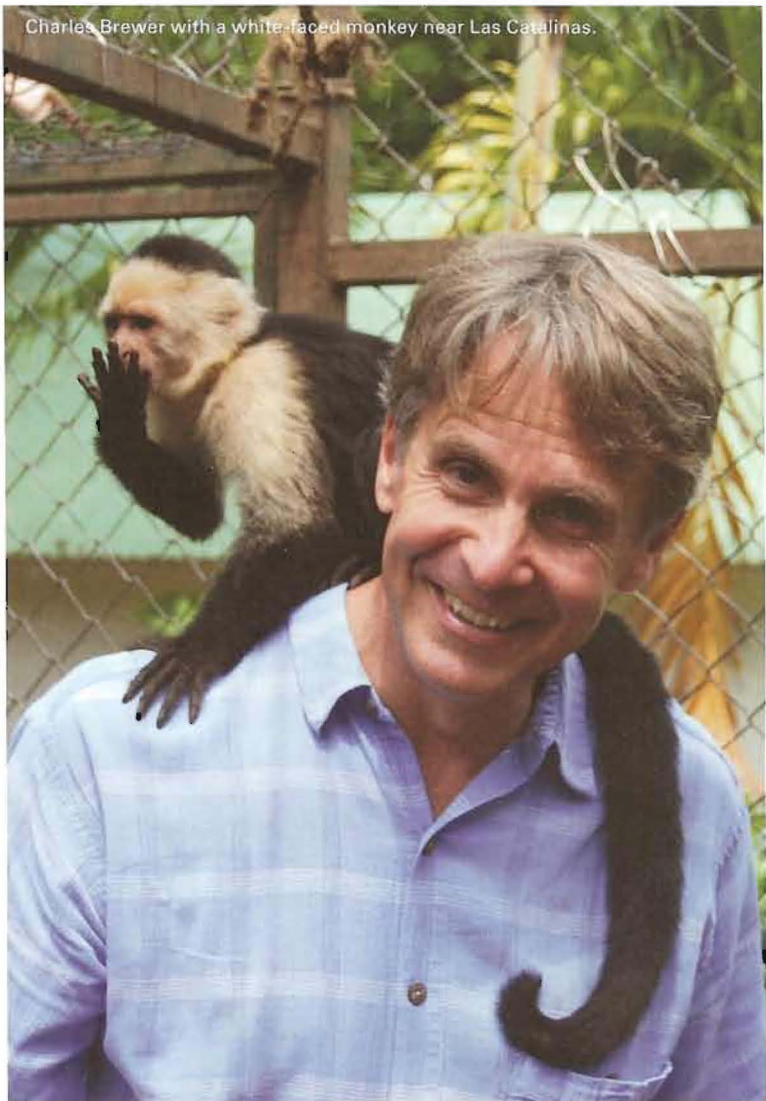
When describing the type of Atlantan who would vacation or buy property in Las Catalinas, Brewer sounds like he's talking about himself. "Educated, successful, curious, outdoor-oriented and not into conspicuous consumption ... those are the kind of people who are really going to like Las Catalinas," he says. One thing is certain about Las Catalinas: With Brewer so involved in the project, it can't help but be a resounding success. ▶◀



An aerial photo of Punta Guachipelines, a part of Las Catalinas.



A rendering of a portion of the Phase Zero houses in Las Catalinas that are now under construction.



Charles Brewer with a white-faced monkey near Las Catalinas.

### Las Catalinas Facts

Location: Guanacaste, Costa Rica

Miles of coastline along Las Catalinas: 2.2

Planned development: Private homes, boutique hotels and inns, restaurants, beachfront parks, outdoor activity outfitters, beach club and extensive trail system

Home costs: \$450,000-\$2.5 million

Activities: Shopping, dining, swimming, snorkeling, body surfing, sailing, paddle boarding, sea kayaking, mountain biking, horseback riding, jogging and hiking

Flights available: Three-and-a-half-hour direct flights daily

Information: Call 866.357.3872 or visit [lascatalinas.cr](http://lascatalinas.cr).