**Winter 2019** 

# **Tenant Topics**

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# Ambitious Audrey aims high

There doesn't appear to be any limit to Audrey James' personal and business ambitions.

Following a conscious decision to change careers seven years ago, Audrey now runs a successful private counselling practice, and is still expanding her range of skills so she can help more people.

Audrey, who lives in one of our Gloucester city centre flats, has just completed a further two years of training to qualify as a Psychotherapist.



"The training has been hard work but worth it," said Audrey. "I have learned so much and the work is incredibly rewarding. It is a privilege to be able to help people to recover from difficulties in their lives, whether it's trauma, bereavement, relationship difficulties, abuse or anger. I particularly enjoy my work with refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced so much trauma in their lives and really need help to heal psychologically and find new ways of living."

> Audrey James is welcoming new clients to her Gloucester practice.

But not content to rest there, she has already embarked upon her next challenge and is now learning Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EMDR) – a psychotherapy that helps people to heal from the emotional distress resulting from disturbing life experiences.

Reflecting her newly-expanded knowledge and skills, Audrey plans to rename her business – based close to the Quays in Gloucester – Restore Counselling and Psychotherapy Service.

Audrey was one of the first beneficiaries of our David Garnett Bursary, designed to help tenants further their education and support their work ambitions. Over three years, the bursary helped eight tenants in different ways – and Audrey used her grant to extend her learning through membership of a professional organisation.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year from all at Two Rivers Housing







Make a date for our next Holiday Club on Wednesday 19 February.

This free activity will help to keep your children – or grandchildren – entertained for a couple of hours during half-term and they'll enjoy a delicious and nutritious lunch, too – thanks, as always, to The Wiggly Worm. There will be a range of crafts, reading and games for children of all ages, including a separate area for toddlers. There's no need to book, but places are limited. Please make sure your children are accompanied at all times.

Holiday Club is held at the Forest Community Church in Cinderford, between midday and 2pm.

# You're in control

Have you tried our online tenant portal 'My account' yet?

It's a great way to keep up-to-date with details about your tenancy 24 hours a day, and you can report non-emergency repairs any time of the day or night – and book an appointment slot at the same time.

Our tenants tell us 'My account' is very simple to use. You just need to register and set up your log in details, then you're ready to explore.

We're expanding the features offered in 'My account', so it's a good idea to register now, and be ready to take advantage of what's on offer. If you would like to use 'My account', go to our website – **www. tworivershousing.org.uk/yourhome/my-account**/ – register and explore! If you need any help, just contact our Customer Service team, who will be pleased to guide you.



Book a repair online and choose an appointment time that suits you.

Over **a third** of all tenants with online access are now using My account.

#### Beware of button batteries (

There's a strong possibility any toys and gadgets coming into your house this Christmas will contain small button batteries – which can be deadly if swallowed by young children or pets.

Button batteries – also known as coin batteries – react with saliva to form caustic soda which can burn through soft tissue and cause potentially fatal or life-changing injuries in less than two hours.

The batteries are widely used in watches, kitchen appliances, car keys and children's toys and games. They come in different sizes but can easily be swallowed, and it's not always easy for parents to know they've been ingested.

Make sure you do not leave these batteries lying around where a child might get hold of them and, if you know or suspect a child has swallowed one, you should take them to A&E immediately.

### Keeping ancient crafts alive

Traditional country crafts are enjoying a revival and one of our tenants is teaching her willow-weaving skills to others to share her love of nature and the use of sustainable materials.

Hannah Beasley grew up on the outskirts of London and volunteered in ecocommunities around the world before moving to the Forest of Dean in 2011. She became interested in working with willow whilst studying at Camphill Communities and, since then, she has perfected her skills and set up her own business – Hedgerow Baskets – to share the craft with others.

Hannah, who lives in Yorkley, explained: "Basket weaving is a traditional craft using methods ingeniously designed by our ancestors. What could be better than a beautiful, practical item that literally grows on trees?! I really do find things are better when bringing it back to basics, and basket-making ticks all the boxes for me."

Working with Adult Education, Hannah has introduced these ancient techniques to community groups, and the first course she ran for Two Rivers tenants at



Bream was so popular they invited her back to run another.

Denise Stuart, who lives in the village, said: "I didn't think I would be able to do it as I have Parkinson's, but I was surprised by what I made. I love it and it has been a great way to meet new people too."

If you are interested in a course being delivered in your area, contact Karen Stiles from Adult Education, Gloucestershire. Email **Karen.Stiles@** gloucestershire.gov.uk.

Hannah is a Director of the Rewild Project, a not-for-profit traditional craft and rural skills centre based in the Forest. You may have seen her featured on a recent BBC Countryfile programme. She has her own website – **www.hedgerowbaskets.co.uk** – or you can find her on Instagram ('hedgerowbaskets').



#### SAVING TIP

Make it your New Year resolution not to pay more than you have to on your household bills. It's easy to compare prices online and you will save money. Try 'Go Compare', 'Money Supermarket' or 'uSwitch'.

## **Paying rent over Xmas**

We understand the pressure to spend on gifts and entertainment over the Christmas and New Year period, but please make sure you have enough left to pay your rent.

If you miss payments during December and January you will start the new year with arrears, and we will take action which may result in losing your home. We would much prefer you enjoyed Christmas without that worry, so please talk to us if you have any concerns about paying your rent.

Here are the revised payment dates for the Christmas and New Year period.

#### Universal Credit

Normal payment date	New payment date
Wednesday 25th December	Tuesday 24th December
Thursday 26th December	Tuesday 24th December
Wednesday 1st January	Tuesday 31st December
Direct Debit	
Normal payment date	New payment date
Wednesday 25th December	Friday 27th December
Thursday 26th December	Friday 27th December
Wednesday 1st January	Thursday 2nd January

If you wish to discuss anything about your rent account, please contact our Income Collection team on **0800 316 0897** or **email incomecollectionteam@2rh.org.uk** .

Margaret Shayle's gardening efforts have been rewarded.

We have a 'Supreme Champion' gardener in our midst in the guise of Margaret Shayle of Newent.

Judges of this year's Newent in Bloom competition awarded the accolade after visiting Margaret's home, and presented her certificate and trophy for 'Best Front Garden' at the autumn Onion Fayre.

Margaret has been tending her awardwinning garden for seven years and, in that time, has transformed the space from nothing but weeds and poppies to a beautiful and diverse environmentallyfriendly haven.

It was Margaret's neighbour who encouraged her to enter and sent in the application form. "I am no gardening expert," said Margaret. "If I see a plant and like it, I pop it in and then hope for the best. I really enjoy spending time in my garden, but it was a complete surprise to win this award.

"I would encourage other people to get out in their gardens and give it a go. I



don't see it as a chore; it's a nice way to spend time outdoors."

Margaret beat off competition from 48 other entrants to win the coveted top honour in her category. The judges noted her garden was 'A small space full of colour, with a wide selection of climbers and pots of plants. Really pretty and eco-friendly.' They also praised the garden of one of our tenants at St Bartholomew's in Newent, having 'varied planting and pots; mulched well'. They capped this off by awarding it a 'Bronze' certificate in the 'Best Courtyard' category.

Well done to all our successful Newent gardeners.

### Meet your Neighbourhood Housing Advisors



#### **Roxy Light**

- Cinderford
- Drybrook
- English Bicknor
- Gorsley
- Joys Green
- Ledbury
- Littledean
- Lydbrook
- Ruardean
- Ruardean Woodside
- Soudley
- Sutton St Nicholas
- Withington
- Worrall Hill



#### **Amy James**

- Alvington
- Awre
- Aylburton
- Blakeney
- Churcham
- Huntley
- Lydney
- Newnham-on-Severn
- Northwood Green
- Sedbury
- Stroat
- Tutshill
- Westbury
- Woolaston



#### **Clive Wilce**

- Berry Hill
- Bream
- Broadwell
- Brockweir
- Clearwell
- Coalway
- Coleford
- Edge End
- Five Acres
- Hewelsfield
- Mile End
- Redbrook
- Sling
- Staunton
- St Briavels
- Parkend
- Whitecroft
- Yorkley



#### Kathryn Hamilton

- Cheltenham
- Corse/Staunton
- Dymock
- Gloucester
- Hartpury
- Hucclecote
- Longhope
- Mitcheldean
- Newent
- Redmarley
- Stonehouse
- Stroud
- Taynton
- Tetbury
- Tewkesbury
- Tibberton
- Tredworth

#### www.tworivershousing.org.uk

# Smart new garages

The first of our new garages are now complete, and they're looking very smart!

They have been built with wider doors which are more suited to modern vehicles, they use a four-point locking system and the walls and roof are manufactured for extra strength.

They will need very little maintenance and they're coated with an anticorrosion covering which should keep them looking smarter, for longer.

By the end of this year, we should have a total of 50 shiny new garages, and the replacement programme continues into 2020.

> What a transformation! These smart new garages in Perch Drive, Coleford, should look good for many years to come.





## Keep on top of data

We live in a world full of information, making it very easy to get bogged down with unwanted data.

And how many photos do you have stored on your smartphone – many of which you probably never even look at?

We often remind our staff of the importance of good data housekeeping and keeping their information in order, but the same applies to everyone.

We recommend you minimise the data you create and keep it tidy.

For instance:

- Delete unwanted files.
- Organise network folders so they are ordered and easy to use.
- File important emails onto network drives.
- Don't keep paper notebooks with personal details.
- Sort photographs, file with a meaningful name and delete all the poor or duplicate ones.



#### Learn something new

If you're looking for a fresh interest or to learn a new skill, you might find what you're looking for in one of the courses run by Adult Education.

They offer one-off workshops and regular courses in subjects such as arts and crafts, building confidence, cookery, employability, gardening, IT and social media, mindfulness and meditation, photography, managing stress, English and maths.

The range of learning opportunities extends beyond this so, if you think you'd like to find out more, please contact Karen Stiles at Gloucestershire County Council's Adult Education team – 07748 933849 or email karen. stiles@gloucestershire.gov.uk.

#### SAVING TIP

Turn Christmas left-overs into tasty new meals with these recipes – www.bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/ collection/christmas-leftovers

Still helping!

This was one of the last outdoor tasks of the year for our Helping Hands team. The painting at Berry Hill Primary School achieved a beautiful result that was clearly appreciated by pupils.

The approach of winter has brought many Helping Hands activities inside and a number of our staff have been supporting students in local schools.

Groups have been preparing Year 13 pupils at The Crypt School in Gloucester, Dene Magna in Mitcheldean and Newent Community School for job interviews. And although the interviewers might have felt under almost as much pressure as the students, they enjoyed the experience and thought it was really worthwhile.

The final event of 2019 was to help staff at the James Hopkins Trust prepare for its Christmas event.

This is always a popular task for our Helping Hands teams, and this year was no different, with nine members of staff volunteering to gather stock, price items for sale and make reindeer food!

### Help for teen girls

A new website has been launched to help teenage girls at risk of relationship abuse, challenging the myths around coercive control.

The LoveRespect website features a relationship health check, stories from real survivors, practical advice and an email support service. It's designed to reach teenage girls who may not realise they are experiencing relationship abuse and who are less likely than older women to call a helpline.

Research by Women's Aid and Cosmopolitan found that two-thirds of teenage girls had experienced abusive behaviour in a relationship, but many did not recognise it as such.

Find more information at **www.loverespect.co.uk** .

# We're doing our bit

You cannot have escaped the phrase 'climate emergency', as individuals and organisations start addressing the crisis facing our planet.

We are supporting the efforts of Forest of Dean District, Gloucester City and Herefordshire councils to be carbonneutral by doing what we can to reduce emissions in our operational area.

We are also developing our own environmental strategy, reviewing those areas of our business which have the biggest negative impact on the environment to work out where our priorities should lie.

If you have any ideas of how we might be able to reduce our carbon emissions, we'd love to hear them. It might be something to do with building or maintaining our homes, or it could be about saving energy, recycling, using innovative products to make us more efficient, reducing water use or finding creative ways to use redundant land. What's most important to you, and is it something we could introduce at Two Rivers Housing and incorporate into our overall plan for protecting the environment?

Please send your ideas by 10 January by email – **customerservices@2rh. org.uk** – or by post to our office in Newent, and we will keep you updated on our progress.

Thank you.



# William's new "wow" home!

Homes at Johnstone Close in Staunton will be given a 21st century makeover courtesy of a total redevelopment of the site.

The 26 bedsits and flats, one house and communal room that make up the scheme are more than 40 years old and no longer meet our standard of accommodation, so – after consulting with tenants – we are planning to demolish it and start again.

Now we are talking to residents about where they would like to move to – either temporarily or permanently – and helping them to make the arrangements.

One of the first to relocate was William Houston, and the coach driver paid tribute to how Scheme Co-ordinator Marianne Roy helped to arrange his move to Newent.



We will be replacing the dated properties at Johnstone Close with homes much more suitable for 21st century living.



"Marianne was fantastic and made it very easy for me, which took away all the stress," he said. "She helped organise the removals and carpet fitting, and Two Rivers paid for them all.

"I loved the flat as soon as she showed me the photos and then, when I first walked in, I said "wow!" It's so much larger, brighter and warmer than my old place. I'm over-the-moon." We will make sure all current tenants are settled into their new homes before we start work on the site, which means we don't expect to begin until 2021 at the earliest.

We are still considering the designs for the new homes but will provide accommodation for anyone who wishes to return once they are built.

#### Three words could save your life

'What 3 Words' is a new smartphone app that the police claim really could save lives.

It's a way to precisely identify a very specific location, whether it's to meet friends, mark somewhere you'd like to return to, report a damaged powerline or call the emergency services.

The world has been divided into 57 trillion squares, each measuring 3m by

3m and each with a unique, randomlyassigned three-word address. This gives a far, far greater degree of accuracy than a postcode – and the police say it has already proven to be a life-saver.

For example, the door of 10 Downing Street is 'slurs.this.shark', while the pavement opposite where the press congregate is 'stage.pushy.nuns'. Our office in Newent is 'rebel.glitter.sigh'.

'What 3 Words' could be really useful if you are going walking or travelling and it's compatible with all navigation systems.

Just go to your app store and install.

The world has been divided into 57 trillion squares, helping to navigate to an area just 3m square.





### Nature's wonder



These beautiful wildlife photos have been provided to Tenant Topics courtesy of Yorkley tenant Ken Grindle.

We have featured Ken's pictures before, and readers of The Forester newspaper may recognise his name as he regularly contributes photographs taken near his home.

Ken's passion is to take pictures of birds and animals and he loves sharing them with others, giving pleasure to those who are not able to get out and enjoy the local wildlife for themselves.

Thank you Ken, for another glimpse of the wonders of our natural world.

### Water leaks

Some of you have had letters from your water supplier stating their intention to carry out work to repair leaks in your road.

This work – under Section 75(9) of the Water Industry Act 1991 – comes with a recharge, yet we can arrange for the work to be carried out much more cheaply.

If you receive a letter like this from Severn Trent or Welsh Water, please contact us immediately so that we can investigate the leak and take the opportunity to do the work ourselves.

Thank you.

#### SAVING TIP

Take advantage of the sales to pick up a bargain – whether it's birthday presents, discounted clothes or homeware, or even Christmas cards and decorations for next year.



Geoff Steer, Sara Beven and Bob Turner visit a new home in Lydney as part of their research.

### When you move on...

Tenant representatives are close to completing a review of what we do when one of our properties becomes empty.

A group of 12 has been scrutinising the process we follow, which includes deciding the work needed to prepare it for new tenants, and what out-going tenants should be recharged in relation to the condition of the property they leave behind.

For their research, members of the Resident Strategy Group and Tenants' Forum visited six properties as they became vacant, and again just before they were ready for new occupiers, comparing the promises made in our 'What to expect in your new home' leaflet with the reality.

They also met Two Rivers staff to talk about our current standards and our

policy on recharging, and researched other housing associations to find out what they do in similar situations.

"It has been a really interesting process," said Bob Turner, a member of the group. "We have seen different types of home – including a new-build – and been considering how much work is reasonable or desirable for Two Rivers to carry out, before it is ready to welcome new tenants.

"We have also seen the condition homes are left in and had an insight into what clearing up or repairs would be recharged to the out-going tenants. We have definitely had some lively and interesting debates!"

The group will present its final report, along with its recommendations, to the Group Board in February.



New properties at opposite ends of the county have opened their doors recently, offering great homes for tenants and shared owners alike.

Tenants moving into the first six homes at Ashchurch near Tewkesbury were thrilled with the eco-features and the space available, inside and out.

Hayley Stanton moved from an older property and is looking forward to having more money in her pocket thanks to the insulation and energysaving aspects of her brand new house.

Meanwhile, Luke Knight and Jade Smith were excited to swap a two-bedroom flat for a three-bedroom house with a garden and off-street parking – far more comfortable for their household of five.

"We were so cramped where we lived before," explained Luke. "Here there's so much more room for the kids and it will be great for them to be able to play outside."

Over at Tutshill near Chepstow, we have accepted our first Shared Ownership properties at Birch Grove. The twobedroom houses were snapped up before they were finished, leaving sales to complete on just the three-bedroom houses. However, they are lovely – and their kitchens are stunning – so we don't expect them to be available for long, and they also come with the added benefit of electric vehicle charging points.

In total, we will have 48 homes at Ashchurch and 45 homes at Tutshill when the two developments are complete – all a mix of affordable rent and Shared Ownership.





# **Blue Badge permits**

The Blue Badge parking permit is now available to even more people, following a recent upgrade to the scheme.

People with 'invisible' illnesses such as anxiety disorders, brain injuries and autism may now be eligible, as well as those who cannot walk without considerable psychological distress or the risk of serious harm.

The changes have been introduced to bridge the gap between physical and mental health disabilities, and a new 'eligibility checker' on the Gloucestershire County Council website also makes it easier to apply for a badge. There are just over 30,000 Blue Badges currently in circulation across Gloucestershire and an estimated 420 people who may be automatically entitled, while others may also be approved following assessment.

If you would like to find out more or apply for a Blue Badge, you will find lots of information on the Gloucestershire County Council website (including the eligibility checker). Alternatively, you can call **01242 532302** or email **bluebadge@gloucestershire.gov.uk** and ask for a paper form.

# Learn your way

Keen to improve your IT skills, but prefer to learn at home on your own? Then the Learn My Way online course could be just for you.

It's a website with a host of free courses aimed at helping beginners to develop their digital skills and make the most of the digital world – from the comfort of their own home.

You can learn how to use your computer or mobile device, browse the internet, send emails, use online forms, create Word documents, PowerPoint presentations and Excel spreadsheets. It will show you how to shop online, use Facebook, search for jobs, manage your money and apply for Universal Credit. Plus a whole lot more!

Helen Harris, who is a member of our Tenants' Forum, put some of the modules to the test for us.

"I already order goods, food etc online and use YouTube to find out how to use things so I didn't need to follow all the modules, but I did learn a few interesting things about using the Cloud, and different ways of keeping my files secure," said Helen.

"The modules are easy to follow and will be very useful for anyone who doesn't have a clue how to use a

### Learn My Way

computer, tablet or smartphone. I would definitely recommend taking a look – and it's all free, so there's nothing to lose."

If you're interested in seeing what's available, please log on to **www. learnmyway.com** for more information.

### Tumble dryer alert

A safety alert has been issued on certain brands of tumble dryer. Hotpoint, Indesit, Creda, Swan and Proline machines made between 2004 and 2015 could all be affected.

These are part of the Whirlpool brand – although Whirlpool machines themselves are not included in the recall.

If you have one of these dryers, you should go to the Whirlpool website – **www.dryerrecall.whirlpool.co.uk** – and check if your model is part of the safety alert. If it is, you will be given the choice of:

- having it replaced free of charge;
- choosing an upgrade;
- having it fixed by an engineer; or
- choosing a refund (dependent upon the age of the machine).

The Government estimates the fault affecting these tumble dryers has caused up to 750 fires in the last 11 years. It is, therefore, essential that anyone with one of these products contacts Whirlpool without delay.

# Recovering debts

A judge has ruled we will be able to recover a debt relating to non-payment of grounds maintenance charges, which has been building over the last eight years.

The owner is a freeholder who bought their home through Right to Buy after the homes transferred to Two Rivers. If she continues refusing to pay, the debt will eventually be settled whenever she decides to sell the house, using the proceeds of that sale. This is called a 'charge' on the property.

It is the first time we have taken this type of action over unpaid grass-cutting

debts but we believe it is important for us to pursue the money owed. Most of our tenants and freeholders pay their bills, and we don't think it's fair to them if others choose not to pay. Every outstanding debt means less money available to spend on our tenants' homes and services.

The debt currently totals more than £500 although this will continue to grow for as long as the sum remains unpaid. The judge also ruled that the freeholder will have to pay our court fees of an extra £250.



# Fit to stretch

The George Place keep fit group celebrates the arrival of its new equipment.

Berry Hill's keep fit enthusiasts have been given a boost with new equipment to help their weekly class along.

The weights, spiky rings, bells and rubber balls come from a grant made by the Barnwood Trust, and they offer a fresh dimension to the weekly exercise class.

A group of people has been getting together every Tuesday afternoon at George Place for over 20 years, to enjoy an armchair workout to music.

The 45-minute class – which is open to everyone who lives locally – used to be led by a teacher from the college but, when she stopped, Cilla Blackwell and Sue Reddan decided to keep it going. Happily, they knew the exercises so well, they were simply able to pick it up and carry on.

Now, a group of about a dozen meet regularly to exercise their hands, arms and legs from the comfort and safety of "I was really impressed with the Barnwood Trust and we're all very grateful for their support," said Sue. "We used to make our own equipment but this donation has set us up nicely for the future."

their chairs – and enjoy a rewarding cup of tea and slice of cake afterwards!

If you would like to join this gentle seated exercise class, you will find them at the communal room in George Place on Tuesday afternoons between 2.30 and 3.15pm.

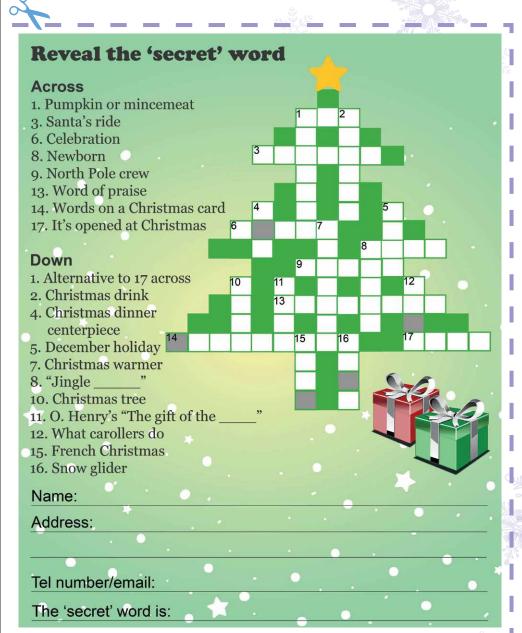




A mystery tenant has gone aboveand-beyond at Wellington Street in Gloucester, creating a lovely floral seating area to share with their neighbours.

Whoever you are, we want to you to know we really appreciate how you are helping to make the area where you live so homely and inviting. We hope you and your neighbours are enjoying it.

Thank you – and we can't wait to see how it looks in the spring.



# Stats on film

The autumn issue of Tenant Topics included our Annual Review of performance and activity in 2018/19, but you might prefer to look at our animated version.

For the first time, we've summarised the key details in a video and uploaded

it to YouTube, hoping it will be a more interesting way for some people to view the information.

You can go direct to YouTube and search on Two Rivers Housing or use this link **www.youtube.com/** watch?v=yGmt0veWON4&rel=0.



Alternatively, there are links to the YouTube animation on the 'About us' page of our website.

Please let us know what you think about this alternative presentation of our annual review.

# Festive tea break

The wordsearch in our autumn issue came up trumps again in terms of popularity and correct entries, and every single entrant identified that 'golden' was the missing word.

However, there can only be one winner and that honour goes to Sally Bozier, who sent her entry in by email. There's a voucher on its way to Sally, which we hope she'll find particularly useful at this time of year.

This time we return to a seasonal crossword, and the letters in the shaded squares spell out a word which is appropriate to the season. Complete all the answers to work out what that word is, and that's the answer we need.

You can submit your entry by post, or you can email us with the all-important word. Either way, we need your submission by **1 February** please, to be entered into a draw for a chance to win the £15 gift voucher.

Here are the details: Communications team Two Rivers Housing Cleeve Mill Lane Newent Gloucestershire GL18 1DS



Email: communications@2rh.org.uk

#### **Contact us:**

Please tell us if you would like this in large print or on audio CD.

### Freephone 0800 316 0897

Email customerservices@2rh.org.uk

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