

Daily Pilot

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Enjoying that SoCal life



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

A RUNNER STRIDES along the Main Beach boardwalk as people gather on the sand and the sun sets over the Pacific in Laguna Beach.

Project doubts allayed in Costa Mesa

After trip to Sacramento, city leaders acquiesce to state plan for emergency operations center at former Fairview Center.

BY SARA CARDINE

After months of fighting over the fate of the 114-acre Fairview Developmental Center in Costa Mesa — where state officials plan to redevelop a portion of land into a regional emergency operations center — city officials are hanging up their gloves.

Mayor John Stephens delivered the news in a regular council meeting Tuesday, saying he and City Manager Lori Ann Farrell Harrison traveled to Sacramento Monday with state Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris to meet with state department heads.

The trio toured a larger state-wide emergency command center in the nearby city of Mather, which serves as a hub of communication and coordination during disasters and other crises, to understand its layout and function.

"We had a pitchbook in hand, and the city manager and I did our best to try and convince the powers that be to relocate the [proposed] emergency services center someplace else," Stephens said Tuesday.

"That is not going to happen. They are very strident that the emergency operations center will be at Fairview Development Center."

Costa Mesa leaders penned letters objecting to the redevelopment of a 15-acre portion of the property, saying the proposed facility would not be compatible with the up to 2,300 residential units envisioned for the state-owned site.

The state is decommissioning the grounds of what served for decades as a hospital for adults with developmental disabilities and has allocated \$3.5 million to the city to rezone the area for residential use. Once that's been done, state officials plan to develop the property in accordance with the new code.

What happens next and how Fairview will fit into the city's future housing plans will be up for discussion Tuesday at 5 p.m., when the City Council hosts a

See **Project**, page A2

OC Coastkeeper teams with state to fund program set to buoy beach accessibility

BY LILLY NGUYEN

OC Coastkeeper and the California State Coastal Conservancy announced this week the Beach and Coast Accessibility Program, which aims to fund improvements that would increase access to the coast and recreation for individuals with disabilities.

Officials at the nonprofit confirmed Thursday the grant program will provide up to \$30,000 to local jurisdictions, nonprofits and indigenous groups for the acquisition of accessibility equipment. That would include items such as beach wheelchairs, walkers, mats and other equipment.

Applications are not yet open, but both groups will be taking them statewide. The program is also expected to cover maintenance and upkeep costs for up to five years.

"Here in Orange County, we have some of the most beautiful beaches in the state. It's important to us that everyone who visits our beautiful coastline can

See **Beach**, page A2



File Photo

ADAPTIVE SURFER Kumaka Jensen, 14, of Huntington Beach rolls out on the first Mobi-Mat in Huntington Beach in 2021. OC Coastkeeper and the California State Coastal Conservancy's Beach and Coast Accessibility Program aims to help fund items such as Mobi-Mats and beach wheelchairs to aid mobility on beaches.

DAILY PILOT GIRLS' VOLLEYBALL DREAM TEAM

Sparks flew for Huntington Beach as Dani ran the show

BY ANDREW TURNER

The beginnings of Dani Sparks' girls' volleyball career at Huntington Beach High allowed her to fly under the radar, to an extent.

Not long before, her older sister, Lindsey, had starred at Edison, helping the Chargers win a state title as a junior in 2016 before going on to play beach volleyball at UCLA.

Needless to say, the younger Sparks was inspired but equally eager to make a name for herself. A freshman season canceled due to the coronavirus pandemic delayed the unfolding of her story.

Once back on the court, with a number of girls she grew up with, Sparks would begin stacking accomplishments right away. In her sophomore year, the Oilers finished as the runner-up to Aliso Niguel for the CIF Southern Section Division 2 championship.

In those early years, Huntington Beach coach Craig Pazanti would rave that it felt like he had three liberos on the floor at once when Sparks shared the court with Tori Hagan and Olivia Foye.

Back-row defense continued to be a strength of the Oilers

"I think that's kind of what she brought to the table... It's like a great point guard or a great quarterback, you make people around you better."

— Huntington Beach coach Craig Pazanti

throughout Sparks' tenure with the program, which concluded this year with an impressive post-season showing against competition in the top division.

Sparks, who is the Daily Pilot Girls' Volleyball Dream Team Player of the Year, guided the Oilers to within one match of the Division 1 section final.

Huntington Beach went 29-9 overall and 5-1 in claiming the Surf League championship outright. The Oilers wound up as the only team to push Mater Dei

See **Sparks**, page A3



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

HUNTINGTON BEACH setter Dani Sparks is the Daily Pilot Girls' Volleyball Dream Team Player of the Year for 2023. She shared Surf League MVP honors with Oilers outside hitter Haylee LaFontaine.

AROUND TOWN

Orangewood Children Center sets goal of 1,000 bicycles

TZone OC Fitness & Pilates in Costa Mesa is helping the Orangewood Children Center mark its 21st year hosting the Orangewood Bike Drive.

The organization is asking the public to help it reach its goal of 1,000 bikes through donations of new bikes or funds that can be used to purchase them.

Please drop off new bicycles by Dec. 21 at TZone OC, 333 E. 17th St. in Costa Mesa. For more information, call (949) 689-0925.

Newport Beach accepting donations for Operation Christmas

The city of Newport Beach is continuing its partnership, ongoing since 2005, with Operation Christmas. Last year's holiday season saw 2,000 gifts distributed from Newport Beach donation boxes alone. Drop boxes will now be out at the Civic Center, the Police Department, OASIS Senior Center, community centers and all library branches through Dec. 20 at 5:30 p.m. Residents are being asked to donate unwrapped toys, sporting equipment and DVDs during regular business hours.

"Many military families are financially struggling this year," said Brad White, founder of Operation Christmas. The gifts will be distributed to families of active duty and reserve National Guard members and the U.S. Space Force, White said.

Sign-ups solicited for Newport Beach Rose Parade float

Newport Beach will have a float in the upcoming Rose Parade.



OWNER SEAN CANOVA at Training Zone Fitness & Pilates in Costa Mesa. This year TZone is collecting bicycle donations on behalf of Orangewood Children Center through Dec. 21.

Susan Hoffman

"Jingle on the Waves" is the longest float entry in the parade's history and is dedicated to the Newport Beach Christmas Boat Parade as much as it is also a dedication to the Balboa Fun Zone's Ferris wheel and the Balboa Pavilion.

Volunteers as young as 13 are being asked to participate in contributing to the float in shifts that span around eight hours. Volunteer decorators are being asked to sign a waiver and dress appropriately for the work, which involves glue and paint.

Volunteers will need to check in at the Phoenix Decorating Co. warehouse at 5400 N. Irwindale Ave.

Available volunteer dates are Dec. 9, 16, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31. Sign up at airtable.com/appbc54x6ikyah7YIIshrjXZzv2pqUx1Zzw.

North Beach Cottage reservations reopen

The Crystal Cove Conservancy announced Thursday it would reopen reservations for some of the North Beach cottages on Monday at 8 a.m. The reservation window will allow for four weeks of reservations starting on Dec. 22. Cottages can only be reserved through ReserveCalifornia.com. More information on the cottages is available at crystalcove.org/beachcottages/cottages.

Huntington Beach resident honored as Veteran of the Year

Assemblywoman Diane Dixon recently honored Sgt. Michael Seeley as the veteran of the year for the 72nd Assembly District.

Seeley is a Huntington Beach resident and served in the U.S. Marine Corps for almost three decades. Seeley, through his service, received two Purple Hearts, a National Defense Medal and a Vietnam Service Medal.

"As the proud daughter of a Purple Heart World War II US Army veteran, and in support of the large veteran population living in my Assembly District, I am honored to join with the Veterans Resource Center in bringing a Veterans Resource Fair to my constituents this month," said Dixon in a statement Thursday. "During the event, I had the distinct pleasure of honoring Sgt. Michael Seeley as our 72nd Assembly District 2023 Veteran of the Year. Congratulations and thank you for your brave service and sacrifice to America."

OCC Theater hosts 'holiday melodrama'

This weekend the Orange Coast College Repertory Theatre Company will again stage "The Toy Master General," which opened last Friday. It's both a drama and an ice cream social.

Adults and children are invited to join and sing along to holiday songs while enjoying a free ice cream treat at performances at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday and with 2:30 p.m. matinees on Saturday and Sunday.

Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children under 12. Tickets can be purchased at occtickets.universitytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=3111. Parking is free in Lot C, and visits from Santa will join every performance.

— From staff reports

Marine pleads guilty in Planned Parenthood firebombing

BY PAUL ANDERSON

A Camp Pendleton Marine pleaded guilty to federal charges last week for his role in a firebombing attack on a Planned Parenthood clinic in Costa Mesa.

Chance Brannon, 23, of San Juan Capistrano, is scheduled to be sentenced April 15.

Co-defendants Xavier Batten, 21, of Brooksville, Fla., and Tibet Ergul, 21, of Irvine, are still awaiting trial. Batten was due in court Dec. 6 for a bond hearing.

Brannon and Ergul pleaded not guilty to federal charges at their arraignment in July. A trial is scheduled in March.

Ergul and Brannon allegedly ignited and threw a Molotov cocktail at the clinic entrance at 1520 Nutmeg Place during the early morning hours of March 13, 2022, according to an affidavit from FBI Special Agent Jennifer Hirsch, who added that the pair returned to the clinic about two hours later.

Security video captured the attack.

"This attack was not ran-

dom," U.S. Atty. Martin Estrada said earlier. "It was a planned and concerted effort to attack the clinic on account of the services it provided — namely reproductive health services. There were repeated discussions prior to the attack and Batten instructed Brannon on how to construct a Molotov cocktail."

The defendants "boasted about what they had done" in messages to each other after the attack, Estrada said.

All three defendants were charged with one count of conspiracy and one count of malicious destruction of property by fire and explosion. Brannon and Ergul were both also charged with one count of possession of an unregistered destructive device and one misdemeanor count of intentional damage to a reproductive health services facility, which is a violation of the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, prosecutors said.

The conspiracy and malicious destruction charges each carry a sentence of five to 20 years in federal

prison, prosecutors said. The charge of possession of an unregistered destructive device is punishable by up to 10 years in federal prison. The intentional damage to a reproductive health facility charge carries a maximum sentence of one year in federal prison.

As for the alleged motive for the attack, Estrada said, "Our investigation is ongoing and we're learning more all of the time ... But there is strong evidence of animus toward women."

Hirsch said the clinic "was forced to close and cancel dozens of appointments," noting that clinic employees told investigators about 30 appointments had to be rescheduled.

A day after the attack, Ergul "texted an acquaintance, taking credit for the fire and noting that he wished he 'could've recorded the combustion,'" Hirsch said.

Ergul sent a photograph to an "acquaintance" showing "his gloved hand holding the Molotov cocktail from inside Brannon's car," according to Hirsch.

Surveillance video from

the clinic shows the two approach the building about 12:55 a.m., Hirsch said. They wore hooded sweatshirts and masks, Hirsch said.

The estimated damage to the building was about \$1,050, Hirsch said.

In January, the FBI offered a reward of up to \$25,000 for information leading to an arrest of suspects, prompting a call from a witness who called the FBI in April, Hirsch said. The witness, who was a friend of the suspects in high school, said Ergul sent text messages admitting his involvement in the bombing, according to Hirsch.

She said the text message read, "Boom (fire emoji)" at "1500 Blk nutmeg plaza... Costa Mesa health center/Planned Parenthood clinic."

The FBI agent also said that Ergul was arrested Oct. 21, 2022, in Tempe, Ariz., on suspicion of aggravated assault, unlawful imprisonment and

criminal damage after "punching his roommate in the nose and breaking the doorknob so she could not

leave their shared apartment."

Brannon's attorney, Kate Corrigan, while at her client's initial appearance in court in June, told U.S. District Judge Douglas McCormick she found it "a little ironic" that officials were citing Brannon's military training as a reason for considering him as "dangerous." She indicated she specialized as a Farsi language expert.

Corrigan said her client would surrender his passport, could be monitored with a GPS device and had strong local family ties with the means to pay for his bond. Brannon has no prior criminal history, she added.

Assistant U.S. Atty. Kathrynne Seiden told McCormick at the June hearing that Brannon crossed over into Mexico on foot without notifying Camp Pendleton officials as required. She also said his biological father owns an online betting company in Costa Rica that has been investigated for money laundering.

Corrigan said Brannon's parents divorced "two dec-

ades ago" and that his father "abandoned the family years ago ... and there's no indication I've heard there's any communication or financial ties."

Seiden said that during a search agents seized silencers, a short-barrel rifle and weapons that are banned.

The agents also found "neo-Nazi" paraphernalia in his room as well as a drawing of a service member shooting someone who is Jewish holding money, and the drawing was captioned, "Thank you for keeping America pure," Seiden said.

There were also writings in his room that included a declaration of "an unbelievable desire to murder journalists," Seiden alleged.

Corrigan noted that the government was alleging her client possessed the material but did not create it. She also said it was irrelevant to the alleged crime. "I can see if it was a crime against a synagogue," Corrigan said.

dailypilot@latimes.com
Twitter: @TheDailyPilot

BEACH

Continued from page A1

have a meaningful experience there," Garry Brown, president and founder of OC Coastkeeper, said in a statement. "We hope this grant can help people with limited mobility explore Orange County and all California beaches in new and exciting ways."

Funding comes from the California State Coastal Conservancy, which approved the disbursement of \$250,000 for the program at the end of November. The program is an expansion of 2019 efforts to provide beach wheelchairs at the coast.

OC Coastkeeper spokesman Matt Sylvester said talks to establish the program largely took place during the summer and developed naturally as the state agency has previously given the nonprofit grants and was familiar with the organization's interest in coastal access and equity.

"[The California State Coastal Conservancy] already have some sort of coast accessibility programming, but it's through their systems and contacts. It's the difference of getting

funds between the state and us, as a nonprofit," Sylvester said. "They're looking to get those funds out to people in all different areas and communities and tapped into us because, although we're in Orange County, we know people all across the state. It made sense for the funding to come to us and, for us, to help develop the request for proposals [for the program]."

Sylvester noted that some beaches in Orange County can sometimes present challenges, whereas others, like Huntington State Beach, are wide open and easier to access.

"Some are only accessible by steps. There's such a varying degree, but what this grant program hopes to do is help local agencies and organizations find solutions that work for them. For some people, that might be beach wheelchairs. Others, it might be mats or walkers. We've seen some kayaks that might be more friendly to those with challenged mobility," Sylvester said. "It's not just about getting onto the sand but about recreating too."

lilly.nguyen@latimes.com
Twitter: @lilibirds

PROJECT

Continued from page A1

study session on that and other housing-related topics.

Stephens elaborated on his trip to Sacramento in a phone interview Thursday, saying any concerns he had about ongoing, disruptive activity happening at the proposed emergency center were allayed by the visit.

"My concern was there would be, in times of emergency, helicopters coming in and out or trucks going back and from the warehouse," he said. "[But] It's like a command center for when there's an emergency. You have an office complex, where people go in and talk and work on their computers — I'd call it an information-gathering and decision-making hub."

"My temperature went way down when I understood what the reality of the functioning of the emergency operations center will be."

The visit also introduced city leaders to the various state departments and officials that would be developing and potentially



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

HOW FAIRVIEW Developmental Center will fit into the city's future will be up for discussion Tuesday when the City Council hosts a study session on housing-related topics.

working at the center once it's up and running, which could happen sometime in 2027.

Meanwhile, Costa Mesa officials have begun drafting a Fairview Developmental Center Specific Plan that will set development standards for any

future build-out of the property.

As for the actual construction of residential units, that's likely still several years out. But, Stephens said, it's a start.

"It's a very positive thing, it's just going to take a long time to figure out," he said

of Costa Mesa's partnership with the state over what to do with the remaining 90-plus acres of land. "It's a unique opportunity for a city that is otherwise built out."

sara.cardine@latimes.com
Twitter: @SaraCardine

SPARKS

Continued from page A1

(43-2) — the CIF Division 1 and Open Division state champion — to a fifth set this season.

“Each year, we got a little bit better,” Sparks said. “Even though we didn’t finish top of the top, we still got so much better than when we started. Honestly, it’s not disappointing where we ended, because I think we ended on a good game. We took Mater Dei to five, which was a really big deal for us, and so I don’t have any regrets.”

Sparks flourished as a distributor for a core group of hitters that included senior outside hitter Haylee LaFontaine, with whom she shared Surf League MVP honors and will be heading to Cal Poly to join the beach volleyball program. Junior opposite Taylor Ponchak, sophomore outside hitter Addison Williams and senior middle blocker Kylie Leopard were also formidable options.

Huntington Beach coach Craig Pazanti praised Sparks for her “volleyball IQ.”

“It’s not as demanding on a coach when you have, basically, an extension of you on the floor,” Pazanti said. “I think that’s kind of what she brought to the table...just her understanding of the game and understanding who can do what. That’s, to me, what makes a great setter. It’s like a great point guard or a great quarterback, you make people around you better.”

“She did that. She did it time and time again, exceeded all expectations, to be honest. I knew coming in as a freshman that she was going to be really good.”

During her senior season, Sparks provided 1,483 assists, 246 digs and 36 service aces. Although Sparks was known as a leader by example, she would use her voice as needed, helping hitters by calling out open spots to target as they went up for her sets.



Don Leach | Staff Photographer

HAYLEE LAFONTAINE (11) of Huntington Beach kills a ball past the block of Santa Margarita’s Brooklyn Kostoff (3) on Sept. 12.

Sparks learned leadership qualities from the mentorship of Lillian Perkins, Sydney Murrey and Cali Haaf during her first prep season of indoor volleyball.

“Although they graduated really early and we only knew them for a year, they really made an impact in just how much we can support each other as a team,” Sparks said. “Not only like volleyball skill. It didn’t really matter how good they were. It was more about what they showed us what we should do for each other.”

COACH OF THE YEAR
Craig Pazanti

Huntington Beach
Huntington Beach set out to take on top-tier competition, and once there, it acclimated itself quite well. The Oilers qualified for the Division 1 playoffs, a designation reserved for the top eight teams in the CIF Southern Section. At season’s end, the Oilers were ranked second in Orange County and No. 8 in the state by MaxPreps.com. Huntington Beach

went 3-2 in postseason play, its losses coming on the road to the top two teams in the state. Those defeats came at the hands of Manhattan Beach Mira Costa in the final round of pool play in the section playoffs and to Mater Dei in the CIF State Southern California Regional Open Division semifinals.

FIRST TEAM

Jade Auger
OH | Ocean View | Sr.
Ocean View (11-10) showed an indomitable will to extend points over the past two seasons, both of which saw the Seahawks stake their claim to the Golden West League title. After tying atop the league standings with Westminster last year, the Seahawks earned a five-set win on their home floor against the rival Lions to win the league title outright. The go-to option for both of those squads, Auger earned Golden West League MVP. She compiled 297 kills, 204 digs and 69 aces in her swansong with the Seahawks.

Haylee LaFontaine
OH | Huntington Beach | Sr.

From the first chance she got, LaFontaine factored heavily into her team’s fortunes. Denied a freshman season due to the coronavirus pandemic, LaFontaine led the Oilers to the Division 2 final as a sophomore. The paths of LaFontaine and Sparks appear intertwined. They shared Surf League MVP honors, and the All-CIF Division 1 honorees signed with Cal Poly for beach volleyball. A former Dream Team Player of the Year, LaFontaine produced 536 kills, 201 digs, 49 aces and 39 blocks.

Kylie Leopard
MB | Huntington Beach | Sr.

Huntington Beach had potent options on the pins, but Leopard’s emergence gave the Oilers another dimension to show teams while competing against the best teams in the sport. The Cal Poly Pomona commit became an emotional leader in postseason play. She had 11 kills and 4½



File Photo

HUNTINGTON BEACH coach Craig Pazanti, seen against Newport Harbor, led the Oilers to the Surf League title.



James Carbone

OCEAN VIEW'S Jade Auger (28) spikes the ball against Westminster in a Golden West League match on Oct. 11.

blocks in a season-ending five-set defeat to Mater Dei. It marked the only time that Mater Dei, which won the Division 1 section title and the Open Division state championship, was taken to a fifth set. Leopard had 243 kills and 90 total blocks.

Korynn Mayo
OH | Marina | Fr.

Following its run to the CIF Division 5 final last season, Marina (17-13) regrouped with a number of new faces. Ryan Parker replaced Jake Nuneviller as head coach, while Mayo became the focal point for the Vikings to play through. The Wave League first-team selection had 23 kills and 13 digs against Laguna Beach in a match that decided the league’s second automatic playoff berth. For an encore, she pounded out 31 kills on

.571 hitting to go with 15 digs and three aces in a first-round win over Glendora in the Division 3 playoffs.

Molly McCluskey
OPP | Edison | Sr.

As a left-handed pin hitter, McCluskey provided a look not often seen by the opposition. When coupled with the versatility and vision to execute tips behind strong blockers, the UC San Diego commit became quite a force to be reckoned with. A Surf League first-team and All-CIF selection, McCluskey guided Edison (16-13) to the Division 2 quarterfinals, one year removed from a Division 3 semifinals appearance. McCluskey finished with 333 kills, 123 digs, 60 blocks and 30 aces.

See **Sparks**, page A4

THE DAILY COMMUTER PUZZLE

By Jacqueline E. Mathews

ACROSS

- 1 Mr. Linkletter
- 4 Fills a suitcase
- 9 Sign of healing
- 13 Flying insects
- 15 By yourself
- 16 Marching band instrument
- 17 Clothing fastener
- 18 Scrooge, for one
- 19 Lyft competitor
- 20 Louis Armstrong or Al Hirt
- 22 Football maneuver
- 23 Reddish horse
- 24 Hubbub
- 26 Spinets
- 29 Software learning aid
- 34 Fully anesthetized
- 35 Clamps
- 36 Actress McClanahan
- 37 Not indecent
- 38 Appointed
- 39 Book leaf
- 40 Beer barrel
- 41 Melts together
- 42 Lugged around
- 43 Not as wobbly
- 45 Purebred evidence
- 46 Final-yr. students
- 47 Stuffed
- 48 Possesses
- 51 Postoperative treatment
- 56 Hawaiian island
- 57 Gullible
- 58 Skelton & Barber
- 60 Places to stay
- 61 Heals
- 62 Cooking herb
- 63 SAT, for one
- 64 Put forth effort
- 65 Indigo or

1	2	3		4	5	6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13			14		15						16		
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	20				21						22		
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26	27	28					29	30			31	32	33
34					35						36		
37					38						39		
40					41						42		
43			44							45			
			46					47					
48	49	50			51	52	53				54	55	
56					57						58		59
60					61						62		
63					64							65	

SUDOKU

By the Mephram Group

Complete the grid so each row, column and 3-by-3 box (in bold borders) contains every digit, 1 to 9. For strategies on how to solve Sudoku, visit sudoku.org.uk.

		7						
		6		1	5	8	2	
1								9
			8					5
8		1	4	6				3
	3			9				
	4							9
		3	5	8		1		
		8				3		

For answers to the crossword and Sudoku puzzles, see page A4.

- henna
- DOWN**
- 1 Stomach muscles
- 2 Torn in two
- 3 Drop of sorrow
- 4 South American plains
- 5 Martian, for one
- 6 Price
- 7 ACL tear site
- 8 Notched
- 9 Daze
- 10 Nation with the most doctors per capita
- 11 Fortas & Vigoda
- 12 Social spots
- 14 Rejected with disdain
- 21 Secure with an

- anchor
- 25 Uno y uno
- 26 Disks on ice
- 27 Stream
- 28 Wise saying
- 29 Hourglass
- 30 _ up; runs out of
- 31 Raging
- 32 Boring tool
- 33 Populous English city
- 35 Flower holder
- 38 Pest
- 39 Fast-growing willows
- 41 Residential monogram
- 42 Powder
- 44 Aid
- 45 Most untainted
- 47 Frenzy
- 48 Leave out
- 49 Subside
- 50 Mother Superior’s flock
- 52 Artificial
- 53 Grow fatigued
- 54 Text message status
- 55 On pins and needles
- 59 Espy
- Tribune Media Services

60 SEASONS South Coast Repertory

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Directed by **Hisa Takakuwa**
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