

# North Georgia News

4 Sections 24 Pages

Hometown Newspaper of Blairsville, Suches and Union County

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Wednesday, October 4, 2023

## 46th Indian Summer Festival debuts this weekend

By Daysha Pandolph  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

SUCHES – Get ready for a weekend that promises family fun, great food, live music, and a variety of vendors all for a worthy cause Oct. 7-8 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., as the Valley Above the Clouds hosts an Indian Summer Festival like no other at the Woody Gap School.

The festival will sport a diverse assortment of 50-60 vendor booths ranging from jewelry to produce, crafts, and much more.

Alongside the booths, there will be plenty of food available to curb guests' hunger such as hamburgers, hot dogs, barbecue and, of course, the famous Indian Summer Festival pies.

To keep things entertaining and showcase local talent, there will be several artists performing live at the festival as well as some students, who are sure to impress the audience with their musical skills.

"I've been looking at some of the applications, and it's amazing how many things are going to be there," commented event organizer Larry Wood, who is one of the original coordinators of the 46-year-old tradition.

Wood noted that there will be ample free parking overseen by the Fire Department, as well as a shuttle for handicapped people provided by event security. Admission is \$5 per adult, \$2 for kids ages 7-12, and free for children 6 and under.

Although the only new attraction of the festival is the typical vendor and music variation, there's plenty of fun to be had all while knowing that the money people spend goes directly toward supporting the smallest public school in Georgia.

"Every dime that we make at this festival goes to that school," Wood said. "We do everything from help them go on field trips to help them buy different stuff for class. That's what it's all about."

"It's going to be a lot of fun for two days. It's a big family get-together for us, and we just want people to come out and enjoy the show for a great cause."

For more information, visit <https://www.suches.com/festivalinfo.htm>.



Always a treat at the Indian Summer Festival is the historical play put on by the young students at Woody Gap School. Photo by Lowell Nicholson/2019

## 2023 UCHS Homecoming Queen set to be crowned on Friday



The 2023 UCHS Homecoming Court consists of Katie Byers, Isabel Galindo, Georgia Patton, Haylie Pattee, Addi Scott, Leah Cox, Sloane Dyer, Jayden Rogers, Lucy Vinez, Abby Barrett, Peyton Grisham, Georgia Hanes, Abigail Gilley, Elli Harper and Payton Murphy. Photo by Todd Forrest

See Page 3A and 2C for Details

## Grants enable electric buses, heavy equipment & more



Union County School Board Members Julia Barnett and Patrick White listen as various department heads provide updates in their Sept. 19 regular meeting. Photo by Shawn Jarrard

By Shawn Jarrard  
North Georgia News  
editor@nganews.com

In their Sept. 19 regular meeting, the members of the Union County Board of Education got an update on the system's new electric school buses that will soon be joining the fleet.

A \$1.5 million federal grant is paying for four electric buses and two charging stations that will accommodate two buses each. The chargers have been installed, and the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC has already put in place a transformer to power the system. See Board of Education, Page 2A

## Plott, Dyer honored with Ag Hall of Fame induction



Local farmer Kenneth Dyer enjoyed the company of family and friends for his induction into the Union County Agricultural Hall of Fame in September. Photo/Submitted

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

Two more of Blairsville's historical farmers have been added to the Union County Agricultural Hall of Fame, ensuring their legacies will live on in perpetuity: Kenneth Dyer and Eugene "Gene" Plott. Dyer and Plott were

recognized at the Union County Farmers Market on Saturday, Sept. 2, with the former represented by the Plott family following his passing in 2005.

According to Historical Society President Mickey Cummings, there were "generations of family" present to support both men – or, in Plott's case, his memory.

The occasion served to commemorate two in a long line of farmers recognized locally for having played prominent roles in the history of the community; Cummings can recall inducting people into the Hall of Fame for at least 10 years now.

"Agriculture is one of the See Ag Hall of Fame, Page 6A

## Dyer talks sorghum heritage in Historical Society lecture

By Brittany Holbrooks  
North Georgia News  
Staff Writer

One of the staples of fall in the mountains is sorghum syrup, the sweet treat that has continued to remain popular in no small part due to the annual Blairsville Sorghum Festival that returns in 2023 the second and third weekends in October.

And on Saturday, Sept. 30, the Union County Historical Society welcomed Tony Dyer to speak on sorghum syrup as part of the organization's ongoing lecture series inside the historic Butt-Mock House.

A member of the Blairsville City Council and expert on sorghum production, Dyer discussed his family's

legacy with caring for the cane crops and their inextricable ties to local history.

Sorghum syrup comes from sorghum cane, which is harvested, stripped of its leaves and seeds, and run through rollers. From there, the juice is strained and cooked in a compartmented pan. Between See Dyer Talks Sorghum, Page 2A



Local sorghum expert Tony Dyer, center, posing with family members after his public lecture hosted by the Union County Historical Society Saturday. Photo by Brittany Holbrooks

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**FOOTBALL**  
**10/6 7:30 PM**  
**vs. Banks Co**

**Pumpkin Carving Contest Oct. 6** See page 6D  
**Annual Coosa Craft Fair Oct. 7** See page 5A  
**Sons of the Pioneers LIVE Oct. 22** See page 6B

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# Board of Education...from Page 1A

chargers.

Transportation Director Kody Owenby told board members he was hoping to receive the new buses and have them ready to roll by the end of October, though all that depends on the delivery schedule, which has changed several times.

"We are going to do training with the Fire Department and EMS when (the buses) do come in, just to go over the basics of battery operation (and what to do) if something was to ever happen on them," Owenby said.

The transportation director also relayed that the district was hauling "about 900 kids in the morning and around 1,400 in the afternoon."

Regarding the new buses, Superintendent John Hill said the system is only getting them "because they are grant-funded and are a savings to our local taxpayers."

"I do not see any time in the near future that we will be all-electric," Hill added. "We would not be getting these buses if they were not free and

grant-funded."

School Facilities Manager Mike Patton said that several construction projects were moving right along, including the Woody Gap Tennis Courts that are nearing completion. The new track at Union County High has completed sitework, with striping and grass the only work remaining.

As for the multimillion-dollar Elementary School building in the works behind the Fine Arts Center, Patton said that, due to favorable weather conditions, the project is about three weeks ahead of schedule moving dirt, meaning everything is still on track for a Fall 2025 open date.

Back in January, the Board Office announced a preliminary cost estimate of \$36,506,900 to build the one-story school. This is a few million shy of the \$39,896,409.60 in projected ESPLOST VI collections approved by voters.

As previously reported, the system plans to utilize \$32,031,380 in ESPLOST VI proceeds, with the remaining \$4,475,520 coming from a drawdown of eligible Advanced Funding monies Union County Schools has applied for with the Georgia Department of Education.

Also in the meeting, CTAE Director Josh Davis said that the Union County College & Career Academy will be receiving a \$100,000 grant from the Tennessee Valley Authority to purchase equipment for students to use in the new Heavy Equipment Pathway.

The TVA grant will help the program buy a skid-steer, a mini-excavator and a forklift to give High School students hands-on training with industry equipment, thereby increasing their employability potential following graduation.

Davis also revealed the creation of a new Government & Public Administration Pathway, which will be taught by School Resource Officers alongside members of the

community with applicable training.

"This is a collaboration between the College & Career Academy, our Union County Schools Police Department, and our eighth-grade and 10th-grade social studies teachers," Davis said, citing an example of staging a "mock crime scene" at UCMS to teach kids in an engaging way.

Added Davis, "The benefits to this are, No. 1, you're introducing students to careers in government and public administration. You're making them aware how all these agencies work together locally, at the state level and at the national level.

"And a huge benefit from the district is we're going to get CTAE funding for currently 404 students, which, from here on out, that increase in state funding will pay for our police force."

To reiterate, the school system gets additional state funding for students enrolled in the CTAE program, resulting at this point in enough extra revenue to cover the cost of salaries and benefits for School Resource Officers, Hill said.

School Police Chief Chad Deyton said he and his staff were "super excited about the opportunity to get to teach these kids this program," adding that he hoped "one day that we can get one of our own (students) to go into the pathway and hire them on (at the School Police Department)."

"This will help the Fire Department, EMS, law (enforcement), all the public safety departments," Deyton said. "Because we all know it's getting harder to find anybody in the public safety fields to fill these spots."

School Board Member Jason McCarter lauded both the CTAE funding aspect and the intent behind the new pathway, saying that it "aligns with the district's values of trying to get kids into public safety and police work – something that's not valued everywhere, unfortunately."

Assistant Superintendent Tiffany Setzer updated the board on the competitive grant awards the schools have received over the previous and current school years: about \$4 million for 2022-23, and roughly \$2.8 million so far in 2023-24, for a running total of more than \$6.8 million.

Retired Assistant Superintendent Dr. Paula Davenport has been helping the Board Office search out and apply for grant funding.

In action items, the board approved a property annexation petition to request that the City of Blairsville accept the new Elementary School property into the city limits.

According to Superintendent Hill, annexation would "save us a little bit of money on utilities but also give the City of Blairsville Police Department jurisdiction on our campus as well."

"It does not cost the School Board any money," Hill said. "It would have to go before the City Council for a vote for approval, and then from there, the commissioner would have 45 days to contest it if he did not approve. This is what we did with the High School property previously."

Two residents attended to offer public comment, starting with Harmony Grove Baptist Church Pastor Scotty Jarrard, who commended the district for coordinating a special event honoring local veterans during a recent football game, which featured voluntary prayer by a student.

Regular public commenter Vince Peterson admonished the board for limiting the number of public speakers at the Aug. 31 school tax increase hearing, noting that public hearings allow residents to be heard and "blow off steam" – an important function he said the board denied.

The Union County Board of Education meets the third Tuesday of each month starting with a work session at 6 p.m. inside the Board Office. The public is encouraged to attend.

## Union County Republican Party September Meeting

The Union County Republican Party held another riveting meeting on Saturday, September 16. Our guest speaker was Mr. Cooper Whitmire, Senior Field Representative at Turning Point Action (TPAction), as well as Georgia GOP's 9th Congressional District Communications Director. TPAction's mission is to embolden the conservative base through grassroots activism and provide voters with the necessary resources to elect true conservative leaders. TPAction has become a force for the conservative movement, hosting rallies across the country on behalf of true pro-America candidates. The organization was founded in 2019



**Cooper Whitmire**

by Charlie Kirk, a well-known conservative activist.

The TPAction website has a legislative scorecard on

their website that every concerned citizen should visit (<https://www.tpaction.com/scorecard>). States and legislators have been ranked based on voting history, with rankings ranging from "Free" to "Tyrannical." Most concerning, Georgia currently falls in the middle, ranked as "Erratic," which should encourage all conservatives and Republicans to "Get out the Vote" on candidates and issues.

We encourage all interested to join us at the next GOP meeting, which will be held on October 21, 2023, at 10:00 am at the Union County Community Center.

*Submitted by Laura Beggs, UCGOP Media Specialist*

## Dyer Talks Sorghum...from Page 1A

compartments, the juice thickens and gradually becomes syrup ready for bottling.

The historical practice can be observed every year during the Sorghum Festival, where the syrup is cooked at the big 16-foot wood-fired pan in Meeks Park.

But for years, people like Nathan Dyer – the father of Tony Dyer – made it their living. Nathan was the third generation in a line of sorghum-pressing Dyers, and according to an article written in the mid-1970s by Bob Harrell, his establishment was one-of-a-kind.

Considered innovative at the time, Nathan "installed a stainless-steel refrigerated cane juice holding tank above his cooker. This means that Nathan can cut cane, put it through his mill and 'hold' it at exactly the correct temperature until he's ready to make sorghum."

It's worth noting that the Dyer set-up was the only one of its kind that Harrell had seen, and the family farm would teach Tony Dyer and his siblings the value of hard, honest work, and they would in turn pass it down to their children.

That said, Tony could remember that by the time he began working on the farm, there were many aspects of sorghum production to learn:

What species of cane offered the best output, and what was popular among other farmers? How many seeds could be harvested and sold to other families looking to get into the business themselves? What other uses did quality cane syrup have?

Historical Society

President Mickey Cummings was there to offer his own memories, adding, "You could make popcorn balls out of that; you could make candy." Cummings compared the lollipops to the milk caramel treat "Sugar Daddy."

"(Those things) would pull the fillings out of your teeth," Cummings said with a laugh before another audience member suggested adding sorghum to baked beans for a unique twist on a favorite dish.

For his part, Dyer remembered his mother making "sweet bread" with the stuff, and it was a staple in other rural American homes for folks who couldn't afford to purchase sugar.

But then, those were just some of the many uses of the syrup. Grain sorghum also made for great silage for cattle, and dove hunters found a use for freshly cut cane as effective lures.

Furthermore, moonshiners used the mash in their less-than-legal products, and one member of the audience quipped that, to this day, some manufacturers buy black sorghum to produce rum.

Audience involvement was one of the many draws to Dyer's lecture. Several people recalled times when the hills of Union County were filled with more sorghum farmers, while others who were younger or from out of town had questions about the process of making or selling sorghum syrup.

As the baby of the family, Kathy Dyer, now Kathy Hood, remembered helping her brothers out on the farm. By the time she was in high school, she was cutting off the cane heads,

having graduated from working in the fields in middle school.

"I got in on the tail end of it because I'm the youngest. I did hate the job," admitted Hood, saying that her favorite aspect of the work was how the sorghum would help her family purchase new school clothes.

For the Dyer family, sorghum production tapered off through the years until fairly recently, when the younger generations picked it up again. Hood actually documented some of the return on Sept. 2, when the family returned to the old farm to press cane again.

"We all enjoyed carefully taking our time in feeding the mill, and I am sure Uncle Vaughn was smiling down as his mill was again jingling as the juices flowed. (We all remember hearing this sound when he was making syrup)," Hood wrote on a Facebook post, adding that her father would also be proud to see the Dyers returning to their roots – or canes, as it were.

Coffee, orange juice, tea and of course fresh biscuits courtesy of the Blairsville Restaurant, along with pitchers of sorghum, were served when the lecture concluded, though many lingered to speak with Dyer and talk among themselves as they dined on a particularly sweet brunch.

Keep an eye out for the Historical Society's other lectures and be sure to stop by the Mountain Life Museum at the 1906 Grapelle Butt-Mock House, which offers free tours that showcase how Appalachian life functioned "back in the day."

# July Term 2023 Grand Jury Indictments, continued

The following individuals were indicted during the July Term 2023 of the Union County Grand Jury, which met again in September:

**Colten Dameon Bohannon**, aka Colten Damien Dwayne Bohannon, possession of methamphetamine; driving while license suspended; possession of drug-related objects; driving on suspended, canceled or revoked registration; no proof of insurance.

**Joseph Bradley York**, terroristic threats; disorderly conduct.

**Mark Nicholas Baisden**, possession of methamphetamine.

**Cheryl Ann**

**Hubert**, possession of methamphetamine.

**Adrian Christopher Breedlove**, two counts sale of marijuana; possession of cocaine; possession of a Schedule I controlled substance; possession of marijuana, less than an ounce.

**Austin Charles Damon**, two counts sale of marijuana; four counts violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act; possession of marijuana with intent to distribute; possession of a controlled substance with intent to distribute; two counts possession of a Schedule I controlled substance with intent to distribute; possession of a Schedule II controlled

substance with intent to distribute; trafficking in ecstasy; two counts trafficking in illegal drugs; possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony; possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.

**Courtney Sirra Collier**, burglary in the first degree; two counts theft by taking; entering an automobile; terroristic threats; false imprisonment; two counts criminal trespass.

**William Joseph Lueckert**, trafficking in illegal drugs; two counts violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act.

**Teresa Robin Lueckert**, trafficking in illegal drugs; violation of Georgia Controlled Substances Act.

**Christopher Lee Setser**, conversion of payments for real property improvements.

**Tyler Reese Derreberry**, three counts aggravated assault; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

**Robert Adam Helton**, three counts aggravated assault; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

**Todd Preston Mckown**, three counts aggravated assault; two counts possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony.

**Christopher Scott Tritt**, 21 counts child molestation; five counts aggravated child molestation; 12 counts incest.

**Tony Randy Guy**, six counts driving under the influence; obstruction of an officer; driving while license suspended; failure to yield right of way.

**Nathan Adam Clayton Shearer**, criminal damage to property in the second degree.

**Walter Ralph McClure**, three counts impersonating an officer.

**Terrie Lynn Aul**, three counts fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; driving under the influence (per se); driving under the influence (less safe) (alcohol); reckless driving.

**Austin James Osborn**, two counts fleeing or attempting to elude a police officer; reckless driving; failure to stop at a stop sign; speeding.

**Johnnie Ray Harper**, two counts simple battery, Family Violence; two counts obstruction of an officer.

The above individuals presumed innocent until found guilty in a court of law.

## Homecoming Court...from Page 1A

By **Todd Forrest**  
North Georgia News  
Sports Editor

One of the 15 members of Union County High School's Homecoming Court will ascend to Panther royalty when reigning Queen Bailey Adams passes her crown to 2023-24 Homecoming Queen on Friday, Oct. 6, ahead of the football team's Region 8-AA opener vs. Banks County.

Headlining the court are five senior representatives:

**Katie Byers**, Isabel Galindo, Georgia Patton, Haylie Pattee and Addi Scott.

**Leah Cox**, Sloane Dyer, Jayden Rogers and Lucy Vinez will represent the junior class.

The sophomore members of the court are Abby Barrett, Peyton Grisham and Georgia Hanes.

And Abigail Gilley, Elli Harper and Payton Murphy will represent the Class of 2027.

Spirit Week kicks off at UCHS this week in honor of

Homecoming. On Thursday, Oct. 5, UCHS will host the Homecoming Parade, a 5:30 p.m. community pep rally at Mike Colwell Memorial Stadium, and the annual Meet the Panthers event rescheduled from August.

The Homecoming festivities Friday begin at 7 p.m. before the week concludes with Saturday night's big dance.

For more Homecoming coverage, see this week's Sports Section.

## Introduction to Color/Honor Guard course completed

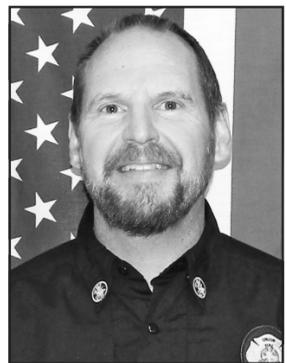
Union County Fire Department would like to congratulate Captain Justin Blanchard and Firefighter Bill Lombardo on their completion of the 32-hour Introduction to Color/Honor Guard course at the Georgia Public Safety Training Center (GPSTC).

This 32-hour course is designed to introduce public safety personnel who are interested in joining a Color/Honor Guard or are new members of a Color/Honor Guard, to the basic protocols of Color/Honor Guard activities. Topics included organization, uniforms, networking, drill movements, flag handling and etiquette along with many more interesting procedures and protocols.

"The fire department is known for its traditions in



**Captain Justin Blanchard** honor, respect, ceremony, and dedication to service. Understanding and providing an honor guard for the department displays and represents these traditions. We are proud of Captain Justin Blanchard and Firefighter Bill Lombardo



**Firefighter Bill Lombardo** for attending the Color/Honor Guard class to further understand and develop this service," said Union County Fire Chief David Dyer.

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# Union County Agricultural Hall of Fame...from Page 1A



**Kenneth Dyer in his younger years as a paratrooper with the U.S. Army.**

most important industries in the county in terms of dollars and cents being brought into the county," Cummings said on why it was important to preserve farming history. "You can see that these people had a real important hand in the development of the county over the years."

Born in 1941 to Worth and Emma Dyer, Kenneth has always had farming in his blood. On the family farm located in Trackrock was where he and his six siblings learned proper work ethic and a healthy respect for the natural world.

Dyer attended Young Harris College for a year before joining the United States Army, where he "had many adventures as a paratrooper." Afterward, in 1975, Dyer acquired land west of Blairsville in a region known colloquially as Young Cane.

Over the span of more than two decades, Dyer made an honest living truck farming, driving down to Fulton County's Farmer Market in Atlanta.

At its peak, Dyer's herd numbered more than 500 head, but due to declining health, Dyer has reduced his stock to about 100 cows and calves. The younger generation now manages the Dyer Family Farm, following in the footsteps of an outstanding man.

"He has impacted my life greatly by teaching me how to do 99% of the things that I know how to do and to always work hard," said Dyer's grandson, Thomas Dyer. "I know that he has left a standing impression on more people than I can think of because of his attitude and work ethic."

Cummings, who served as county ag agent for years and also managed the local Farmers Market, remembered working and interacting with Dyer, and what stuck with him the most was the latter's work ethic.

"He would work – and he learned that from his parents – from daylight until dark. And I'd see him early in the morning and I'd see him late at night," Cummings said. "I know that there would be times that he would maybe get two or three hours of sleep and that's all he would get."

Eugene "Gene" Plott was another legend in his own right. As the oldest son of Oliver and Mabel Plott, he was born on Aug. 22, 1921, and like Dyer, learned to respect the land from

a young age among a farming family.

One of his earliest jobs was being employed by the farm at Young Harris College, where produce sales helped fund the college's needs. That chapter of his life ended with his draft into the United States Army Air Corps and his involvement in the European-African Middle Eastern Campaign in World War II.

Upon returning home, Plott resumed a life of agriculture and began to specialize in cattle, but in 1968, he earned the title of being one of Union County's first recipients of the Dekalb "200" Club for "outstanding corn production."

Considered a leader in the agricultural industry, Plott served on several boards and made a point of helping other farmers. Indeed, it was from Plott that Dyer learned how to care for beef cattle, and Plott was a supervisor of the Blue Ridge Mountain Soil and Water Conservation District.

"He was a leader and his peers put him in that leadership role, so they recognized his importance and his knowledge and his wisdom to have him up there trying to help other people in the community," observed Cummings, saying that Plott "gave of himself" to the best of his ability.

"My Papa Gene left behind quite a legacy for our family and this community," said Leila Nicholson, Plott's granddaughter, whose oldest and youngest brothers maintain a legacy of farming and livestock husbandry.

Nicholson described "Papa Gene" as "the most generous and caring person" she knew, and "he never hesitated to help someone in need." Such grace seemed in contrast to a man of great strength, but that only made him more extraordinary in her eyes.

Plott passed away on Aug. 6, 2005, following a lengthy battle with Parkinson's



**Historical Society President Mickey Cummings and Commissioner Lamar Paris, right, joined the family of the late Gene Plott to honor the longtime local farmer by inducting him into the Ag Hall of Fame last month.**

Disease. He had three children – Edward, Nancy and Gerald – and nine grandchildren. His wife, Mildred McClure Plott, would follow him Home in 2007.

"On occasion, folks will remind me of what an impact he had on this community with his knowledge of farming and animals, as well as his quiet generosity," Nicholson said. "Farming wasn't his job; it was his way of life."

There's no doubt that both Dyer and Plott played an integral role in the development of Union County over the years, and they also accomplished much on a smaller scale; Cummings can "show you people throughout this county that they had a direct influence upon their careers, their education, all kinds of things in their lives."

But in the end, the whole point of recognizing them is greater than the farmers

themselves. "It's important that we realize how important agriculture is in the county,"

Cummings said. "And that's why we started this program years ago, so people could gain an understanding of how important it is to remember those people who had such a profound impact upon agriculture."



**Union county farmer Gene Plott showing off his award-winning corn. Plott passed away in 2005.**

## The Mountain Coin Club monthly meeting



Member of both the American Numismatic Association (ANA) and Georgia Numismatic Association (GNA)

The Mountain Coin Club monthly meeting will take place Tuesday, October 10th.

Mountain Coin Club meets the second Tuesday of each month at 6 p.m. in the Conference Center of North Georgia Technical College.

The educational program conducted this month is about the history of the U.S. 3-cent coin, "Who Ordered That?" presented by Jeffrey S. Visitors are always wel-

come and have a chance to learn about their old coins and currency's value. They can learn the value of the gold and silver coins, ancient and modern, domestic and foreign.

There will be items presented by individual members.

Visitors are welcome to purchase items but are not able to place items for auction until they become a member.

There are also three door prizes for those attending.



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