September 17, 2015

Weekly News From Around the Columbia Union Conference

Columbia Union Membership Tops 144,00
At the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee meeting today, Rob Vandeman, executive secretary of the Columbia Union, reported that as of June 30, membership in the Columbia Union is 144,207, an increase of .76 percent from March 31. Vandeman also shared that there are 822 churches and companies.—V. Michelle Bernard

1,120 Volunteer at Faith for Families Event

The forecast predicted rain, but that didn’t dampen the spirits of members who spent an afternoon going door to door across Philadelphia and Reading for the Pennsylvania Conference’s “Faith for Families” event last weekend.—Tamyra Horst

Glenville Installs First Woman Pastor
Allegheny West Conference and the Glenville church in Cleveland recently made history when leaders installed the first female pastor, Regina Johnson. Johnson is serving as Glenville’s administrative pastor.—Allegheny West Conference Staff

New Assistant Treasurer Joins Ohio Conference Team

After a lengthy search for a new assistant treasurer, the Ohio Conference hired Roy Simpson. Simpson, son of a pastor, lived in five different countries while
Potomac Conference Names Human Resources Director

Fred Warfield, the administrative pastor for the Potomac Conference’s Takoma Park (Md.) church, has accepted an offer to serve as the conference’s director of Human Resources beginning October 1.—Tiffany Doss

Read the entire September Visitor online!

More Adventist News

Blue Mountain Academy Staff, Alumni Celebrate 60 Years of Ministry
Columbia Union Hosts Health Ministry Training
3-D Printer Helps Enhance Takoma Academy STEM Program
Adventist Community Center Warms Hearts in Dublin
Adventists, Grieving After Deadly Storm, Comfort Others in Dominica
Hospital Sued for Not Giving Adventist Nurse the Sabbath Off
Thousands of Syrian Refugees Stranded in Budapest
Columbia Union Membership Tops 144,000

Michelle Bernard

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At the Columbia Union Conference Executive Committee meeting today, Rob Vandeman, executive secretary of the Columbia Union, reported that as of June 30, membership in the Columbia Union is 144,207, an increase of .76 percent from March 31. Vandeman also shared that there are 822 churches and companies.

Allegheny East Conference showed the most growth with a membership increase of 1.39 percent. They now have 38,958 members and 150 churches and companies on the books.

Below the totals from each of the conferences:

**Allegheny East Conference**
Churches: 119
Companies: 31
Members: 38,958

**Allegheny West Conference**
Churches: 54
Companies: 8
Members: 15,452

**Chesapeake Conference**
Churches: 84
Companies: 9
Members: 14,718

**Mountain View Conference**
Churches: 33
Companies: 2
Members: 2,304

**New Jersey Conference**
Churches: 88
Companies: 8
Members: 15,709
Ohio Conference
Churches: 91
Companies: 7
Members: 11,527

Pennsylvania Conference
Churches: 114
Companies: 6
Members: 11,287

Potomac Conference
Churches: 143
Companies: 25
Members: 34,252
The forecast predicted rain, but that didn’t dampen the spirits of members who spent an afternoon going door to door across Philadelphia and Reading for the Pennsylvania Conference’s “Faith for Families” event last weekend.

Story by Tamyra Horst

The 1,120 volunteers included church members and friends, pastors, teachers and students from local Seventh-day Adventist schools, staff and students from Blue Mountain Academy in Hamburg and conference leaders. It rained in the communities around Philadelphia, but not in the city itself until after the teams returned to the churches. In Reading more than 120 people went out despite torrential downpours, determined to not let the weather prevent them from connecting with people.

The groups gathered at 13 churches, then distributed door hangers and literature and prayed with people in the neighborhoods surrounding the churches. Volunteers returned to the churches with stories of how God had used them—many sharing that those they met said their visits were an answer to prayer. Others were excited that people they met signed up for Bible studies. Volunteers also invited people to upcoming evangelistic meetings.

“We’re expecting 100 baptisms, [because of the activity]” says Tim Bailey, director of Leadership and Spiritual Growth, who is already working with the pastoral team to plan next year’s “Faith for Families” event. “We want to see this be an ongoing part of our evangelism efforts.”
Glenville Installs First Woman Pastor

Michelle Bernard

*Allegheny West Conference and the Glenville church in Cleveland recently made history when leaders installed the first female pastor, Regina Johnson. Johnson is serving as Glenville’s administrative pastor.*

*Story by Allegheny West Conference staff*

Johnson graduated from Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Md., in May 2012, then joined the WAU Office of Ministry team as chaplain of ministry. While serving at WAU, she led the development of Crossroads, a student-led church service, started several new ministries and helped prepare 85 students for baptism.

Johnson has also been actively involved in service and outreach around the world. She led an evangelistic series in Uganda, which led to the baptism of more than 200 people. In India she led a group of students who graduated more than 2,300 children from Vacation Bible School. She most recently traveled to Brazil, where her mission group restored and renovated an ex-drug rehabilitation center, conducted a “world cup tournament” and helped form a cheerleading squad for children in a low-income neighborhood.

Pastor Johnson encourages all to “stop trying to understand God and understand that He knows what He’s doing.” She says she “loves the Lord, and has realized that listening to His voice is the best thing you could ever do.”

MyRon Edmonds, Glenville’s senior pastor, says they couldn’t be happier to have Johnson on their staff.
New Assistant Treasurer Joins Ohio Conference Team

Michelle Bernard

*After a lengthy search for a new assistant treasurer, the Ohio Conference hired Roy Simpson. Simpson, son of a pastor, lived in five different countries while growing up in Central America.*

*Story by Heidi Shoemaker*

He opted to study accounting because he “wanted to work for the church, and numbers have always been my strongest area in school,” he shares. Simpson has a bachelor’s in business administration, and expects to complete an MBA in finance in about a year.

While living in Cleveland, Simpson was very active in the Ebenezer Spanish church. He continues to work with the youth in the area, and is helping coordinate a Hispanic youth festival. “I hope to give my best [to] the Ohio Conference because I consider serving God and this church a big privilege and responsibility. … Serving this church has always been my dream, and I'll put all my heart to give the best of me,” he says.

Simpson replaces Nancy Barnett, who served as associate treasurer for more than four years.
We are pleased to announce that Fred Warfield, currently the administrative pastor for the Takoma Park church (Md.), has accepted an offer to serve as Potomac Conference’s Director of Human Resources, beginning Oct. 1, 2015.

Fred has a heart for people and during his time at Takoma Park managed the hiring and evaluation processes of church staff, oversaw the development and execution of contracts and developed church voted policies and procedures. Fred will complete his Master in Business Administration in December (2015) adding to his existing degrees of a Master of Arts in Youth/Young Adult Ministry and Bachelor of Arts in Religion. Prior to coming to Potomac in 2009, Fred served as a chaplain and educator at Adventist academies in California and Illinois.

Joining Fred will be his wife Lindzie and their two daughters, Phoebe and Michaela. Fred and Lindzie are also expecting another baby at the turn of the New Year. We invite you to join us in welcoming the Warfield family as they join the conference’s administrative team.
Blue Mountain Academy Staff, Alumni Celebrate 60 Years of Ministry

Michelle Bernard

In 1952 a real estate agent was tasked with finding the right property for the future Blue Mountain Academy (BMA). When he found it, he immediately called the president of what was then the East Pennsylvania Conference to share the news; however, he left out one vital piece of information: the land wasn't for sale. Two conference employees toured the 683-acre grounds in Hamburg, Pa., that held six farms, a dairy, 169 head of cattle, nine buildings, seven barns and machinery to operate the entire plant. It also included a summer camp with five buildings, a swimming pool and summer vacation cottage.

Story by Caron Oswald

But, owner J. Lee Bausher wasn't interested in selling. Undaunted, the search committee voted to purchase the property as soon as it was available.

Bausher's heart softened when he learned Seventh-day Adventists were the potential buyers. His grandmother had been an Adventist. Conference leaders and Bausher signed an agreement January 1, 1953.

When BMA opened in the fall of 1955, there was no heat or hot water in the dormitories and no glass in the classroom windows. Students wore winter coats, boots and earmuffs to class. But, by the end of the school year, the classrooms, dorms, cafeteria and gymnasium were finished and heated.

Through the 60 years of BMA's educational ministry, students, their families and staff have found it to be a place that facilitates life-changing journeys with God.

“‘My dad had not worked for seven years when BMA opened,’ remembers Elaine Miller Ferguson ('56), former academy business manager. She thought attending BMA was impossible, but her dad didn’t. ‘You are going!’ he told her. ‘Somehow the money was always there,’ she says.
John and Nancy Edison began their faith adventure as faculty in 1959. For 43 years, Nancy taught piano and organ, and John taught band, choir, orchestra and geometry. Their greatest personal growth came from the students. “The kids changed us,” they share.

During Celica Galeano’s (‘14) junior year, her faith and trust in God became real. A divorce shattered her family and BMA was no longer affordable. Friends and staff supported her with prayer. And, God did the impossible and allowed her to continue attending. “Sometimes I wondered if He was too busy for me, if He really cared,” she says, [But], God was providing through people in my life. He is always listening.”

David Morgan (‘82), principal, adds, “During its 60 years, BMA’s journey continues to be built on faith and the God-ordained adventure continues. The mission remains the same: ‘...to provide a Christ-centered Seventh-day Adventist Christian education that leads students into lives of service for God’.”

Cover photo: BMA’s first students get a taste of pioneering as they attend classes in unfurnished, unheated buildings. Photo from Youth’s Instructor, September 9, 1958.
Columbia Union Hosts Health Ministry Training

Michelle Bernard

The Columbia Union Conference will host “Creating a Vibrant Health Ministry” October 2-4 at the Allegheny East Conference Center in Pine Forge, Pa. The comprehensive training will cover the Adventist philosophy of health and health ministry, methodological approaches and basic health knowledge to be shared in congregations and communities. Register here.

Story by Carolina Ramos
3-D Printer Helps Enhance Takoma Academy STEM Program

Michelle Bernard

*Takoma Academy’s desire to have a STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) program that rivals those of the top tier schools in the nation took a huge leap forward with its recent acquisition of a 3-D printer.*

Shaun Robinson, science teacher and robotics club advisor, says, “3-D printing is one of the areas that we are focusing on for the 2015-16 school year. It is a rapidly advancing technology that crosses many disciplines. Students in the best institutions are increasing their design and engineering skills with curriculum built around 3-D printing.”

A 3-D printer is an industrial robot that can print in plastic, metal, nylon and various other material. It can print manufacturing prototypes, end user products, aircraft engine parts and even human organs using a person’s own cells. 3-D printers use a variety of very different types of additive manufacturing technologies, but they all share one thing in common: they create a three-dimensional object.

Takoma Academy obtained the printer through a Versacare grant that the Office of Advancement obtained for the school. TA’s STEM department’s overall goal is to have a state-of-the-art 3-D printing lab with multiple printers and workstations.

*Feature photo: Members of Takoma Academy’s robotics club and Shaun Robinson, science teacher and Robotics Club advisor, surround the new 3-D printer.*
Mark Finley officially opens the Cuisle Center near the Irish capital’s downtown area.

In a teeming Irish city of more than half a million people, a quiet center of respite just south of downtown Dublin is rapidly becoming a hub for the local community.

The Cuisle Center, whose name means “pulse” in Irish, is open most days in the newly refurbished Ranelagh Seventh-day Adventist Church and offers the community a selection of healthy snacks as well as health screenings, massage, counseling, and simply a safe place to chat and relax.

Its core volunteer staff of doctors, therapists, and counselors say they are surprised at the difference the center has made in just a few short weeks and are delighted to give freely of their time to support the initiative.

“This is a gift to the community,” U.S. evangelist Mark Finley said as he officially opened the center last Thursday, Sept. 10.

“Jesus was concerned about the physical, mental, and spiritual connections of human beings,” Finley said, noting that such centers are, in fact, “the arms, the feet, the eyes, the heart of Christ, to bless others in our communities.”

The Cuisle Center is among some 350 Life Hope community centers being established in Adventist churches around the world, including in a church and evangelism training center that Finley and his wife, Teenie, are helping build in their hometown of Haymarket, Virginia.

The Dublin center has its roots in an evangelistic program that Finley and the Adventist Church’s Irish Mission began to implement in the city about two years ago.

It’s also a dream come true for the Ranelagh church’s senior pastor, Gavin Anthony, who is convinced that ministry needs to encompass the mind, the body, and the spirit.

“I feel increasingly convicted that we need to approach each person using that multifaceted approach,” he said.

Anthony, who spends several hours a week at the center, said he has been astonished at its simple effectiveness.

“As long as we have the doors open and are available to the community, people really do come through the doors, and they come to church,” he said.

Church leaders couldn’t help but notice the stream of well-wishers who passed through the building during the opening ceremony. Those included a man who initially had been referred to the center for a health check by a nearby physiotherapy practice, a woman who has re-established her connection with the church after many years and is now attending church and developing new friendships, and a middle-aged woman who first came through the
door just two weeks ago and, while puffing on an e-cigarette, remarked how much she loved the friendliness of the people in the center. It turned out that she also enjoys a good massage.

The friendliness has made an impact. The local florist refused payment for the attractive ribbon and bow she put together for the official opening. She told Irish Mission president David Neal how delighted she was at how the center was bringing the community together and providing hope.

Nomsa Maphango, a children’s doctor working at the center, said she volunteered her time because she liked the more relaxed environment where people could open up more than at the hospital.

“It’s a blessing God gave me to work as a physician,” she said. “It is a responsibility for me to be able to give back to serve the community and help people get better health.”

Read “I’m Scared of Jesus’: A Plea at a Mark Finley Meeting”

Similar sentiments were expressed by the other volunteers, including the center’s manager, Edith Samambwa, a health educator who took a sabbatical from the Irish health service to help establish the center. She was planning to go overseas as a missionary but has instead found a mission field in Ireland. Her initial expenses are being paid by a donation from the Emerald Foundation, a group of Adventist philanthropists in the United States.

The official opening is a step in the journey. Finance will always be an issue, but generous donations are helping, church leaders said. More volunteers will be needed as the center becomes an increasingly greater part of local life.

“This is an extremely exciting program we are starting, and it is very exciting to see where it will be heading in the future,” Anthony said.

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Adventists, Grieving After Deadly Storm, Comfort Others in Dominica

At least one Adventist believer is among the more than 30 people killed in the Caribbean storm.

Posted September 16, 2015

By Royston Philbert and IAD staff

Seventh-day Adventist volunteers are providing meals and moral support to scores of people on the small Caribbean island of Dominica after a violent tropical storm killed more than 30 people, including at least one Adventist believer.

Tropical Storm Erika devastated the small island of about 72,000 people on Aug. 27, triggering mudslides and destroying roads, bridges, and homes.

Nearly 20,000 people have been affected by the storm, and half of the island is without electricity. Nine communities were hit especially hard, and one of them, Petite Savanne, saw all its residents evacuated by helicopters.

Flights into Dominica's Douglas Charles Airport have been suspended since the storm struck.

Volunteers with the Dominica branch of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency are feeding about 120 persons at two main shelters, said Priscilla Prevost, the local ADRA coordinator.

In addition, she said, “church volunteers have been preparing three meals per day at the church’s Roseau Community Services Center since residents were evacuated from their destroyed homes.”

Roseau is the capital of Dominica.
A view of the damaged Berean Bible Church and school located across from the Roseau Adventist school in Dominica. (ADRA)

Last week, Collin Thorne, ADRA’s coordinator for the Adventist Church’s East Caribbean Conference, which oversees the islands of Barbados and Dominica, joined church volunteers in distributing food and water in the worst-hit communities, which are only accessible by boat. Adventist counselors offered support to people during the trip.

The tragedy has sent shockwaves across the Adventist community.

In addition to the member’s death, 10 Adventists lost their homes and are currently staying in shelters, said R. Danforth Francis, president of the East Caribbean Conference.

The Adventist grade school in Roseau was flooded and suffered damage as was the Adventist church building in the west coast village of Dublanc, he said.

“We are thankful our church members and pastors are all actively involved in the relief effort,” he said.

Kern Tobias, president of the Caribbean Union, appealed to church leaders and members throughout the dozens of islands comprising the English Caribbean territory to help Dominica.

Churches across neighboring islands began collecting funds during church services days after the storm hit.

In the Central Adventist Church in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, pastor J. Wilmoth James comforted many of the members of his congregation who were born in Dominica.

“We are all traumatized by the tremendous loss of life in the tragedy, but we are assured that God is alive and is still in control of this world,” James said.

The church’s North Caribbean Conference, which oversees the U.S. Virgin Islands and nine other islands, is involved in collecting special offerings for disaster relief efforts in neighboring Dominica.

ADRA is currently engaged in discussions with Dominica’s government to assist in building 10 homes for people who lost everything in the storm, Prevost said.

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The U.S. government is suing a privately owned hospital group in the state of Minnesota, accusing it of revoking a job offer in retaliation against a Seventh-day Adventist nurse who sought the Sabbath off.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a U.S. government agency, says North Memorial Health Care violated U.S. law on religious accommodation in the workplace by rescinding the job offer for Emily Sure-Ondara to work as a registered nurse.

Sure-Ondara, 37, received the written job offer in November 2013 and then asked her new employers for a schedule that would allow her to not work from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, according to the U.S. government lawsuit filed Wednesday.

North Memorial rejected the Sabbath request and withdrew the job offer eight days later, the lawsuit says.

North Memorial officials refused the request because “they couldn’t do it under the [labor union contact],” U.S. government lawyer Jessica Palmer-Denig told the Minnesota Star Tribune newspaper.

Sure-Ondara later told North Memorial that she would be willing to work on Sabbath, but the Robbinsdale, Minnesota-based hospital group withdrew her job offer anyway, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said in a statement.

“We plan to show North Memorial’s decision to withdraw the job offer after Sure-Ondara’s request was retaliatory and unlawful,” said Jean P. Kamp, another government lawyer.

“Job applicants and employees may request a religious accommodation at any time,” Kamp said in the statement. “Applicants are not required to notify a potential employer about an accommodation issue before starting a job, though that’s what Ms. Sure-Ondara did. This lawsuit is about what happened next.”

The Adventist Church views Sabbath observance as a matter of personal conscience in the health-care industry, says Todd R. McFarland, associate general counsel for the Adventist world church, who has been involved in a number of Sabbath workplace cases.

“It is up to the individual member,” McFarland told the Adventist Review. “While some Sabbath work is clearly necessary in the hospital setting, in non-Adventist hospitals not all work may be necessary.”

Adventist doctors and nurses who work at Adventist-owned hospitals may have little choice but to accept Sabbath shifts. However, Adventists who have worked in non-Adventist hospitals say employers are usually happy to give Sabbaths off in exchange for Sunday shifts, when people of other faiths ask for the day off.

“Even in cases where it is necessary, working on the Sabbath is at best less than ideal,” McFarland says. “It is perfectly appropriate for a church member to ask for an accommodation, and an employer should grant it if doing so would not cause an undue hardship.”

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission said it sought and failed to reach a resolution with North Memorial before filing the lawsuit. It is seeking back pay for Sure-Ondara, compensation for job-search expenses, and compensation for “emotional pain, suffering, inconvenience, loss of enjoyment of life, and humiliation,” according to...
the lawsuit. It also wants North Memorial to adjust it employment policies to prevent a similar situation in the future.

“Federal law protects the right of job applicants or employees to request a religious accommodation without fear that the request will lead to retaliation," says John Hendrickson, regional attorney for the U.S. agency’s Chicago District.

North Memorial, which operates several hospitals and scores of clinics in Minnesota, said it would not comment on ongoing litigation, the Star Tribune reported Thursday.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has been particularly sensitive to claims of religious discrimination in recent years. The commission chair from 2001 to 2006 was Cari M. Dominguez, a Seventh-day Adventist and member of the Spencerville Adventist Church in Maryland.

In a case similar to North Memorial, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission sued a franchisee of the Dunkin’ Donuts restaurant chain last year for rescinding a job offer to an Adventist believer who had refused to start work on a Friday night. The franchisee — the Citi Brands manufacturing facility in Arden, North Carolina — agreed in July 2015 to settle the lawsuit by paying $22,000 to the Adventist man and taking measures to ensure that such an incident did not occur again.

Other Adventist employees have also found themselves in court in an effort to protect their Sabbath beliefs.

Last June, a U.S. federal judge ruled that Mini Price Storage, a chain of self-storage businesses based in Virginia Beach, Virginia, fired Adventist employee Sean Mohammed in 2011 in retaliation for his refusal to work on Sabbath and awarded him more than $150,000 in back pay.

In April, three retired federal government employees and Adventists who worked as ushers for the Washington Nationals went to court on accusations that the baseball team changed its work policy to prevent them from skipping games between sundown Friday and sundown Saturday to observe the Sabbath.

In July 2014, an Adventist air traffic controller, Matthew Gray, won a complaint against a U.S. government labor union that had ordered him to work on Sabbath in retaliation for his decision to quit the union.

Meanwhile, the nurse at the center of the Minnesota case said she has found a job that allows her to follow her practice of attending worship services on Friday evenings and Saturdays. She now works as a home-care nurse with a company called Fairview Health Services, the Star Tribune reported.

“I never got a first day on the job," Sure-Ondara says of North Memorial. "Where I am now, I am accommodated."
Thousands of Syrian Refugees Stranded in Budapest

World News

The Adventist Review shares the following world news from Religion News Service as a service to readers. Opinions expressed in these reports do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Review or the Seventh-day Adventist Church. -- Editors

More than 100,000 persons were displaced from Syria.

Posted September 10, 2015

BY RICK JONES ©2015 Presbyterian News Service

The Syrian refugee crisis has drawn increased attention this week with the heartbreaking photos of a lifeless child’s body being pulled from the Aegean Sea. Aylan Kurdi was one of at least a dozen refugees who drowned while seeking safety from the conflict in Syria. In the past few days, thousands more refugees have found themselves stranded at a Budapest train station as they seek to cross the border into Austria.

Images out of Hungary show people either camped out at a local train station, or swiftly running along the tracks toward the border. Witnesses describe the station as a place of “disorder and confusion” as families gather on blankets on the station floor. The railway company suspended all trains leaving the Hungarian capital for transport security reasons.

Police have tried to contain the families at the station, yet some have broken away to reach the border by foot, nearly 100 miles away. Meantime, Hungarian volunteers are trying to distribute food, water and other supplies to those who continue to wait.

“In addition to the work we are already doing in Syria and Lebanon, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance continues to support its European partners and members of the ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together) as they minister to the large numbers of stranded families,” said the Rev. Dr. Laurie Kraus, PDA coordinator. “Our hearts are broken as we try to stand on every front with those who are suffering. We are working to provide ways for local congregations and individuals to engage in advocacy and hospitality for Syrian refugees and others.”

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, an estimated 2,000 refugees are crossing into Hungary along the southern border each day. Government officials report they are setting up a “temporary social zone” not far from the train station and have asked for technical help for housing units. The camp is not expected to be functioning for at least another week and a half.

“Today the plight of the four million Syrian refugees has come a little closer to home,” said Susan Krehbiel, PDA catalyst for Refugees and Asylum. “Yet we can be part of the solution—praying for the refugees to find strength and hope and for the countries who are hosting them. At such desperate times, we are thankful to the many European citizens for their heartfelt responses to provide shelter, food, and friendship to the families who have risked their lives in search of safety.”

Since the first of the year, more than 100,000 displaced persons from Syria, Northern and Middle Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq have registered in Hungary alone.

“Europe—both West and East—is being tested on the strength of its commitment to human dignity and rights. This
is a test of our human values and Christian legacy,” said the World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit in a Sept. 4 statement issued from the WCC headquarters in Geneva.

Tveit continued, “Today the countries of Europe are confronted with the worst refugee crisis since the Second World War. But compassion and action seem to be tragically insufficient to meet the pressing need. This is so despite the tragedies reported daily from the shores and borders of Europe – let alone from the countries from which these people have been forced to flee by conflict, oppression and extreme poverty.”

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