



THE SPIRIT of DOWN HOME RANCH

JANUARY 2014

RANCHERS & CHANGES COMING IN 2014

Building a Bigger and Better Community of Independence

The New Year will usher in a new period of growth for Down Home Ranch, and the chance to share its exciting and rewarding lifestyle. The Founders' Legacy Campaign (see story on pg. 4) will provide funds to create more and more diverse housing for Ranchers.

Currently, 17 men and nine women live in the Ranch Village, and six residents live in nearby houses: three women in Taylor and three men in Elgin. Twenty-four of the 26 Ranchers living on Ranch premises are supported by ICF, one private-pay Rancher lives in an ICF home and the other on his own in a small cottage.

ICF licensure became a model to provide for people with intellectual disabilities when states were required by the federal government to begin moving their populations into the community. An ICF home can house as few as four or as many as 32 people. Down Home Ranch has two four-person homes, two five-person homes, and one six-person home. One Rancher lives alone in a cottage.

ICF is a rigorous licensure. Literally thousands of "tags"

govern the staff's duties and procedures. Consequently, all homes have live-in staff, even though many Ranchers don't need it.

ICF is a licensure designed for medical caretaking. Our homes must meet many of the same requirements as a nursing home, and many of our more self-reliant residents cannot be allowed the extra freedoms that might allow them to live richer, fuller lives. While the licensure is appropriate for many of our Ranchers that need the intensity of support it provides, it is limiting for many others, who are capable of living in their homes independently and who very much wish to do so — some as couples, some as housemates.

The Ranch plans, through the Founders' Legacy, to build new housing to allow these Ranchers to spread their wings a bit. As some Ranchers move out of their homes, new Ranchers will be able to take their place. Some of the new Ranchers will benefit from the structure and support those homes

provide long term; others will cut their teeth at the Ranch in ICF homes and, when the time is right, move out.

Ranchers graduating to independent housing will be able to work more hours and help support themselves to a much greater degree. Although they will have staff support, it will not be live-in.

Being able to fit services to actual need will enable significant savings for the Ranch, making it possible to provide for independent Ranchers at a much-reduced cost. Every Rancher, of course, will continue to receive optimal care suited to his or her needs.

Our mission has always been to create a place where those with intellectual disabilities live and work alongside those without. We look forward to welcoming more residents to this place — a community of friends, where they can make the most of their abilities and their lives.





“DOWN TOWN RANCH”

The Ranch used to receive letters addressed to “Down Town Ranch” every now and then. Interestingly, something like it might be right around the corner.

An Austin group headed by Ashley Sanchez, longtime friend and former board member of Down Home Ranch, has joined with several other families to launch a model that does not depend on government financing to enable their adult children to live with substantial independence.

How come Sanchez’s daughter doesn’t just live at Down Home Ranch? Simple, she’s a city girl!

The model is based on The Mission Project of Mission, Kansas. In 2004, fourteen sets of parents created a non-profit corporation to secure housing and jobs for their children.

We learned about The Mission Project during a workshop at the National Down Syndrome Congress Annual Conference in 2007 and soon began recommending the model to other parents interested in “building something like the Ranch” as a much more quickly achievable and less expensive model.

The Austin group has not yet decided upon a name for its project, though we know it will not be “Down Town Ranch.” They have elected officers and will soon be filing for 501 (c)(3) status and adopting by-laws.

Those interested in learning more about the Austin project should contact Judy Horton at judy@downhomeranch.org or Ashley at asanchez@austin.rr.com or go to the web site of The Mission Project at www.themissionproject.org.

RANCHER LIFE AND WORK

What’s life like for a Rancher living at Down Home Ranch?

Well, first of all, they don’t all live at the Ranch. Three men live in Elgin and three women in Taylor, commuting daily to work and to participate in classes such as Healthy Habits, Special Olympics, Theater Arts and Down Home Singers. That leaves 26 Ranchers living at the Ranch — nine women and 17 men.

But regardless of which house they call home, every one of our Ranchers will be happy to tell you about the work they do and the wonderful staff they work with.

In the past year, the Ranch began a deliberate move away from work centered in a program setting to work centered around the real-life needs of the Ranch: caring for livestock, tending plants in the gardens and greenhouses, cooking meals, maintaining facilities for retreats, and all of the daily jobs that keep this place humming. Immediately, supervisors noticed a higher level of engagement in the Ranchers they worked with.

Currently Ranchers in the Real Life Work Program are working as Carpenter’s

Assistants, Mechanic’s Helpers, Clean Team Members and Kitchen Aides. Soon, one or two will become Data Entry Assistants, with more jobs and titles to come.

King, a Rancher charged with feeding the cattle each morning, is especially proud these days. He received kudos for counting the cows and realizing three had gone missing. He quickly alerted Scott Ragan, Ranch Manager, and together they located the wandering ladies in a neighbor’s pasture and got them back where they belong.

King just shrugged off all the accolades. “Everybody knows you count your cows every morning,” he said. Sage advice, Mr. King.



Judy being welcomed home from surgery and chemotherapy.



Judy reads a dedication at the planting of a tree in memory of Julia’s dad.



Birthday boy Mark’s new ride.

CRUISE NEWS

This coming January 23rd, Ranchers, accompanied by staff, parents, friends, and admirers, will depart for their 7th annual four-day cruise vacation to Mexico on the *Carnival Triumph*.

There were concerns given last year’s problems with that ship on the high seas, and staff did look into vacation alternatives.

In the end it was felt that, given highly-publicized investments in the ship, including a new engine, safety issues have been addressed and Ranchers heaved a sigh of relief, as they greatly look forward to their annual cruise!

The Ranch has arranged for a commercial, 45-passenger bus to transport the group to the terminal, solving problems associated with parking, driving through Houston, bathroom stops, luggage transport, embarkation and disembarkation.

If you are interested in joining the fun, contact Lauren Rich at Carnival, 1-800-819-3902 ext. 82494. Ask to be seated with Down Home Ranch in the dining room.

For other questions call Casey Dickerson, 888-926-2253, ext. 126. Non-Ranch staff or Ranchers are welcome to hop on the bus and join the fun early for a pro-rated fee.



Cart and bike shelter being built by the men of Sunnybrook Church, Stillwater, Oklahoma.



Students from Juan Diego Catholic High School putting manure mulch around young fruit trees.



The Mobile Chicken Unit (MCU), commonly called a "chicken tractor," is, simply put, a portable chicken coop. We'll park it among our cattle where the hens will free-range, scratching and improving the soil, while laying eggs in the MCU. A portable electric fence surrounds the unit, which is moved from location to location every couple of weeks. We use a lot of these fresh, delicious eggs and sell some at the Farmer's Market. Want DHR eggs? Contact lauraz@downhomeranch.org.

THE BEST LIFE IS... RANCH LIFE



Retired Texas Forest Service Director Bruce Miles was instrumental in getting DHR its own fire truck! Cottonwood Volunteer Fire Department made us a generous offer of their old fire truck, which we use to water trees, sprinkle our dusty roads and have ready in case of a grass fire.



SAFETY FROM A CHAINSAW?

Our Annual Texas Chainsaw Manicure is a lot of fun, but more importantly, it protects us from the ravages of wildfires.

Down Home Ranch welcomed over 100 volunteers for the 2013 Texas Chainsaw Manicure, held October 12th. A big Down Home "Thank you!" to everyone who came out and worked hard to make Down Home Ranch a safer habitat for those who live and work here.

In 2006, a fire at a neighbor's ranch got us to thinking about fire dangers. We were the first responders and could have put it out had we gotten there a couple of minutes earlier, but firefighters showed up to put it out — including a contingent from the Texas Forest Service. That was the beginning of a great new relationship that is helping Down Home Ranch become a safer place.

In 2007 we held the first Annual Texas Chainsaw Manicure and it's been a rousing success. Working with the Forest Service we became a Firewise Community — one of only 24 in Texas. We've created "defensible

space" around the residential areas of the Ranch and are in the early stages of becoming a completely Xeriscaped community. We've also instituted policies and procedures that make it possible for us to react quickly and keep everyone safe.

The Bastrop fire over Labor Day Weekend in 2011 was a grim reminder of just how important this work is. The worst fire disaster in the state's history consumed more than 1,500 homes and 34,000 acres just a few miles south of us. Everyone on the Ranch has friends and family who were directly affected by these fires. We were on full alert for several days and could see huge smoke clouds to our south.

Thank you to all who have volunteered over the years and worked so hard at each of our annual Chainsaw Manicures. Today our "defensible space" — areas cleared of grasses, shrubs, and brush between buildings and thick wooded areas — is greatly expanded, creating a safer habitat for those who live and work at Down Home Ranch.



FOUNDERS' LEGACY CAMPAIGN

"Nothing endures but change" wrote the philosopher Heraclitus around 500 BC, an insight that still holds 2500 years later.

As I write, 2014 looms around the corner. But, I stop and think: 2014! Where did 2013 go? It seems only a moment ago that we wrote "Once Upon a Time," a little tract that laid out this unlikely dream of a Ranch for people with intellectual disabilities. That was in 1989, when Kelly was five.

In 1990 we bought 217 acres east of Austin, set up a mobile home — Judy called it Mustard Seed — and settled in. It was a modest beginning. Fr. Bob Mahoney visited us early on and later confessed that he thought to himself, "Those people have got an incredible faith or else they're dumb as a bag of hammers!" He may have been right on both counts.

Forward to 2000 and there was still just Judy, Kelly and me in permanent residence on the Ranch. We had funding for Gabriel House but we were still a year away from welcoming our first Rancher. But after Michael came to live with us in November of 2001, it was like getting the first pickle out of the jar. Danny and Robert moved in. Then the next home was Martha House, with Kelly being the first Rancher there. Barnabas, Timothy, Teresa, and Isaiah Houses came in quick succession, filling the Village with life.

Today, over 24 years later, *from the* **DIRECTOR'S CHAIR** we have 30 buildings and 41 of us live on the Ranch. More will be coming next year.

The Ranch is now 330 acres of chickens, greenhouses, cattle, gardens, ponds, wells — everything you need on a working farm and ranch.

Yet... nothing endures but change, and 2014 will be one of great change — not the least of which is the passing of the baton.

Judy and I will continue to be the keepers of the flame, and I still have a lot I plan to accomplish, but time is passing — as must we.



The Founders' Legacy Campaign will be Judy and Jerry's final leadership role in the building of Down Home Ranch. They are asking **everyone** that has ever helped in the creation of the Ranch to consider a gift or pledge to the campaign: every person, every charitable foundation, every service club, every business, and every church.

The Ranch is a work-in-progress and isn't yet complete. Promises have been made that Jerry and Judy want to fulfill: the promise of paved roads, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd, new micro-houses and cottages for those Ranchers asking "will I ever get my own place?" The answer to which must be "yes!"

The Legacy Campaign will create new housing, new places to gather and roll out the welcome mat for new Ranchers. A Community Center in the Village will include an underground recreation room that will double as a storm cellar for the entire community. Legacy funding will help us

conserve energy, harvest rainwater, produce more of our own food and live more lightly on our 330 acres. It will put a cover over our pool for year-round use and will build a much needed Welcoming Center. It will help Down Home Ranch continue its role in providing a unique model community for adults with intellectual disabilities.

The goal is \$2,500,000 in gifts and pledges, with construction starting as early as January 2014. We hope to complete some of the projects by the end of 2014 and all aspects of the Legacy Campaign by the end of 2015.

We hope that much of the funding will come from charitable foundations, but they want to see a strong base of support from **people like you**, as well as churches, businesses and other organizations. A general appeal will be sent in January and all who know and love Down Home Ranch will be asked to pledge.

ONLY THE BEST

The quality of the staff at Down Home Ranch is one of the things most remarked about by others. There is no issue more on the minds of parents than staff quality, especially when stories surface in the news concerning neglect or abuse of people with disabilities.

We are proud of the professionalism, attitude, and performance of our staff. Most agencies pay minimum wage and provide zero benefits for their direct-care staff, but the Ranch has always paid well above that and makes health insurance available to all full-time staff, paying two-thirds of the premium in addition to providing a 403 (b) plan with up to a 4% employer match.

Check out the Founders' Blog at www.downhomeranch.org for profiles on individual staff members, and learn why the Ranch has ample reason to be proud. *Staff, clockwise from top: Office Mgr. Annette Ragan and Ranch Manager Scott Ragan; Kitchen Manager Gigi Ross; Ranch Receptionist Laura Z and daughter Peyton; Development & IT Specialist Craig Russell.*



SAVE THE DATE(S)

Here are a few calendar items for 2014 that will highlight the DHR year:

- March 14-19 Sunnybrook Church, Stillwater, Oklahoma volunteers
- March 28-April 5, Blythe Island Baptist Church, Brunswick, Georgia volunteers
- April 4, 8th Annual Golf Tournament, Avery Ranch, Austin
- April 5, 9th Annual Gala, Bullock Historical Museum, Austin
- July 11-13, National Down Syndrome Congress Convention, Indianapolis, Indiana
- August 30, Swim Fest at Down Home Ranch
- September 13, Family Day at Down Home Ranch
- October 18, Texas Chainsaw Manicure at Down Home Ranch

NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IN 2014?

Judy and Jerry Horton have been working to prepare for new leadership since the 2011 Strategic Planning project. The Hortons started the Ranch over twenty-four years ago and have worked diligently to create the community that now exists, but they and others are very aware that the organization needs a smooth transition to new leadership.

The Hortons brought a proposal to the Board earlier this year to provide a framework for transition, which is a work in progress. The actual transition has already begun insofar as Judy has officially retired while continuing to serve on the Board, the Senior Management group and the Development Committee.

FRED

This year and last, Jerry and Judy got invited to the FRED (Farms and Ranches Enabling Disabled persons) conference in Manhattan Beach, California (www.fredconference.myevent.com/?cp=1).

FRED is focused on autism spectrum disorders, but they invited Down Home Ranch because it is an operational farm and ranch, with valuable experience and ideas for families and start-up organizations.

A subcommittee has been established to complete a comprehensive job description for Jerry's position, along with search criteria and time-lines. Once a search is launched, it will be followed by screenings, interviews and ultimately a hiring, after which a period will ensue in which Jerry and the new ED will work side by side for a year or more.

The Hortons will continue to live in The Village at Down Home Ranch and will play important roles. Jerry will remain as the ED for the DHR Foundation and hopes to spend several years building an Endowment Fund to provide a measure of long-term financial security for the Ranch.

In March 2014, Judy and Jerry will again represent DHR at the FRED conference, along with Kelly and Sterling, who will be on a self-advocates panel. The conference organizers are especially interested in getting first-hand information from Ranchers who are living the dream that many families wish for their children with IDD. (Dates are March 28th and 29th, in Los Angeles.)



(Left to right) Judy, board members Peter and Genie, and staff members Cathy, Carol and Gigi joined Jerry (holding the camera) at the National Down Syndrome Congress annual convention in Denver. Attendees brought back a lot of useful ideas and information, not to mention valuable new contacts. A one-day symposium on research was especially encouraging.

RANCH CAMP

In August, the Ranch's Board of Directors voted on the recommendation of DHR staff and suspended Ranch Camp for the foreseeable future, a difficult but necessary decision.

Ranch Camp started in 1995 and was an immediate hit with both campers and families. It grew until, at its peak, over 400 came each summer from across Texas, 16 other states, Canada, London and Helsinki. But, as the residential program began growing — the real mission of the Ranch — so grew also a tension between residency and Ranch Camp: two big programs using the same spaces, same amenities and some of the same staff at the same time. Some Ranchers came to rue

the coming of Ranch Camp, when their pool use was limited, the Pavilion dining hall was off-limits and other impositions occurred.

A Ranch Camp of the future — with its own place, own mission, own staff and own budget — is possible. But for now it is being laid down.



Judy and Maria kayaking on Cypress Pond at DHR.

It's been the most glorious autumn — flaming reds and warm bronzes, glittering gold sifting down through the branches, stirring gratitude bordering on melancholy.

Our life is like that now. Of all creatures, only man knows his time on earth is finite. Its predicted length has not changed much from Biblical times: "70 years, 80 if one is strong." We are close.



What a gift, to know this. It whets appreciation as satiety creates indifference. God knows what he's doing!

I was diagnosed last year with ovarian cancer, treated and recovered. Now I feel better than ever, pushing myself to hit those 10,000 daily steps.

We came to the Ranch in the autumn of 1991. There was no fall color then. Just driving, pouring rain lasting well into 1992. The leaves turned gray and plopped to the earth in sodden heaps that autumn.

I sat in our tiny trailer home and wrote letters to potential donors asking for help to build a ranch home for people with "special needs" like our Kelly, who has Down syndrome.

Improbably, today that Ranch home exists. Amazingly, it now exists without much input from me.

When I became ill last year I stopped taking care of the Ranchers and they started taking care of me — hauling groceries, making cards, stopping by for a hug, tying pink ribbons on our trees. Staff was equally wonderful.

That told me this was the community we'd intended.

These days Jerry and I are like the autumn leaves, still on the tree, but within sight of the day we will detach and drift away. We are working with our Board of Directors in formulating a "transition plan."

Work still lies ahead. The Ranch is our home. We love it.

Most of all we love our people. We will care for them for as long as we can.

We are profoundly grateful, to our people, and to you. Thank you.

How Do We Do It?

Down Home Ranch was created with an entrepreneurial inclination and a desire to explore and create diverse income sources — to reduce reliance on any one source and to fuel a passion for self-reliance. Today, the Ranch generates income in several ways:

- Growing berries: we eat all we can and make jelly from the rest!
- Growing and selling poinsettias, flower baskets and drought-tolerant plants
- Bartering firewood for catering by SouthSide Market Barbeque
- Renting our facilities to churches and other groups
- Making and selling note cards, picture frames and other creative products designed and created by Ranchers
- Charging fees for services, especially camps and residency
- Growing tomatoes, lettuce and other vegetables for farmer's markets



- Raising free-range chicken eggs for DHR use and on-site sales
- Seeking charitable gifts and pledges

None is as important as charitable gifts and pledges, for they represent the spirit of community and giving that is at the heart of Down Home Ranch. Ranchers don't go to Special Olympics, or drive golf carts, or go to Austin for movies or bowling or pizza without charitable giving. Charitable support provides the quality of life that makes Down Home Ranch unique.

Please consider making an end-of-the-year gift to support what is (we hope) your favorite Texas ranch: www.downhomeranch.org/donate.shtml.



DOWN HOME RANCH GARDENS

Since 1999, the Ranch has been growing, selling and delivering poinsettias — 13,000 this year, which sold out two weeks before Thanksgiving. Then, starting in January, we grow “spring color,” primarily a half-dozen varieties of hanging baskets.

But the Ranch recently signed an agreement with a vegetable consulting group and is starting a process that will result in four hoop-greenhouses being converted to growing tomatoes, lettuce and other vegetables. Brian and Steve are already growing hydroponic, pesticide-free tomatoes, lettuce and other leafy vegetables in Hoop House 1, and we expect to start converting the other three as poinsettias are delivered.

The Ranch recently joined the River Valley Farmer's Market and expects to be showing up soon with beautiful, vine-ripened tomatoes, “living lettuce” and other leafy veggies, followed by free-range chicken eggs as the new layers start to produce. The Ranch will consume a lot of produce, but a surplus is intended, opening the door to other farmer's markets as well as possible shelf space in local stores.

Ranchers and staff alike are excited about growing more food and becoming a little more self-reliant. And, yes, tomatoes, lettuce, eggs and other produce will be sold on the Ranch as well — especially in the DHR Gift and Garden Shoppe as it gears up.

INN KEEPERS

Inn Keepers started many years ago and as a consequence the Ranch has hosted many church retreats, with very little publicity or fanfare.

With the suspension of Ranch Camp, the decision was made to ramp-up our Inn Keeper retreat ministry, which is still largely word-of-mouth but very successful. This fall, the Ranch has hosted seven church retreats and already has nine booked for 2014. A brochure and marketing plan are in progress.

Church retreats provide a great opportunity to connect with people and organizations that might not otherwise know

about Down Home Ranch. New relationships are established, jobs for Ranchers and staff are created and, inevitably, some participants that have a family member with special needs discover a new potential resource in Down Home Ranch.

DHR staff is getting high marks for the welcome extended to guests, not to mention the great meals supplied by Gigi, Scarleth and the Kitchen Team.

If your church or other group is interested in using DHR facilities and services contact lauraz@downhomeranch.org.

VOLUNTEERS

The Ranch benefits from more than 12,000 volunteer hours each year. That's the equivalent of six full-time employees! And they don't just sweep a floor or paint a deck. Here are just a few things volunteers have accomplished:

- The Austin Pond Society volunteers drained and rebuilt our Koi pond in the Community Garden and in Sarah's Garden, donated a pond vac and made a generous financial contribution.
- Members of Blythe Island Baptist Church came all the way across the southern U.S. from Brunswick, Georgia to build our Raised Center Aisle barn.
- Folks from Sunnybrook Christian Church in Stillwater, OK, have come several years in a row, building decks, bike/cart shelters, decorating homes

and other buildings, erecting Pavilion awnings and much, much more.

- Regents School in Austin sends 80 or more 5th graders to the Ranch, often twice a year, to clean greenhouses, pick-up rocks and sticks in newly disked fields, stain decks, move plants and just about anything we ask them to do. Real worker bees!
- Dell volunteers come out to "cut" poinsettias — 13,000 of them — and then move them to the nine greenhouses to grow out.
- Innumerable volunteers help plant, prep and deliver poinsettias each year.

We have something for every individual or group that wants to be a part of the DHR community. To learn more, just contact Laura at lauraz@downhomeranch.org.



Jerry and Judy with the Scott family from Stillwater, Oklahoma, who volunteered for all 6 weeks of Ranch Camp!



Down Home Ranch has become a favorite volunteer site for the Young Men's Service League of Austin.

GOLF & GALA VOLUNTEERS

The 2014 Golf tournament will be at Avery Ranch on Friday, April 4 and the Bullock State Historical Museum will host the Gala for the third year in a row on Saturday, April 5, with live and silent auctions, catered dinner, live music and lots of fun. Work on the 2014 event is underway and **volunteers are needed**. Join the Golf & Gala Committee and help make the event a great success!

- Take the lead in getting 75 silent auction items.
- Help line up six attractive live auction items.
- Seek underwriters/sponsors for the two events.
- Serve at the Golf Tourney or the night of the Gala.

Contact Kristin for more info or to volunteer: Kristin@downhomeranch.org.

WISHLIST

- Great items to sell at the 4/5/14 Gala
- Good used golf carts, gas or electric
- Engineers to design a pool dome
- iPads for Ranchers
- Good, lightly used furniture
- Two-seater kayaks; double blade paddles
- Rowing machine for gym
- Metal-cutting bandsaw
- Functional truck for Ranch maintenance
- Lawn care equipment, shop tools

MICHAEL LYNN WESTOVER

12/22/63 TO 10/6/13

Michael came to our first Ranch Camp in 1995 and returned for many, many years. Judy and I knew how he wanted friends and relationships, which his disability often seemed to disrupt, but he was a man with a quick smile and eager handshake. Michael was a sweet man and we rue his passing.

A DEVELOPING ENTERPRISE

For the first years of Down Home Ranch the only income was from “development,” charitable fundraising. The Hortons had a little MacIntosh computer and wrote letter after letter asking individuals, families, churches, businesses, service clubs and others to consider a gift, and many did — enough to survive. But included in the original strategic plan was an entrepreneurial spirit and a determination to generate multiple sources of building and operating income.

Gradually, some foundations took an interest in the Ranch and capital grants were awarded. Almost every structure on the Ranch was built with grants from foundations: RGK, Anderson, Meadows, Mabee, Justin Paul, Dodge Jones, Still Water, Karakin and many others. The Ranch owes its creation to the generous support of such organizations.

In 1995, Ranch Camp was launched using National Guard tents and cots. Shortly thereafter, donated greenhouses were erected and the first crop of 2,300 poinsettias were raised and sold. Two new sources of enterprise income were established.

In recent years, government funding for day-to-day operations has become significant. But such funding is limited to shelter, food,

supervision and the like; it doesn't cover “quality of life” support that most of us take for granted. Moreover, public tax dollars are being squeezed and are probably in an irreversible decline.

Ranch income comes from three sources: government, enterprise and development. There is little one can do about government support, but much that can be done about enterprise and development — and that's just what we are doing. We are branching out into vegetable production, ramping up facility rentals through Inn Keepers and investing in personnel and technology to help with development.

The Development Office will soon launch the **Ranch Hand program**, a sustained effort to raise \$1 million in new operating support from 3,000 people or organizations that will pledge \$1.00 a day to Down Home Ranch.

Most non-profits are financially challenged and few have the resources or the resolve to engage the problem and emerge a stronger, more robust organization. We **do** have the resources and we for sure have the determination. As it is said, “failure is not an option.” Success is.

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