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Western Nebraska's open spaces can beckon new residents

For Cyndi Trees, living in Scottsbluff means her three sons can safely play outdoors. For Sharon McKinney, it means wide open spaces free of congestion.

These new Nebraska Panhandle residents relocated to Scottsbluff from large cities. University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension and community leaders are tapping into their motives for moving to encourage further growth and retention in the region.

"We want to learn more about who the new residents are, their characteristics, what pulled them here, and what things will potentially push them away," said Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, UNL community development specialist based in Scottsbluff.

Marc Trees accepted a job with Aurora Loan Services and moved his family from Arlington, Texas.

"It's a really great community and people are really friendly," Cyndi Trees said. "Scottsbluff is a great place to raise kids."

McKinney had been looking to relocate in the Midwest for several years. The director of radiological services at the Regional West Medical Center in Scottsbluff said she fell in love with the area and had no trouble leaving behind Southern California and 12 million people in a five-county area.

Through a federal grant, a team led by extension's Burkhart-Kriesel and Randy Cantrell, University of Nebraska Rural Initiative

rural sociologist, mailed questionnaires to more than 1,000 new Panhandle household members. One-third of the questionnaires were returned. Seventy-eight individuals from 10 Nebraska counties then participated in focus groups to further explain their choices.

Overall, Cantrell said respondents sought simpler lifestyles, less congestion and being closer to relatives. Others sought a lower cost of living, a more natural environment and higher-paying jobs. For those areas of rural Nebraska that have done well in creating skilled jobs, he said, lifestyle advantages can attract needed workers.

Community viability is imperative in attracting and retaining new residents, Burkhart-Kriesel said.

"After a community becomes so small, it becomes difficult to provide for schools, safety and infrastructure. The economic base gets lost. Many communities are kind of teetering," she said, adding as populations age, "it becomes more critical to look at recruitment and retention."

Darla Heggem, employee recruitment manager for the Twin Cities Development Association in Scottsbluff, worked with extension to create the association's www.wehavejobs.net,



Dave Ostdieck

Cheryl Burkhart-Kriesel, left, UNL extension community development specialist, and Darla Heggem, Twin Cities Development Association employee recruitment manager, overlook the cities of Scottsbluff and Gering from atop Scotts Bluff National Monument.

showcasing amenities such as affordable housing, health care, quality education, recreational activities and a listing of more than 200 job opportunities in the community.

Burkhart-Kriesel said a Web site recruiting potential residents needs to be more than pictures of buildings.

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Dean's comments

Pleased? You bet I am!

How could I be anything but, when I think of how the new national initiative called eXtension pulls together "the best of the best" educational resources from the nation's 74 land-grant colleges and universities, availing them for easy public use.

At *eXtension.org* consumers find information and answers to their questions, and interact with each other to grow their knowledge in a particular field.

eXtension.org currently offers 16 areas of interest, called Communities of Practice, supported by national teams. One-fourth of these areas are led or co-led by University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension specialists.

UNL extension specialists and their areas of expertise for eXtension are:

- Kathy Anderson, horses
- Rick Rasby, beef cattle
- Rick Koelsch, livestock and poultry environmental management
- Scott Hygnstrom, wildlife damage management.

In addition, Shirley Niemeyer has provided extensive material for extension's disaster education area.

Other current eXtension areas of expertise are in cotton, dairy, diversity, entrepreneurship, family caregiving, fire ants, Map@syst, parenting, personal finance, youth SET for life, and gardens, lawns and landscapes.

Dan Cotton, former director of the Communications and Information

Technology unit in the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, of which UNL extension is a part, heads eXtension. I was a member of the first national governing board that selected Dan. He has worked very hard in getting eXtension established, and continues to do an excellent job.



Elbert Dickey

eXtension is a new, valuable tool that processes large amounts of information into a useable format that is legitimate, research-based, unbiased and can be used with confidence.

eXtension is, in a sense, a transformation of extension — it better enables us to work together across state boundaries.

Extension experts always have been very good about developing and delivering educational programs for the public good. Now eXtension provides a framework to synthesize and adapt "the best of the best" information nationally to serve local needs.

Yes, I am very proud of UNL extension and eXtension. Check out more at <http://www.extension.unl.edu>, <http://www.eXtension.org> and the story on page 6.

To personalize your eXtension experience and to receive information tailored to your interests, members of the public may register at <http://www.extension.unl.edu>.

Elbert Dickey

Dean and Director

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

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Partners with Nebraska

Land-grant universities work with the people they serve. NU's Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources does so in priority areas of food, agriculture, agribusiness, natural resources, people and communities. We teach, discover new knowledge through research, and extend that new, unbiased information across the state and beyond through extension.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is part of the Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.

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EDGE knowledge increases confidence and business

Angie Peitz had long wanted to make her 18-year glass etching hobby into a full-time career, but the thought of quitting her full-time job and venturing into her own business was scary.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension's NebraskaEDGE course gave her the incentive she needed to start Etched Impressions by Angie in Hartington.

"In my first year I made the exact same amount as I did working full time," Peitz said.

EDGE — Enhancing, Developing and Growing Entrepreneurs — is a 40-hour course held over 11 weeks in various Nebraska locations. Since it began in 1993, about 2,400 people have taken the course to either learn how to start a business or improve their existing business, said Marilyn Schlake, EDGE coordinator.

The course helps prospective entrepreneurs learn how to work out the finances for a new business, determine if they have the skills needed to run the business and determine if the timing is right for the business.

"It's a testing ground for them to test their ideas," Schlake said. "It's a soul-searching activity for them."

Peitz took the course in Hartington in spring 2006 before launching her business.

"I always wanted to do it full time to stay home with my kids," she said. "This gave me the courage to do it."

She learned to put together a business plan, which allowed her to make the business work. So far she is finding clientele in northeast Nebraska and Iowa.

She even was commissioned last sum-

mer to etch the Nebraska state quarter into the glass doors of the private governor's office in the Governor's Mansion as a gift from Hartington in honor of three past governors from the community.

Peitz recommends anyone considering their own business to take the EDGE course.

She said if she hadn't taken it, "I'd still be working for somebody else."

Molly McNeely, a Nebraska City dentist and 2001 graduate of the College of Dentistry at UNL, also took the EDGE course in spring 2006, a few months before opening her Molly McNeely DDS practice.

"The EDGE business plan was second to none," McNeely said. "They really walk you through a step-by-step program to help you write a business plan. It's just amazing."

McNeely decided to take the course to make sure she had the business knowledge she needed before starting her practice.

"Opening your own business is eye



Marsha A. Wuebben

Extension's NebraskaEDGE helped Angie Peitz turn her glass etching hobby into a full-time career.

opening," she said. "I wanted to know as much as I could to prepare for the business side of things."

In 2007, 169 people completed the EDGE course across Nebraska, Schlake said. Those 169 represented 75 existing businesses with annual sales of \$24.1 million and 280 full-time jobs. The most recent survey on the program showed 71 percent of businesses taking the program increased business.

— Lori McGinnis

Schlake can be contacted at (402) 472-4138.

new residents (continued from page 1)

"People want to see themselves in that community. They want to see themselves as if they would be living there — riding bikes, at a football game, enjoying the weather and air quality."

Survey results show 60 percent of participating new residents said they probably or definitely still will live in their current communities in five years.

Heggem said the association has organized several newcomer events to help new

residents feel more welcome and is helping develop a young emerging leaders' group to foster a sense of investment in the community.

Western Nebraska's work ethic is another plus — people take pride in their work and job turnover is low, said McKinney, who moved to Scottsbluff in early 2008. She said she eagerly anticipates exploring sites around her new home and volunteering in the many area's available quality community services.

"I just think there's a tremendous amount

to do here," she said. For any additional shopping choices, she notes Denver and Rapid City are just a couple of hours away.

"Coming from LA, driving two hours is nothing," she said.

For more information about the study, visit <http://cari.unl.edu/buffalo>.

— Cheryl Alberts

Burkhart-Kriesel can be contacted at (308) 632-1234.

Empathy, understanding unfold during poverty simulation exercise

Even in a simulation, living in poverty is frustrating, often driving acts of desperation, according to high school and college students participating in a University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension poverty simulation exercise.

Marilyn Fox, based in Grand Island, is one of several UNL extension educators statewide who use a poverty simulation scenario that generates insight into how families in poverty live.

“They are no different than you and I,” Fox said of people enmeshed in poverty. “People who aren’t poor don’t understand how difficult it is to live without money.”

The U.S. Census Bureau reports the 2005–2006 Nebraska poverty rate at 9.9 percent, with Nebraska children’s poverty rate at 12.7 percent. The U.S. poverty threshold for a family of four in 2005 was \$19,971, Fox said. In 2007 it was \$20,650.

Fox said about 2,000 people, including members of the state probation office, have participated in extension’s poverty simulation exercise in the last two years.

Participants get a feel for what it is like to barely be able to put food on the table, or have a place to live. They discover those who can least afford it often pay higher interest rates and may be unable to open a bank account.

In the exercise, participants are assigned a life situation and the amount of money on which they must make do. They may simulate having disabilities, being jobless, having children and other dependents, perhaps while speaking no English.

Community members act as landlords, police, merchants, social workers and community service representatives.

Kathy Gifford uses the poverty simulation to teach personal finance and independent living classes at Kearney High School.

“It has all the intricacies in it,” Gifford said, noting participants can be “cheated” and that some resort to illegal activities.

“Sometimes people just don’t understand why (people in poverty) do some of the things they do out of desperation to feed their families,” Gifford said. The exercise helps them understand that better.

Rebecca Fisher of Concordia University in Seward said the poverty simulation will better prepare her students for situations they are



Cheryl Alberts

UNL students participate in a poverty simulation exercise for a College of Education and Human Sciences class, with dolls representing babies and children to care for. Natalie Zabrocki of Omaha and Brett Burton of McCook approach the “pawn shop” operated by Chris Tran of Lincoln, while poverty simulation coordinator Marilyn Fox stands in front of the “homeless shelter.”

likely to encounter in their professions.

For example, Concordia graduates “will be teaching kids where the kids won’t have \$5 to spend on snacks after the basketball game,” Fisher said.

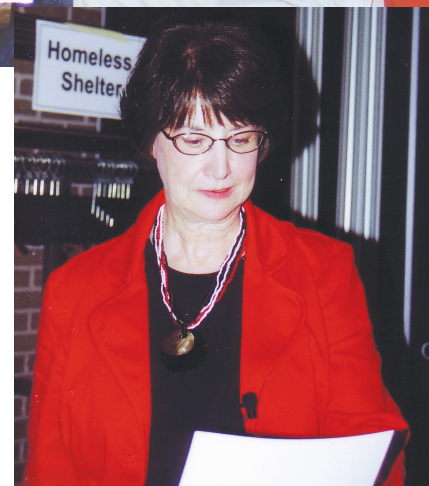
One of Fisher’s students who reflected on the poverty simulation exercise wrote that in reality she felt “greedy and selfish ... I sometimes spend \$4 on a cup of coffee. My character didn’t even have \$4 to buy transportation to get to work or to obtain food for her child. My heart goes out to the students I

will encounter whose lives are affected by such circumstances.”

Wrote another: “Many times I felt so lost and worthless that all I could think was I could never do this in real life.”

— Cheryl Alberts

Fox can be contacted at (308) 385-5088.



Cheryl Alberts

Would you like to treat a friend?

Do you know someone who would like to receive *UNL Extension Connect* who isn’t currently receiving a copy? Please send the name and address to: Editor, *UNL Extension Connect*, P.O. Box 830918, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68583-0918. We’ll do the rest. Thanks.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Sandhills field day reinforces agriculture's importance, career possibilities

Getting down to the nitty gritty of how cattle digest their food and of how crime scenes are investigated are but two of the many activities in which students can participate at the annual Youth Field Day at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory.

The spring event, held at the 13,000-plus acre ranch near Whitman, helps high school students learn more about the importance and opportunities of Nebraska agriculture and science, said Bethany Johnston, UNL extension educator based in Thedford.

Throughout the day, UNL faculty and others present 15-minute sessions on such topics as forensic science and insects, entomology, beef nutrition, ultrasound to improve beef quality, reproductive physiology of beef cows, diet analysis of beef cows, Sandhills hydrology, agricultural economics, water jeopardy, songbirds and wildlife, and using native plants in the landscape.

Dan Brost, science educator for Mullen Public Schools, annually takes his sophomore biology class to the field day. His students take field notes they later use in a homework assignment. In addition to learning new information, recording what they see and hear improves students' skills in notetaking and listening, Brost said.

"They enjoy being out in the field and

seeing things," said Brost, adding he also learns something new every year. The day is valuable, he said, because the state is so dependent upon agriculture. Nearly one in three Nebraska jobs is connected to agriculture in some way.

Cameron Hamer teaches agriculture at Sandhills High School in Dunning and is the school FFA adviser. The 2002 College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources (CASNR) graduate in agricultural education learned about the youth field day in an invitation from Johnston, and took his first group in 2005.

"The students were amazed that anything like that exists in the Sandhills," Hamer said, adding youth become aware of career possibilities they may not have known about or considered.

"It's great how they get all facets of the ranch — water, economics, the whole package," Hamer said. "It opens eyes."

Brent Nollette, a May 2008 CASNR graduate in agricultural education, was a field day participant a few years ago as a Cody-Kilgore High School student. Nollette plans to teach at Amherst High School next fall.

"If the opportunity arises, I will definitely take my students," said Nollette, who has his own cattle herd and enjoyed learning more about grasses and how the four chambers of

the bovine stomach digest them.

In addition to learning about Nebraska agriculture at Gudmundsen, students and instructors learn about requirements for program degree study at UNL's CASNR and the Nebraska College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis.

Last year the field day attracted 152 youth from more than a dozen schools, including students who are home-schooled and involved with distance education, Johnston said. Participants appreciate the facilities, which include the Wagonhammer Education Center and Ray Bohy Conference Room, completed in 2005. Students this year also heard sessions in the new beef cattle teaching lab, right next to the education center.

After the field day last year one student wanted to encourage using ultrasound on the family ranch, Johnston said. Another decided working around animals on the ranch is the place to be. "When I got home I told my parents about it," wrote another excited student.

Other student field day participants may have no agricultural background but "we try to find a match for them in their interests," Johnston added.

— Cheryl Alberts

Johnston can be contacted at (308) 645-2267.



Bethany Johnston

High school students at the annual Youth Field Day at UNL's Gudmundsen Sandhills Laboratory learn about forensic science, Sandhills hydrology and many other topics with ties to agricultural sciences. Here students at the 2007 event participate in a field discussion on range management.

Nebraska leadership helps launch national eXtension initiative

A national initiative bringing “the best of the best” in unbiased, research-based information to the public has University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension leadership helping pave the way.

eXtension.org, a partnership of 74 U.S. land-grant colleges and universities, launched nationally in February in Washington, D.C., said Rick Koelsch, UNL extension assistant dean.

Currently 16 areas of expertise are available to the public through *eXtension.org*. UNL extension specialists have provided leadership or co-leadership in four of the areas. They are: Kathy Anderson, horses; Rick Rasby, beef cattle; Koelsch, livestock and poultry environmental management; and Scott Hygnstrom, wildlife damage management. In addition, Shirley Niemeyer provided extensive material for extension’s disaster education area. Dan Cotton of Nebraska

provides overall leadership as eXtension director.

Other eXtension topics are cotton, dairy, diversity, entrepreneurship, family caregiving, fire ants, Map@syst, parenting, personal finance, youth SET for life, and gardens, lawns and landscapes. A total of 21 topics are launched or under development with five more to be added in 2008, Koelsch said.

More than 36,000 frequently asked questions, with appropriate answers, are available at the site, Koelsch said. Consumers who have questions after reviewing eXtension information have the option to “Ask an Expert” their question.



Brett Hampton

UNL extension’s Shirley Niemeyer explains her eXtension contributions on disaster education to Alan Moeller, assistant vice chancellor in UNL’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. A March 17 reception recognized Nebraska’s leadership in eXtension.

For content about the topic areas, or to obtain information tailored to specific interests and local events, go to <http://www.eXtension.org>.

— **Cheryl Alberts**

Koelsch can be contacted at (402) 472-2966.

Tips teach living safer with lead to help protect children

Lead poisoning in children can occur through contact with lead dust in the air or on surfaces.

The susceptibility of children to lead poisoning and ensuing health problems prompted University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension to work with the Douglas County Health Department to educate Omahans about the dangers of lead, said Vernon Waldren, extension educator based in Omaha.

A 2006 \$300,000 Department of Housing and Urban Development grant enhanced extension’s work with the health department in educating about lead, Waldren said. County workers made one-on-one contacts with residents living in areas of high risk for lead.

“We are in the process of evaluating the health workers’ contacts, and the initial results show that 100 percent of adults who have met and have been taught by the health workers have had their children tested,” Waldren said.

Children up to age 6 are particularly vulnerable to lead poisoning, which can damage nervous systems and kidneys and decrease intelligence. All parents should have their children tested annually because lead poisoning can occur from breathing air contaminated by lead dust, Waldren said.

In addition to lead testing, extension helped teach families to practice better nutrition to potentially reduce lead absorption, improve housekeeping to keep dust in check and properly landscape to help cover lead-contaminated soil.

Some older areas of Omaha have a high level of lead in the soil because of past industrial contamination, said Rachel Wright, extension assistant based in Omaha. About 20 square miles of Omaha have been designated by the Environmental Protection Agency as a Superfund site, which requires a site cleanup, she said.

Cleanup is more than halfway completed, Waldren said.

Extension also works with the Omaha Healthy Kids Alliance, an umbrella organization that brings together several agencies to deal with lead problems, Wright said. One project was testing toys to determine the presence of lead.

Extension education also teaches real estate professionals, painters and remodelers about alleviating lead dangers, she said.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Waldren can be contacted at (402) 444-7804.

Check out Extension’s

Web site at:

<http://extension.unl.edu>

Diabetes education improves health, emotions as need increases

Increasing waistlines and decreasing physical activity is taking its toll in the form of higher rates of diabetes, according to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension has broadened its effort to combat diabetes by increasing the number of locations where diabetes education is offered, said Debra Schroeder, extension educator based in Cuming County.

Control Diabetes for Life began in 2001 in eight locations in northeast Nebraska. It is now offered in more than 28 locations, Schroeder said. The program teaches people with diabetes how they can live with the disease and control it through self-management that includes diet, exercise and medication prescribed by the patient's medical team.

"Many people with diabetes live on limited incomes and it would be difficult to get this education otherwise," she said.

Extension's education is needed, said Kathy Goddard, program manager for the Nebraska Diabetes Prevention and Control Program at DHHS. Currently in Nebraska 7.4 percent of adults — about 100,000 people — have diabetes. That figure was 5 percent just three or four years ago, she said.

Goddard attributes more obesity and

physical inactivity for the increase.

"As weight goes up, diabetes rates go up," she said.

A recent survey shows that the program is helping people make lifestyle changes to help them control the disease. The survey, by Linda Boeckner, interim Panhandle Research and Extension Center director, indicates more than half of the respondents indicated they would better monitor their blood sugar and half said they would increase their physical activity.

Larry Bockelman, mayor of Wisner, has had diabetes for about seven years and has attended extension's workshops since they began. They have prompted him to change his diet. He has reduced the amount of carbohydrates he eats.

Bockelman's wife, Kerri, who has attended the workshops as well, said they have helped her deal with the emotional side of diabetes.

"It helps you handle it emotionally. I need to talk about it. That was something I had felt all along," she said, adding the sessions helped her husband realize that he needed to talk about his disease with his wife.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Schroeder can be contacted at (402) 372-6006.

College day booster

Deciding where to attend college and what to study are major decisions for high school students. University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension is trying to make it a little easier for northeast Nebraska students.

Extension has sponsored Northeast Nebraska Career Day at Wayne State College for the last three years. The first group of students to attend now are seniors in high school and are making college decisions.

Take, for example, Devon Kathol, a senior at Hartington High School. The career day events she attended as a sophomore and junior convinced her that UNL was the place for her. She plans to study graphic design and art when she enrolls this fall.

"I thought it was really fun," Kathol said of career day. "All the kids had positive feedback."

About 2,200 high school students from 32 schools have attended the career day over the last three years, said Jane Armstrong, extension educator based in Hartington. Students listen to a keynote speaker, choose three careers to hear about and attend breakout sessions on preparing for life after high school.

At the last event, 118 area professionals presented sessions on 98 different careers. The next event will be Oct. 20.

Career day is important for high school sophomores who need to know what courses to take in high school to prepare them for college as well as how community activities, 4-H projects and job shadowing can help them prepare, Armstrong said.

"In their sophomore year they need to make decisions about college before too long," she said.

Evaluations taken after the 2007 event show that 97 percent of student participants agreed that career day provided information to help them prepare for college, Armstrong said. Many learned about opportunities they didn't know existed. In addition, many participants indicated the event helped them feel more confident about going to college and taught them the importance of making good grades in high school, she said.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Armstrong can be contacted at (402) 254-6821.



Ginger S. Bailey

UNL extension's Debra Schroeder, right, teaches healthy eating in diabetes workshops to participants such as Larry and Kerri Bockelman of Wisner.

Buffalograss advantages are deep-rooted

Planting buffalograss to conserve water is an example that Jim Schild, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension educator based in Scottsbluff, hopes is catching.

In the last year more than 30 percent of the bluegrass at the Panhandle Research and Extension Center, where Schild works, has been converted to drought-resistant buffalograss.

“We’re trying to promote its use and lead the way in the community,” Schild said.

Differences between buffalograss and the more common bluegrass and fescue are stark. Whereas more common turfgrasses require watering two to three times a week, buffalograss needs watering only once every two weeks in western Nebraska and, when established, rarely if ever in the more humid eastern Nebraska, Schild said.

“One of the goals at the center is to reduce our outdoor water use by half,” he said.

The root system of buffalograss can go 3 feet deep while that of bluegrass is about 8 inches, meaning that buffalograss draws more water from the soil.

Extension is helping the city of Ger-

ing and the North Platte Natural Resources District develop incentives to encourage homeowners to plant buffalograss. The NRD is reimbursing seed costs up to \$150 per homeowner, and Gering bought Cody buffalograss seed to give to homeowners wanting to plant it. Both programs are being implemented this spring.

After seeing the new grass at the center, Scottsbluff officials have shown interest in buffalograss, Schild said.

Buffalograss does have some drawbacks, Schild said. The growing season is shorter, typically from mid-May through the first hard freeze, the grass is lighter green than other more typical grasses and it doesn’t tolerate high traffic as well.

“We need to rethink what is acceptable,” Schild said. “It’s OK to have a browner lawn a little later in the spring and a little earlier in the fall if we’re going to conserve some water.”

Schild is working this spring with Roch Gaussoin, UNL turfgrass specialist, on a



Ron Ernst

The city of Gering is offering incentives to residents to plant buffalograss like that in this park.

10-year study to determine how different species and varieties of grass grown in the different climate conditions of Lincoln and Scottsbluff respond to different levels of irrigation.

— **Lori McGinnis**

Schild can be contacted at (308) 632-1480.

Through a network of 83 offices serving all 93 Nebraska counties, extension is your front door to the University of Nebraska–Lincoln — no matter where you live or what you do. Your local extension educator, extension specialists and university researchers work together to bring unbiased, relevant and empowering information to families, farmers and ranchers, business and industry, communities, homeowners and young people across the entire state. Discoveries and findings rapidly make their way into the hands and minds of the people who need them — so you can apply this knowledge to answer your questions, make better decisions, achieve your objectives or improve your life in some way.

Extension is committed to helping Nebraskans know how — and know **now**.

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