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## **Staller Estate Winery continues to grow**

By **Jennifer Eisenbart** staff writer

For Staller Estate Winery, 2023 was a year of change.

"We've done a number of different things," said Joe Staller, the jack-of-alltrades who runs much of the behind-thescenes work at the winery.

As his wife, Wendy, finished, those changes have gone "very, very well."

The couple, which has the habit of bantering back and forth, puts that to good use in its "In Vino Veritas" – Latin for "In Wine There is Truth" – on the company's Facebook page. The segment talks about the various details of wine making and changes at Staller Estate.

Which, ironically, has left the couple with a few new topics. Primary among them is the sale of brandy and vodka made onsite, a process that has been in the works for several years.

"We actually started working on that about seven years ago," explained Joe, saying that the time was needed to secure the licensing at the federal, state and municipal levels. Add in the purchase of a hand-built still from Portugal and the twoyear aging of the distilled product, and the "Estate Brandy" has just hit the shelves this year.

### KEEPING IT UNIQUE

That is part of the commitment that Staller Estate has to its overall product, which Wendy – the company's general manager – and Joe say starts with the crafting of unique products.

"Our focus is really on the craft product," Joe explained. "We have really, really great customers that embrace a craft product. You can go anywhere and get a brandy old-fashioned. But you can't go anywhere and get one made with all fresh ingredients."

The old-fashioned is one of the many specialty items that Staller Estate has added to its lineup. Now using the housemade brandy, the addition of fresh cherry juice and orange, aromatic bitters and demerara syrup (essentially, a less-refined version of simple syrup, or sugar), and the couple has a hit on its hands.

"That adds a lot more depth, a lot more character to the old-fashioned," said Joe. Also new is the couple's old-fashioned

mix, which Staller Estate just got federal approval to sell. It takes the brandy and the old-fashioned components and puts them



in a barrel to age before it is sold as an old-fashioned.

Since wine serves as the base from which to distill brandy, that step was the next logical one for the winery, which is in its 15th year after opening in May of 2008. Even the artwork on the bottles is a little different – an artist's rendering of Wendy operating the presses for the product.

### **NEW OFFERINGS**

Staller Estate was also working to produce a style of wine that Joe said is inspired by Beaujolais nouveau – the idea of using this year's grape harvest to produce a fresh wine that has only been fermented a short time (versus years). That was coming out late last fall.

"It's 100%, estate-grown estate nouveau," Joe explained, adding that while the winery uses many of its own grapes, it does bring in others.

Also new is the Apple Nouveau – a spirit made with apple cider and apple brandy, blended and aged in a bourbon

barrel. The spirit uses apples from Orchard Ridge, a nearby neighbor on Highway 89.

Beyond that, a new orange brandy was expected to be released late in 2023, and other products are, as the couple says, "in the works."

### **MORE SPACE**

In addition to the new products, the Stallers have expanded their space. While the event space is large enough to host fundraisers – Staller Estate hosted Bethel House's annual event recently – the barrel cellar serves as a more intimate space for smaller gatherings and tastings.

New, though, is the pergola, which offered outdoor seating beginning last summer.

Eventually, Joe explained, the space will feature grapevines growing over it as well as the seating space, giving visitors a chance to experience a cozy, intimate setting outdoors.

Staller Estate has a wide variety of wines and cocktails available, as well as

charcuterie boards and flatbreads. Both are made with homegrown, fresh products, including vegetables grown on site and artisan cheeses from around the state. Those cheeses and spirits are also available in the store on site.

Picnic baskets are available for visitors as well, featuring cheese and homemade breads.

The space, Joe said, allows people to lose themselves in the country.

"One of the things people always tell us about coming out here is the seclusion," he explained. "You're getting away from the hustle and bustle of town.

"We get a ton of people who come out for wedding pictures or graduation pictures or engagement pictures," he added. "It's one of those places people can kind of lose themselves in."

Staller Estate Winery is at W8896 County Road A, Delavan. Reach them by phone at 608-883-2100 or online at stallerestate.com. For reservations, email wendy@stallerestate.com.





run Staller Estate Winery, which is on Highway A on the north side of Delavan. The winery began boasting something new late last year - brandy and vodka distilled on site bottom left: The barrel cellar offers a cozy, intimate space for small

at left:

Wendy and

Joe Staller

space for smal gatherings at Staller Estate Winery **bottom** 

right: Staller Estate has numerous spaces both inside and out for gatherings both large and small.

# Putting it all down on paper

### Renowned track and field coach shares wisdom about team, family in book

### By **Jennifer Eisenbart**

STAFF WRITER

For two days every year, Whitewater's Mark Maas gets a chance to shed one title that carries tremendous responsibility – that of "coach."

During those two days of the WIAA Track and Field Championships, Maas gets to take on another role, that of "announcer." But last year, the two ended up blurring just a little bit.

Shortly before rain moved in and caused chaos on the first day of the June 2023 meet, the Division 2 girls 4x200 preliminaries were held. Maas, calling the race with Jay Wilson, held to a professional tone for most of the event, but just before the handoff to the anchor on the team, Maas said a quiet, "C'mon, Kindyl."

Kindyl Kilar ran the anchoring, and even though Whitewater didn't win the heat, it set the Whippets up for a mighty race that weekend – a race that saw Kilar, Madelynn Buehler, Emma Wiegel and Sydney Schilt win a state title with a time of 1:42.95, less than a tenth off the state record.

Maas was in the booth for the final, watching athletes he has worked with on and off for years. When Kilar powered across the finish line first, all Maas could say was, "Wow."

Looking back now, he remembers apologizing.

"I remember distinctly, too, apologizing to the fans. Folks, I'm sorry, but I've had the opportunity to work with these girls," Maas said last fall. "I was standing up there in the booth. As it was getting closer and closer...I was leaning into Jay, saying, 'C'mon, c'mon.""

For those two days, Maas gets to live what he considers a dream.

"It's a track junkies' dream," Maas explained. "You're at the state meet for two days, you're sitting in an air conditioned press box, you're looking at Granddad's Bluff (in La Crosse) ... I pinch myself sometimes. 'How did I fall into this?'"

Maas recently tried to answer that question. After 40-plus years coaching –

LeAnne Ehlen recovered from injury to help the Whippets medal at state under the guidance of Maas. BOB MISCHKA Wonders of Walworth County

both in Delavan-Darien and Whitewater Unified School districts, among other opportunities – he is basically retired.

With the help of a journalist in southcentral Wisconsin, Maas recently published a book: "One Team/One Family: Winning Is A Lifestyle."

The book is available on Amazon.com as well as BarnesandNoble.com, with a paperback version costing \$16.95, and the eBook costing about half that at both outlets.

The book is Maas' opportunity to share the stories he accumulated in a lifetime's worth of coaching – a chance to share not just his successes, but also his mistakes.

"In teaching, academics is paramount, don't get me wrong," Maas said. "But it will always be relationship, relationship, relationship.

"If you want to get the most and you want the team to be as great as they can be, it'll be the relationships they build with each other and that the staff builds with them."

#### LIFE AS A COACH

In Maas' home in Whitewater, there isn't much out in the open in terms of showing off his successes.

In fact, in order to see the pictures Maas is most proud of – those of his various state championship teams at Whitewater High School – you have to convince him to open the door to his basement.

When asked to take a picture with those photographs, Maas almost declined.

"Does it look OK?" he asked.

It's what one might expect from Maas, who explains that not only is the story really not about him, but it's also not about any one individual.

"What if I had a school where, I had people who believed it was job number one to make each other better," Maas explained. "Being kind, doing better for each other... it isn't a weakness, it's a strength."

The idea of a team being a family is at the heart of Maas' coaching philosophy – and at the heart of the hundreds of stories he



Holly Matthews recovered from a torn ACL to win a state title in the pole vault with Maas as her coach.

BOB MISCHKA Wonders of Walworth County



Whitewater's Mark Maas has put in more than 40 years coaching track and field, much of it in charge of the Whippets but prior to that, Delavan-Darien. He recently published a book called "One Team/One Family" to share his knowledge and stories from his years spent coaching.

has about track and field.

Those stories aren't just confined to his teams, either. Ask Maas about almost any year at the WIAA State Track and Field Championships and he has a story worth sharing.

When the name of one of Wisconsin's top distance runners comes up, Maas has a story that didn't even take place at state. Chris Solinsky, a several-time WIAA state champion, 14-time All-American and now assistant coach at the University of Oregon, was the kind of team player Maas loved.

Maas shares a story of Solinsky racing in high school, where he told another runner he would pace him to the school record in an event. Kenny Bednarek, now an Olympic medalist, originated in Rice Lake. Maas remembers talking to his coach.

"To hear his coach talk about what an amazing teammate he was to the rest of his team, that means as much or more," Maas said.

It's the entire point of his book. After 40 years of coaching, he knew he had a chance to share both the good and not-so-good from over the years.

"I enjoy the backstory as much as I do the performances," Maas said. "That's the message of the book: team and family. The principles apply across the board."

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On the cover: A fleet of C Scows from across the Midwest approach the first buoy rounding during Race 4 of the 2023 C Scow National Championship Regatta held on Delavan Lake. ED KEARINS PHOTO Wonders of Walworth County



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# An international lesson about understanding

Peace Corps member brings teaching style to area students - and (way) beyond

By Callie Koehne

Verstehen, a German word roughly translated to mean "meaningful understanding," has been the focus of Julie Quartucci's sociology class at Delavan-Darien High School.

Quartucci, who has spent 30 years in the district, always does her best to do something different for her junior and senior sociology students.

"I'd rather show them what it means in practice than just go from the book," she said.

This year, just before her class got to the unit focused on culture and social structure, she heard about a former student, Zach Weerts, who graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire in 2023.

He'd recently joined the Peace Corps and accepted a teaching assignment in Togo, West Africa.

Zach had been in her AP Psychology class before he graduated from DDHS in 2018. Quartucci also knew Weerts' father, Mark, who is the principal at Prairie View Elementary School in East Troy.

Fifth graders in Holli Wolter's classroom had just made a connection to Zach in Togo, and the elementary-aged children he was teaching in his small rural village.

"We realized what a great resource we had available," Quartucci said. "It isn't often that classrooms across the world get the chance to interact and learn from one another."

Everyone involved felt like it was an opportunity that couldn't be squandered. Wolter's class started their journey

to Togo with a geography game called "Where in the world is Zach Weerts?"

At the beginning of the school year, the students guessed where he might be, picking over continents, countries and jumping across the ocean.

Once they found him, their game turned into video exchanges from Zach's Class to Wolter's, based on certain themes. Each class told the other what school was like where they lived, they talked about how the weather was different, what sports they liked to play.

In one video, Prairie View students sent a video of themselves playing in six feet of snow, an idea completely revolutionary to children who live seven degrees of latitude north of the equator.

"The thought behind all of this was giving our kids here in East Troy an

• CONTINUED ON PAGE 6



WONDERS

WALWORTH COUNTY



22:36 / 22:48

Zach Weerts, a Delavan-Darien High School graduate, speaks to students through video during a recent call. Weerts is teaching in Togo as part of the Peace Corps and is offering insight to students at both Prairie View Elementary in East Troy and at Delavan-Darien High School. At right: Students work on questions to ask Weerts.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS Wonders of Walworth County

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### COACH · CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

### WRITING THE BOOK

After his first attempt at retirement, Maas knew he wanted to take a shot at sharing some of his stories.

"I wanted there to be lessons within it. I wanted it to be lessons that go across the board," he explained.

"My wife, Lexy, she came to me one day and said, 'You have a good book inside of you. Now write it," Maas added.

It took five years for the book to come together. He credits journalist Josh Smith – a former distance runner from Elkhorn – with helping Maas pull the book together.

Smith did an article on Maas when he was inducted into the Wisconsin Track and Field Hall of Fame, and the two remained in touch.

"I would take him out for lunch periodically. He gently prodded me, and kept me going. When I needed a little push, he gave me a push. When I needed different thoughts, he gave me different thoughts," Maas said. "I am so indebted to him. There was never a time where he wasn't

encouraging to me," he added. Smith said Maas simply needed the outlet.

"He's a great person with a lot of wisdom for the next generation of coaches and teachers," Smith said. "The philosophies that Mark shares in his book are genuine. He doesn't have a coaching persona. He is that generous, he is that kind. He lives these principles on a daily basis."

In the book, Maas got a chance to talk about everyone from his own son to an unnamed youngster at Delavan-Darien High School. He talked about his fellow coaches, and he talked about his wife, Lexy – and her battle with cancer. Throughout the entire book, family is at the heart of the message, whether it be blood relatives or family by choice.

"We've gotta all be on the same page," Maas said. "You have to foster a 'team first, family first' mentality, where everyone wants the best for one another. That's when the magic happens."

#### A FEW OF THE STORIES

In the book, Maas talks about several highs and the lows.

For example, he speaks of Jacob Dennis-Oehling, a young man who almost didn't come out for high school track and field.

"He was humiliated as a seventh grader," Maas said, explaining in the book that a coach and other students laughed at his running form.

But Dennis-Oehling did do out for the team and turned into one of the talented state champions Maas said he had the privilege of coaching. As a junior, Dennis-Oehling won the 200-meter dash at state.

"I can still see him, it's just so clear," Maas said, adding that he told him, "'You're going to have to change your blocks a little bit and run the curve.' He wins the 200, and he almost never came out."

As a senior, Dennis-Oehling did something that almost every track and field athlete has nightmares about – a false start at a major meet. For the senior, it happened at state in the 100-meter dash final.

"(He) was just devastated for his team," Maas recalled. In the book, he shared how upset the athlete was, thinking he may have cost the team a state title. But the teammates rallied around Dennis-Oehling, and the team went on to secure the state title behind another win for the senior in the 200-meter.



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P.O. BOX 88, 124 Cass St. (on Button Lane) Lake Geneva, WI 53147 office@genevaupholstering.com www.genevaupholstering.com www.facebook.com/geneva.corp.com As important as the win was, teammate Louissant Minnett was waiting for Dennis-Oehling at the finish line, as promised.

Not all the stories are positive, though, and Maas is the first to point out he's made mistakes as coach. In one chapter, he shares a raw story of using sarcasm with an athlete during a pool workout.

"It haunts me to this day," Maas explained. The athlete walked out of practice and never returned.

"She may have been looking for an excuse," Maas said. "I offered it up to her on a silver platter."

Maas doesn't remember what he said to the athlete, but he knows it hurt her, enough so that he relates the story along with the meaning of the sarcos – the base of the word sarcasm – "to literally tear flesh."

"That's a lesson I learned in a heartbeat," he said, adding that he hopes others can as well.

At the end of each chapter of storytelling, Maas poses questions.

"Coaching is teaching. You're a teacher. I never understood why coaches feel it's OK to curse kids on the field. You certainly wouldn't do it in a classroom," he explained.

#### BACK TO THE PRESENT

It's ironic that Maas wrote a book about coaching, in the sense that he is so quick to credit others.

In talking through some of his stories, he was quick to say that Ed Lauzon of Delavan-Darien High School was a great role model for him as a young coach.

In high school, two teammates took the time to embrace his passion for track and take him out running with them.

Also on his mind were his throws coaches at Whitewater, Susan Reinholz and Mark Mattison – coaches who shared a position because he couldn't pay a third – and Kaptan Wilson, the longest tenured track and field coach at WHS. All of them helped make him successful.

But, beyond his assistants, Maas credited

the athletes – the athletes whose stories he has been honored to share.

"It's not about the coach. It was about the student athletes," Maas said. "Those kids accomplished their goals. What mattered was they got there."

To that point, Kilar – the senior that anchored the Whitewater 4x200 relay team to victory last year – speaks of the passion Maas has.

"You can just tell, in his heart, he believes the best in his athletes. He sees the potential in every single one of his athletes," Kilar, who is now a freshman at Florida International University, said recently.

Kilar explained that when the Whippets won their state title, they didn't know how emotionally involved Maas was up in the booth. The team got to watch the relay, though, on the bus trip home.

"To have him announce all of our names, when we were presented on that podium ... it's kind of indescribable," Kilar said. "It's just amazing, hearing his voice, hearing him so excited for us."

"What an amazing person he is. He just loves from the bottom of his heart," she added.

Dennis-Oehling, meanwhile, said while he was humbled Maas shared his story, the credit really needed to go to the coach.

"There are a thousand unwritten records of him empowering students with the same mentality and lessons that he writes about," Dennis-Oehling said. "For me specifically, he helped guide me on a path to success, not just because he wanted to 'win,' but because he saw more than just an awkward teenager. He saw someone wanting to do better and be a part of something greater.

"I wasn't skilled or confident when I started, but he had patience. Mark treated me equally to my peers and respected everyone. I wanted to model that patience and respect, because I knew how much better it made me feel," he added.

"While I did end up finding success, winning was a byproduct of the attitude put forth by his mentality and coaching."

### TEACHING STYLE · CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

opportunity to be able to expand their knowledge beyond our community into the much larger world," Mark Weerts said.

Students in Quartucci's sociology class learned everything they could about Togo before they spoke with Zach for the first time.

"I told them, 'We have boots on the ground there, so what are we going to ask?" she explained. "How are we going to look at this idea of culture and learn about another part of the world?"

Quartucci helped her class collaborate on a list of questions they put together for Zach. They asked how much things cost, what the dating scene is like, what kinds of things he isn't allowed to do. They also wanted to know what it looks like when he teaches, what their religion is and so on – basically any question they could think of, Quartucci said.

Zach got the list and sent the class a document with everything in it to help them understand the basics of the country, the ethnic make-up, and the languages. He laid everything out so they could see what it looked like on paper.

Then, he sent a video and answered every question.

He told them about being thrown into the fire of learning the local language right away, and how the first thing that he noticed when he got off the plane was how hot it was, coming from northern Wisconsin (remember, he recently graduated from UW-Eau Claire.) He also told them how amazing it was to realize that kids are kids everywhere.

"I think what a lot of times is missed is that we see a lot of National Geographic things about Africa and West Africa or just any part of the globe, and although those videos are beautiful and amazing I think it sort of 'others' them in a sense," Zach said. "It makes them seem like they're so far and different from us and it's not the case."

In the 20-minute-long video, Zach spoke to students at DDHS about the importance of taking off their western glasses, that something might initially strike them as weird but when they take the time to step back and take into account culture and history it's easier to have understanding and acceptance.

"That's what I hope my students take from this class," Quartucci said. "I hope they go out into the world and understand that any time they're interacting with other people they're using the tools they've gained in sociology. I hope they remember that it all comes down to one thing: understanding."

Prairie View fifth graders were asked what they had learned through this experience.

"Don't base your thoughts on stereotypes," they said. "Don't be afraid to ask questions and listen."



The Elkhorn Area High School gymnastics team brought home a WIAA Division 2 team title – plus two individual titles – in early March. The team and coaches, (right photo,) from the left, are: coach Amanda Merlo, Jessa Bachtell, Kate Krauklis, Maci Skala, Kaylee Frank, Jenna Heindselman, Norah Adams, Ava Zepezauer, Emily Wheeler, coach Stephanie Nelson and coach Kayla Crane. Above: Fans show support for the team before the welcome home parade. JENNIFER EISENBART Wonders of Walworth County



# Elks bring home state gymnastics title

### EAHS WINS D2 CROWN, FRANK, HEINDSELMANN WIN INDIVIDUAL TITLES

### By Chris Bennett

CORRESPONDENT

The goals of a band of motivated young women became reality March 1 when the Elkhorn Area High School gymnastics team won three titles at the WIAA Division 2 state titles.

The Elks competed March 1 and 2 in the Division 2 State Gymnastics Tournament at Wisconsin Rapids Lincoln High School, winning the team title the first day.

The team competition took place March 1, with competition in the individual events on March 2. Individually Elkhorn's Kaylee Frank tied the Division 2 state title on the vault and Jenna Heindselman captured the crown in the floor exercise.

Coach Amanda Merlo said the Elks went to Wisconsin Rapids with a title in mind and spent their season focused on that goal.

She said Elkhorn gymnasts and spectators alike kept refreshing the mobile app that tracked scores in real time during the team competition, ignoring a previous pledge not to do so.

Elkhorn parents and competitors learned of the Elks' first state title at about the same time by keeping an eye on the app, she said.

"They were super excited," Merlo said. "We talked about making history. It was very emotional – there were lots of tears."

Elkhorn advanced to state after winning the seven-team Mount Horeb sectional Feb. 24 at Mount Horeb High School. The Elks posted a team score of 140.600 and won each individual event and the all-around.

At the sectional meet the top two teams advance to state, along with the first five individuals in the four individual events and the first five individuals in all-around.

Merlo said the Elks won every invite and tournament they competed in this season, with the exception of those in which Division 1 powers Franklin/Muskego and Verona/Edgewood competed.

Franklin/Muskego won the Division 1 state title and Verona/Edgewood finished second.

Elkhorn posted a score of 140.6835 in winning the Division 2 state title, which fell just short of the school record score of 140.975, which was set in 2018.

West Salem finished second at state (140.2335). Elkhorn finished third behind West Salem at last season's state tournament.

Merlo said the Elks started to get a feeling they would win this season when Kate Krauklis posted a no-fault balance beam routine and Heindselman completed a strong floor routine.

Heindselman's mother coached Elkhorn gymnastics when Merlo, under her maiden name of Lockhart, competed for the Elks and graduated in 2005.

Henidselman scored 9.3 in winning the floor exercise. Merlo said the senior wondered if the performance would be enough.

"She put it all out there," Merlo said of Heindselman. "She left everything on the mat and kept saying, 'It's in the judge's hands.""

Frank finished 13th in the floor exercise (8.8667). Merlo said Frank was hoping for state titles in both the vault and bars, adding that she had competed this season after going through reconstructive surgery last spring for a torn anterior cruciate ligament.

Frank and Rice Lake's Avery Ash tied for the title in the vault (9.4167). Frank came in third on bars (9.1833).

Merlo said the Elks will enter next season with another strong team. Heindselman is the only senior this year but will be missed.

"Those will be some huge shoes to fill," Merlo said of Heindselman. "The rest of the team are sophomores and juniors."

She expects team members to bring an extra energy with them when the new season begins.

"We have some more success to look ahead to. I think this will make them motivated to try to come back and repeat," Merlo said.

### Precision Plus awarded state Manufacturer of the Year

Reader Precision Solutions' Precision Plus division was recently awarded the Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year 2023. This accolade is a testament to the company's unwavering commitment to manufacturing excellence, innovation, community engagement, and workforce development.

Thirty-six manufacturing companies in Wisconsin were named among the finalists for the annual honors. Nine companies, who represent the state's robust and diverse manufacturing industry, were declared winners for outstanding achievements in manufacturing Feb. 22 at a black-tie banquet at the Pfister Hotel in Milwaukee.

The Wisconsin Manufacturer of the Year award – presented annually by the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, Baker Tilly, and Michael Best – celebrates outstanding achievements in manufacturing, recognizing companies that demonstrate a strong commitment to business growth, professional excellence, and community support.

Precision Plus was selected from a competitive field of nominees for its significant contributions to the manufacturing sector, particularly in the areas of business growth, technological advancement, engineering innovation, and community stewardship.

"This award belongs to each and every one of our

employees. It is their hard work, innovative ideas, and dedication to our core values that have propelled us to this moment. All of them have played a crucial part in this achievement," said Michael J Reader, President and Owner of RPS.

"Receiving this award underscores our team's dedication to pushing the boundaries of what's possible, our collaborative spirit, and our unwavering focus on delivering superior precision solutions to our clients," Reader added.

The selection committee highlighted several key factors contributing to Precision Plus's win, including the company's adoption of cutting-edge manufacturing technologies, its focus on sustainable operations, and its active role in community and industry partnerships.

These initiatives not only bolster the company's competitive edge but also contribute positively to Wisconsin's economic and social fabric.

"Looking to the future, Precision Plus and Iseli Precision remain committed to maintaining their leadership position in the advanced manufacturing and precision machining industries," said Ray Jargstorf, Marketing and Brand Manager for RPS.

"We look forward to cultivating our continued partnership with the WMC and its affiliate entities Wisconsin Business World, the Wisconsin Safety Council and the newly formed Wisconsin Defense Industry Council," Jargstorf added.

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