

UT, St. Edward's conduct research in Belize, Costa Rica

AUTUMN RHEA CARPENTER
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The 400-year-old Mayan Plantation in the Central American nation of Belize appears ripe for development.

Indeed, the Belizean government and a Hawaiian company have big plans for the property, including luxury resorts and a research park. Researchers at the University of Texas are participating in plans for the research component.

Last year, a team from UT's IC2 Institute visited Belize to conduct research and to determine the feasibility of the Belizean government's working with Hawaii's Belizea Corp. to develop the Belizea Education Science & Technology Park, known as BEST.

In addition to UT's involvement, professors and students from St. Edward's University have worked on projects in Costa Rica.

Jerry Mitchell, executive director of the International Center of Austin, says that, thanks to passage of the Central America Free Trade Agreement, companies in Texas will benefit from new business opportunities in Belize, Costa Rica and neighboring countries.

"As these growing markets open further to U.S. exports and investment, the research projects undertaken by universities like UT and St. Ed's will be critical to the success of Austin companies in the Central American markets," Mitchell says.

"Our ties with Central America are already strong, but we can strengthen those ties further through educational exchanges, joint research projects and business undertakings," he adds.

David Gibson, associate director of the IC2 Institute, sees those opportunities. The BEST Park will feature:

- An education center. Gibson says Austin and Houston businesspeople within close proximity of Belize want to attend seminars there.

- A health and wellness center and spa. "The local-based botanicals and tropical environment are a natural fit for the wellness center," he says.

- An incubator to support local businesses. "Several business opportunities can be studied in the incubator, including agribusiness, food technology, hotel management and green building," he says.

From IC2's perspective, "the BEST goal is to bring development — both tourism and other industries — into the hands of the local people, in a way that the environment is preserved and enhanced by industry, not destroyed," according to Gibson.

"We are motivated by the assumption that if you have an educated local population who love and respect their environment, the industry that they develop will be smart and sustainable," Gibson says.

A 400- to 1,000-acre project, BEST could expand UT's research efforts to include archaeology, botany and marine biology.

"The potential for a cross-disciplinary research center with a living laboratory is there, if we can bring the right interests together to provide a structure for student exchange and research," he says.

In July, Belizea announced its preparations to start construction of the private Belize Outrigger Resort & Canoe Club. But dirt has yet to be turned on the BEST project.

"The challenge is, how can a small country like Belize with significant assets use them to overcome significant challenges and find a niche to be a viable and sustainable part of the 21st-century global economy," Gibsons says.

A similar challenge faces Costa Rica.

PRIMED FOR DEVELOPMENT



Since 2003, Gary Pletcher, global business chairman in the School of Management and Business at St. Edward's, has led MBA students on several foreign excursions.

"Costa Rica is one of seven countries chosen because it has an emerging economy and stable political atmosphere, and is indicative of how developing nations might plan and implement economic development," Pletcher says.

Three times a year, St. Edward's MBA students tackle projects in Central America. One project involves consultation on the revenue of a nonprofit sea turtle

organization in Talamanca, Costa Rica.

Jamie Luna is a St. Edward's student who participated in the sea turtle project.

"As an MBA with a global business concentration, the experience is invaluable because it provided me with real-life consulting experience," Luna says.

"I was able to do preliminary research, then travel to the customer site and conduct interviews, view the sites and continue with field research. The ... scope and breadth provided several challenging and unique situations that you would not usually experience."

Where Values Count

Grande
COMMUNICATIONS®

VOICE, DATA & INTERNET
BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

512.220.2555 Austin
bizsolutions@grandecom.com

REASON #63

TO LIVE IN STEINER RANCH
THIS IS YOUR VIEW.

HOMES FROM THE \$180s TO ONE MILLION+
WWW.STEINERRANCH.COM

WELCOME CENTER 512-266-5833 • 800-783-4640
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS GOLF CLUB, NOW OPEN

Taylor Woodrow

Worldwide builder and developer of master-planned communities. www.taylorwoodrowhomes.com
©Taylor Woodrow Communities
Information contained within this advertisement is correct at time of publication and subject to change. 0104

JACKSON WALKER L.L.P.
TRADITION AND INNOVATION SINCE 1887

Tradition.
Commitment to quality legal service for over 100 years.

Innovation.
Creative, cost-effective solutions for our clients.

- Intellectual Property
- Business Transactions
- Bankruptcy
- Litigation
- Legislative
- Energy
- Health Care
- Immigration
- Labor & Employment
- Tax & Estate Planning
- Real Estate

www.jw.com
1-866-922-5559

Austin • Dallas • Fort Worth • Houston • Richardson • San Angelo • San Antonio