

Eastern Shore POST

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COVID-19 Delta Variant Identified on Eastern Shore, Cases Rise

By Carol Vaughn

The Eastern Shore for the past six weeks has been averaging around one case per day of COVID-19, according to a health department official.

The health department is closely monitoring an increase in cases seen over the past four days, said Jon Richardson, chief operating officer of the Eastern Shore Health District, on Monday.

As of Wednesday, the average had risen to five new cases per day.

The delta variant of the virus has been identified among cases on the Eastern Shore, which Richardson said is not surprising.

"The vaccines are still measuring pretty effective against this variant, which is good news. Given its higher level of transmissivity, the main concern would be amongst the unvaccinat-

ed," he said in an email.

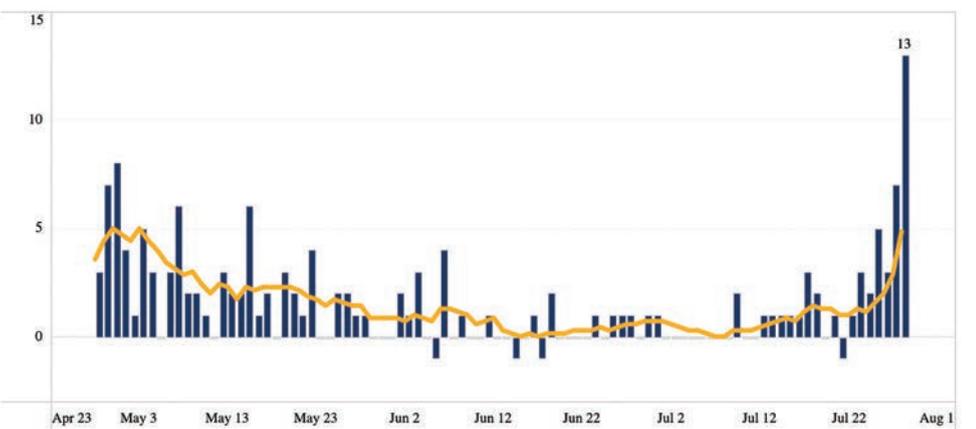
There currently are four variants of concern in the United States. All four have been reported on the Eastern Shore.

The delta variant is now the most common variant in the United States. It is thought to be 40% to 60% more transmissible than the alpha variant, which itself is estimated to spread about 50% more easily than previous variants.

As of Friday, July 23, the Eastern Shore had reported 13 cases of the alpha variant; two of the beta variant; one of the gamma variant; and three of the delta variant.

A variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 is considered to be concerning when it increases the risk to human health, for example by spreading more easily or causing more severe illness, among other factors.

COVID-19 Cases, Accomack and Northampton Counties April 23 - July 23, 2021



Source: Virginia Department of Health

New COVID-19 cases in Accomack have been increasing for the past 30 days, according to the Virginia Department of Health. The number of new cases in Northampton has been decreasing.

Between June 20 and July 24, the Eastern Shore reported 29 new cases

and one death.

Of the total cases, seven were people 19 or under; 10 were age 20-39; seven were age 40-59; four were age 60-79; and one was a person age 80 or over.

Four of the cases involved Black in-

(Continued on Page 4)

Eastville Inn Tenants Face Uncertain Future as County Moves to Month-to-Month Lease

By Stefanie Jackson

Louise Oliver, who runs a catering business out of the historic Eastville Inn owned by Northampton County, was surprised when she learned that the county was considering offering the lease to someone else to run a different type of business.

She was even more surprised that she first learned of the news from not a county official but the minutes of an Eastville Town Council meeting.

"My initial reaction when reading the Eastville Town Council minutes ... was one of shock and disappointment that I should be treated in such an unprofessional manner ..." Oliver said.

"As an excellent tenant of the Eastville Inn and successful business owner I would have expected to be treated with a modicum of respect."

Oliver has run her catering and weekly meal service, Kitchen Sync, out of the first floor of the Eastville Inn for the last six years, with the help of three regular part-time employees and her husband, Stuart Oliver, who has long-standing family ties on the Eastern Shore.

Louise Oliver has dozens of clients who order her pre-made meal items at the beginning of every week, which are picked up or delivered every Friday, ready to bake or freeze. The menu changes every week, blending casual

and fine dining fare in what the Kitchen Sync website calls "inspired eastern shore dishes with an international flair."

Oliver, who is originally from Tasmania, Australia, is accomplished in the culinary arts. She has worked around the globe as a private chef and a manager for several large hospitality companies. Her travels and experience lend European and Asian influences to the dishes she creates. Her employees also bring Mexican influences to the table.

She has a long list of corporate clients, and more than 500 private clients, for whom she caters both off- and on-site.

Clients often choose the Eastville Inn

for corporate events because it offers more privacy than a restaurant. The inn's most popular dining area is the Glass Room, a dining room enclosed by a glass wall and decorated, like the rest of the establishment, in the federalist colonial style of the late 1700s to mid-1800s.

The Olivers attribute the success of Kitchen Sync in part to its alternate business model, which stands out from its predecessors.

Previous businesses at the Eastville Inn have consisted mainly of restaurants that eventually faltered and were closed, including a restaurant operated by Tim Abraham, of Cape Charles.

(Continued on Page 2)

~ Eastville Inn ~

(Continued From Front Page)

Abraham later found success when he opened the restaurant Tim's Place, in Cape Charles, but it appeared that running a restaurant out of the Eastville Inn wasn't meant to be, even for the most aspiring entrepreneurs.

The Oliver's noted aspects of the Eastville Inn that are not conducive to the restaurant business.

The narrow, long kitchen is not convenient for servers delivering orders to guests in the main dining room, but the layout is ideal for preparing catered meals, Louise Oliver said.

There is little to no parking at the inn, and foot traffic in town is light. On a warm, sunny Friday afternoon, only one person walked past the inn in nearly two hours, she pointed out to a reporter.

The town's main street, Courthouse Road, once was part of the main road on the Shore, Stuart Oliver said. The construction of Route 13 divided many of the Shore's small towns, and now most traffic bypasses Eastville's historic courthouse green.

The Eastville Inn was built around 1724 to serve travelers passing through or stopping to do business at the Northampton County courthouse, which has been home to the oldest continuous court records in the U.S. since 1632.

Similarly, the Eastville Inn is thought to be the town's oldest surviving business establishment.

The Eastville Inn operated through the decades and centuries, but business dwindled in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps due in part to the opening of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel in 1964, which enabled more through traffic via Route 13.

The Eastville Inn fell into a state of disuse and disrepair. The private establishment appears to have become public property around the time Northampton County obtained federal grant funding to restore the historic building, which was reopened in 2000.

Since then, the Eastville Inn has been home to a number of restaurants and also has endured periods of vacancy.

About 2015, Louise Oliver was looking for a commercial kitchen for her catering business that she had been operating for about four years. She discovered the Eastville Inn, which was vacant at the time. Northampton County offered the Oliver's a lease on the inn.

The lease worked well for the Oliver's, but after the initial lease expired, it was renewed on an annual basis, the couple said.

They were told the one-year lease gave more "flexibility" to the county, whose officials were concerned about the amount of rehabilitation the structure still needed.

(The second floor of the Eastville Inn remains empty and unused, except for limited storage, and is stripped down to the floors and framing, with no walls, ceilings, furniture, fixtures, or working utilities.)

A one-year lease agreement was not ideal for the Oliver's, but they carried on their business.

There was another unexpected turn of events when the lease came up for renewal in October 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic: Northampton wanted the Eastville Inn open for lunch at least three days a week, primarily to serve county employees.

The Oliver's reluctantly agreed to the new lease terms. Louise Oliver began planning and occasionally purchasing equipment she would need for preparing food to order. She kept tabs on the COVID-19 pandemic through the Virginia Department of Health.

Oliver had settled on the opening date of July 6 to serve lunch every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, allowing Friday to remain as the weekly pickup and delivery day for her pre-made meals.

She displayed a sign on the front of the building announcing that Kitchen Sync would be opening soon.

Then Oliver read the minutes from Eastville's May 3 Town Council meeting, which stated that "Northampton County was considering a different direction for the Eastville Inn and possibly a new tenant."

The announcement was made by David Eder, who is both Eastville's police chief and its town administrator, a dual role of which the Oliver's are critical, citing a possible conflict of interest and the potential for corruption. "The lines are blurred," Stuart Oliver said.

The Northampton board of supervisors held a special-called meeting June 23, which consisted of a closed session for the discussion or consideration of the acquisition or disposition of public property – specifically, the Eastville Inn – and consultation with legal counsel on an unrelated matter.

The June 23 meeting minutes state that after the closed session, Supervisor John Coker made a motion to terminate the Eastville Inn's lease Sept. 30, at the end of its current term, and "allow the tenant to lease the property on a month-by-month basis if they so desire."

The motion was seconded by Supervisor Oliver Bennett and passed unanimously.

Through their ordeal, Louise and Stuart Oliver have been provided little explanation or guidance, except for one meeting with County Administrator Charlie Kolakowski.

Kolakowski wrote in a Jul. 29 email to the Eastern Shore Post, "The Eastville Inn is a unique and important asset. ... It is also an old structure that will need to be maintained and will require significant investment to keep it operating. ... The County will be advertising a Request for Proposals for the sale or long-term lease of the facility ... to properly provide for the long term preservation of the property and also provide a vibrant and contributing facility to enhance the Town and County."

Stuart Oliver disagrees with the idea of Northampton selling a piece of history and a public asset. He said selling the inn would "border on insanity" and not be in the county's best interest.

The Oliver's believe they have been good stewards of the inn and have sustained their business, even through COVID-19.

A restaurant may not have survived the pandemic, but Louise Oliver's meal delivery service went "through the roof" and approximately doubled due to new clients who could not or would not eat in restaurants.

The Oliver's serve clients from Exmore to Cape Charles and will deliver any order, whether it's a week's worth



The historic Eastville Inn on Courthouse Road has a red sign out front that reads "Keep Calm, We Are Opening Soon." Submitted photo.

of meals for a family or a pint of soup for one person.

Stuart Oliver noted that even during the pandemic, the rent on the Eastville Inn was paid in full and on time every month.

He acknowledged that since Kitchen Sync is not a restaurant, it generates few food and beverage taxes for the town of Eastville. However, he and his wife have maintained the inn, and their business has not caused any trouble and "serves the community well," he said.

Louise Oliver was recently notified that she will be permitted to lease the Eastville Inn through Jan. 31, 2022, enabling her to schedule events for the upcoming fall and winter holiday seasons.

Stuart Oliver will continue to attend Eastville Town Council and Northampton supervisors meetings to make his case to allow the business to continue in its current location and to enter a three-year lease agreement.

The couple also plans to submit a bid for the purchase of the Eastville Inn, even though they doubt the process will be fair.

Louise Oliver is also looking for another location with a commercial kitchen in case their efforts to purchase or continue leasing the inn fall through, even though commercial kitchens are hard to find, she said.

Either way, Kitchen Sync won't be sunk if the Oliver's have anything to do with it.

Shore Farmer Hops on Production of Beer Brewing Specialty Crop

By Stefanie Jackson

Images from a presentation by Dixon Leatherbury, hosted by the Cape Charles Memorial Library, unless otherwise noted.

Dixon Leatherbury, an Eastern Shore native, retired farm equipment dealer, and Northampton County supervisor, has been taking on the challenge of growing and selling hops since 2015.

Hops are the green, cone-shaped flowers of the hop plant – which is related to hemp and marijuana – and are primarily used to add stability and flavor to beer. That flavor may be bitter, citric, or zesty. Hops can also flavor other beverages and be used in herbal medicines and as a natural antibiotic.

History

Brewing beer or ale with hops dates back to ninth century Germany. Prior to that, blends of bitter herbs and flowers such as horehound, dandelion, and heather were used to offset the sweetness introduced to the brew by the wort, a mix of malted barley and yeast.

It was discovered that the hops' nat-

ural antibacterial properties kept beer and ale from spoiling; hops became popular in 19th century Britain because the ale brewed with hops could be shipped unrefrigerated to British troops in India. That was the beginning of the popular brew style known today as an India pale ale or IPA.

Hops were grown in Virginia as early as the 1600s, and Thomas Jefferson grew hops at Monticello.

Present

About 80% of U.S. hops production is in the Pacific Northwest; the rest is mainly in the Midwest and on the East Coast. The Eastern Shore is near the southernmost edge of the East Coast area in which hops are grown.

In northern latitudes, which get about an hour more of daylight in the summer, hop plants can grow up to 30 feet tall and yield up to 10 pounds of wet hops per plant – about four times as much as Leatherbury observes in his hop yard, he said.

His farm is working with North Carolina State University, which received



Cones form on hop plants in late June through early July. Photo credit: © Ievgenii Meyer /Adobe Stock.

a grant to breed a variety of hops that is better suited to the shorter summer days farther south.

Hops come in hundreds of varieties, divided into two main groups: bittering and aromatics. Varieties of hops

that grow well on the Shore include Cascade (named after the Cascade mountains), Nugget, and Zeus.

Only female hop plants are grown on Leatherbury's farm in Machipongo. If male plants were introduced, they



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The photos above show the stages of hop vine growth. 1. Edible shoots of hop plants, which appear similar to asparagus, emerge in early April. 2. Burrs, which typically emerge between mid-May and mid-June, transform into cones. Photo credit: © Valery Prokhozhy/Adobe Stock. All rights reserved. 3. Hops plants climb strings on trellises in early June. 4. Leatherbury's Cascade hops show their growth progress in mid-July.

would fertilize the female plants, producing seeds and lending an “off flavor” to the end product.

The higher demand for hops in recent years was driven by the increasing popularity of IPAs, the farm-to-table experience, and nano- and microbreweries, Leatherbury said.

The Shore has two microbreweries of its own – the Cape Charles Brewing Co. and Chincoteague’s Black Narrow’s Brewing Co. There are 32 microbreweries in Hampton Roads, including Big Ugly Brewing, in Chesapeake, which uses Leatherbury’s hops.

Pests and Threats

Downy and powdery mildew are two types of common threats for hops, which are combated by spraying the hops with mildew killer every seven to 10 days, Leatherbury said.

Insects that are pests to hops include potato leafhoppers, Japanese beetles, and what Leatherbury calls his nemesis – two spotted spider mites. Pesticides can be applied to the hops to kill the insects before they damage or kill the plants.

Growing hops organically is possible but not economical, he noted.

Growing Season

Hop plants are dormant during

the winter, and edible shoots begin to emerge in March. The edible plant is available for such a short time it is considered a delicacy and can be served in a salad, cooked like asparagus, or pickled.

The hop plants become too bitter to eat once they reach about eight to 10 inches tall.

When the plants are tall enough, around late April or early May, they are trained to climb up strings made of coir, or coconut husk fiber, which are attached to trellises.

Three or four shoots per plant are chosen to wind around the string, and the rest are trimmed away. Training the

plants and trimming are done by hand. The shoots must be wound clockwise around the strings or they will unwind themselves, Leatherbury said.

New shoots that emerge later also must be cut by hand, but a chemical spray can be used on them after the hop plants reach 6 feet tall.

Burrs, which will grow into cones, begin to emerge in mid-May.

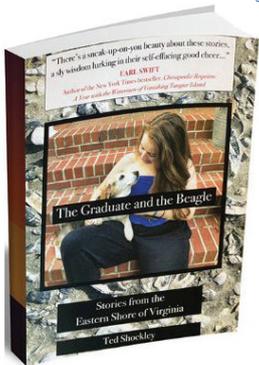
Harvesting and Processing

A large-scale harvester, bigger than a tractor-trailer, costs about \$1 million and can harvest about 200 hop plants per hour; Leatherbury uses a small-

(Continued on Page 6)

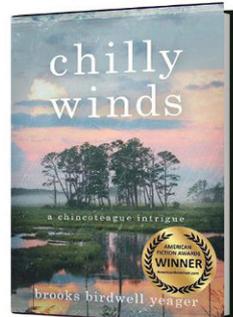
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~ Hops ~

(Continued From Page 5)

scale harvester that was designed and built on his farm.

After the hop plants are harvested and the leaves and cones have been removed from the plants and separated, the cones are ready to be sold or processed.

The fresh, unprocessed cones are called wet hops because they have a moisture content of 70% to 75%. Wet hops must be used quickly, because they will spoil within 48 hours, even with refrigeration.

Beer brewed with wet hops has a “more dramatic, slightly grassier” taste, Leatherbury said.

Since hops are harvested in late August and early September, and it takes about six weeks for yeast to cause fermentation and produce alcohol, a beer brewed with wet hops will be ready just in time for Oktoberfest, he added.

Hops that are not used wet must be dried at a low temperature – not more than about 125 degrees, or the batch will be ruined – so Leatherbury uses “a lot of air but not much heat” to dry the hops until they



Left: One of Leatherbury’s employees operates the farm’s small-scale hops harvester. Right: Hops are formed into pellets and ready to use. Photo credit: © Rich Townsend Photography/Adobe Stock.



have less than 10% moisture content.

When dried hops are refrigerated, they can last up to four months, and when they are also vacuum-packed, they can last up to 18 months.

Dried hops can be processed into pellets, which can last two years or more and are preferred by brewers because the pellets are much easier to use.

After a brew has fermented in a steel tank, if hop pellets were used,

the plant material will have sunk to the bottom, making for easy clean-up. However, whole-cone hops contain leafy material that floats to the top of the tank and must be skimmed off.

Most pelletizers heat their contents to 190 or 200 degrees. A special pelletizer is needed to process hops, and there is only one in Virginia. That machine was unavailable this year, so Leatherbury shipped hops to New York to be pelletized,

and he looks forward to finding more economical ways to transport the hops.

Starting a hop yard with several hundred plants is “not a hobby” and requires patience. A newly planted hop yard will be about 20% productive in the first year, about 50% to 60% in the second year, and about 80% to 90% by the third year, Leatherbury said.

Establishing a hop yard costs about \$15,000 per acre, and there are ongoing costs for labor, fertilizer, and other supplies.

One acre can be planted with 1,000 hop plants, which will yield around 2,500 pounds of wet hops or 750 to 800 pounds of dried hops (about 3.5 pounds of wet hops will make one pound of dried hops), Leatherbury said.

Wet hops sell for around \$5 to \$10 a pound, and dried hops sell for around \$15 to \$20 a pound. If hops farmers can get top dollar for their crops, their yards can potentially bring in \$15,000 per acre every year.

Growing hops is “plenty of work ... but it is fun,” Leatherbury said. “I have met more delightful folks – brewers are really a different lot. ...They think outside the box, and they’re fun to be around.”

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Belle Haven's 'The Office' Banks on Modern Technology and Classic



Above, The Office is located on 35615 Belle Haven Road, Belle Haven. At right is its business sign displayed at the parking lot entrance.

Story and Photos by Stefanie Jackson

The Office, a newly opened professional workspace in Belle Haven featuring open and private office space and high-speed internet, isn't your average old building that has been repurposed and given a new lease on life.

Originally opened as the Belle Haven Bank in 1907, The Office is steeped in history, as is the backstory of the couple who owns and operates it, David and Dorie McCaleb.

The McCalebs moved to the Eastern Shore around 2005, but their story really starts with David McCaleb's grandfather.

The late Walter Flavius McCaleb Jr., born in 1912, was a banker in Ohio who dreamed of moving to the countryside and becoming a farmer.

He and his family arrived on the Eastern Shore in 1947 to live on a farm he had purchased in Craddock Neck. McCaleb was "not well-received" by local bankers because he used his connections as a former Ohio banker to obtain loans for clients – some of whom were farmers – when his competitors couldn't, David McCaleb said.

Walter McCaleb dabbled in farming but was not very successful. He soon moved on to the insurance business and started W.F. McCaleb Jr. Insurance, which he operated in the former bank on Belle Haven Road, which was built in 1906.

He rented the property at first, then he purchased it from Burleigh and Henrietta Mears in the late 1950s.

His son, Edwin Philip "Phil" McCaleb, also helped run the insurance company. Phil's son David McCaleb was born in Nassawadox in 1971.

Phil McCaleb and his sisters took over the insurance business, and an addition to the building was built in 1987.

Fast forward to the 21st century and David McCaleb and his wife, Dorie McCaleb, were living in Colorado, where they met when she was in college and he was in the U.S. Air Force Academy.

David McCaleb left the military in 2000 and worked in finance for "corporate America" while his wife was an accountant who worked from home while raising their two children.

She left accounting and started an interior design firm with her sister, which her husband joined around 2002 or 2003. David McCaleb discovered the world of online business and ran a website that sold blinds and shutters.

Around 2005, the couple realized they needed to move to the Shore to care for aging parents. When Phil McCaleb died in 2015, he left behind the insurance business and its 10 employees, for which David McCaleb was now responsible.

The insurance business was moved to a new building on Route 13 in 2017, but the McCalebs still owned the old building on Belle Haven Road.

Dorie McCaleb, with her interior design experience, wanted to restore the historic property, but her husband was under too much stress at the time to consider taking on such a huge proj-

ect. They agreed to sell the building.

After the property was up for sale for a year and a half but failed to attract a buyer, David McCaleb gave his wife his blessing to begin renovating the former bank and they took it off the market.

Dorie McCaleb unearthed many historical treasures during the demolition and heavy renovation that began in 2019. She discovered original hard-



wood flooring and the tin-paneled high ceiling, both of which had been buried under previous renovations that had attempted to modernize the old building.

McCaleb spent nine months up on scaffolding, fixing the ceiling. She explained that in the early 1900s, when the bank was built, pressed tin ceiling panels were popular because they could be painted white to resemble the intricately detailed, molded plaster of

Paris ceilings that were fashionable during the Baroque period that lasted through the mid-17th century.

The pressed tin tiles could be manufactured quickly and cheaply yet added an element of opulence to an interior space, such as the lobby of a bank.

McCaleb also found old bank records that provided clues to the building's history, which are displayed around a teller window at the top of the stairs leading to the second floor, where a shared break area with a microwave and four private offices are located.

(The Town of Belle Haven occupies one of the offices, and the other three are currently vacant.)

It is uncertain when the Belle Haven Bank closed, but the last entry in a checkbook McCaleb found among the old records is dated April 2, 1931. It appears that the building sat empty for many years after the Great Depression hit.

Security at The Office is thorough. The property is monitored via video surveillance, and a code must be entered on an electronic keypad to access the building at any entrance.

Each office also has an electronic keypad on the door, as well as a video intercom system so the tenants' clients can contact them upon arrival at the front of the building.

The Office has two wireless broadband internet connections to provide redundancy, and those are also secured via encryption and a hardware firewall.



Dorie McCaleb stands in The Office conference room next to a framed, antique pressed tin ceiling panel that she restored. The panels were traditionally painted white to resemble plaster of Paris.

Style Adding Up To Success



The Office hot desk station is the former bank's teller counter.

Available technology in the conference room includes a 64-inch presentation TV.

The Office's technology blends seamlessly with its restored antique and historic elements, and many new decorative flourishes were added in keeping with the classic style of a 1900s-era bank.

Entering The Office, one sees the teller counter, which has been converted to six hot desks complete with outlets for powering and charging electronic devices.

An antique L.C. Smith & Bros. typewriter sits on a table near the break area that has a couch, minifridge, and coffee bar.

The restroom is located in the former bank vault, with flooring made entirely out of pennies that

Dorie McCaleb painstakingly sorted by color and placed in a diamond-checked pattern.

The conference room table was made out of salvaged wood and brass bed parts by local woodworker Andy Teeling, one of several examples of how The Office is "a place the community built too," McCaleb said.

The restoration of the Belle Haven Bank was a labor of love for Dorie McCaleb, who holds a deep appreciation for Belle Haven and its Eastern Shore,

small-town appeal.

When she was considering what the new purpose of the old bank would be, she asked herself, "How can I make this a win-win?"

She wanted her project to benefit not just her own family but the whole town.

Belle Haven doesn't have a beach or a harbor but its still a part of "the soul of the Shore," she said.

The couple saw a need for both shared



The Office restroom occupies the former Belle Haven Bank vault and its floor is tiled with multicolored pennies collected by Dorie McCaleb.

and private office space in their community, where many homes still cannot access high-speed internet, which has become essential to any professional or business endeavor.

David McCaleb looks at the historic building that has become The Office and sees "something that could have fallen to the wayside but is serving the community again."

For more information on The Office, visit www.officeontheshore.com

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