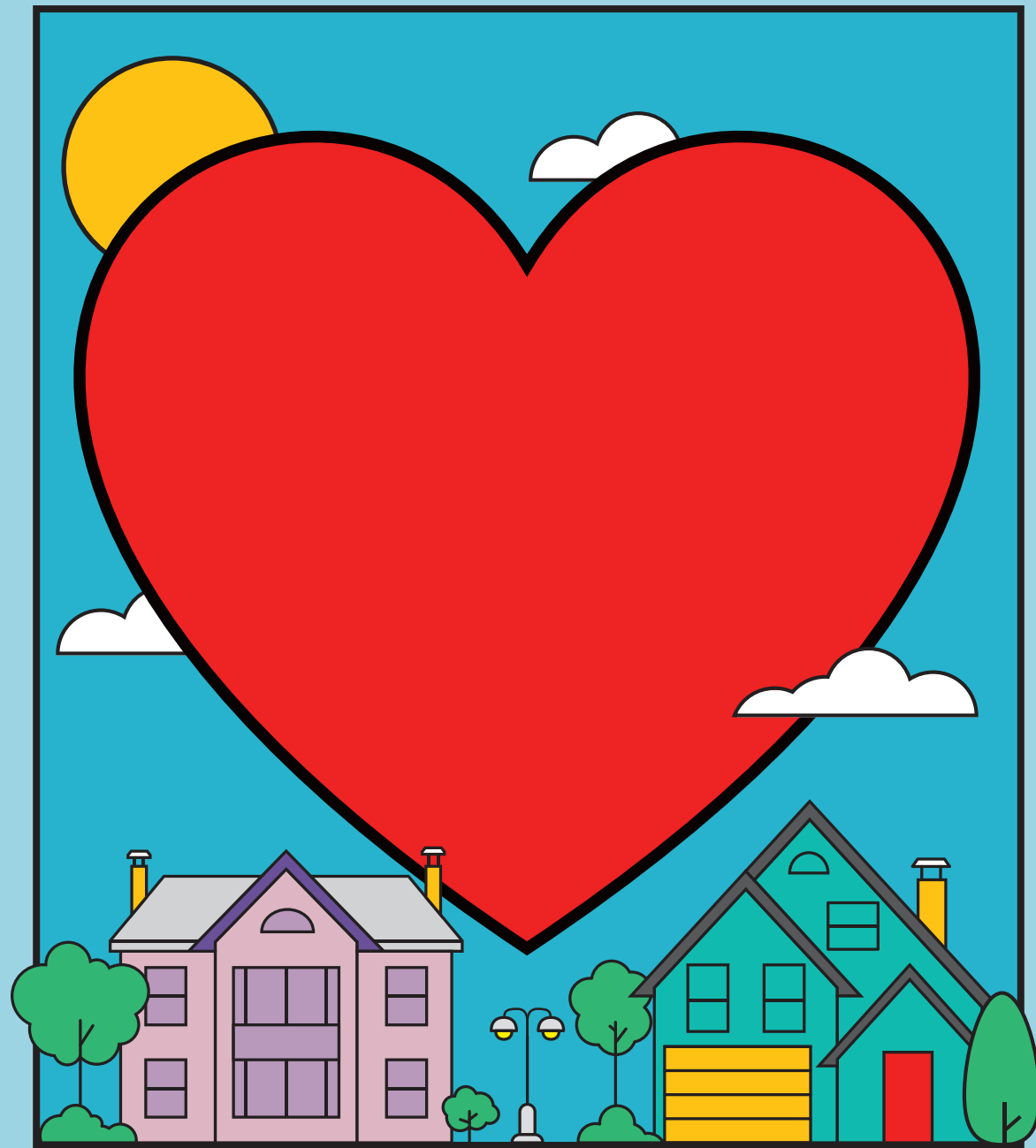


The Heart of the



Suburbs

Checking the pulse of our suburban residents reveals a love for not just community but *communities*, as well as abundant nature and places for the pooches. A little extra elbow room doesn't hurt, either.

By MILWAUKEE MAGAZINE STAFF
and CONTRIBUTORS;
Edited by CHRIS DROSNER

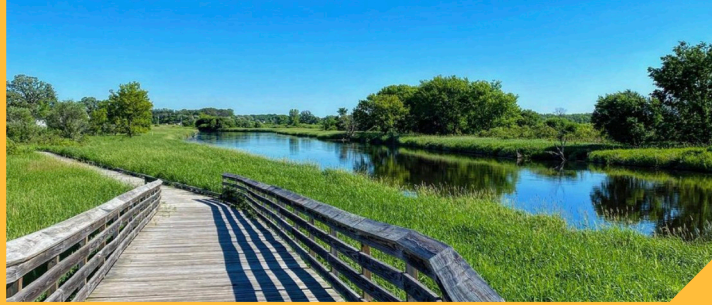
Neighbors and New Beginnings

A MOVE TO THE SUBURBS felt inevitable. Our tolerance for hunting down narrow parallel parking spots and waking to boisterous late-night street chatter had waned, but we weren't ready to do away with weekly volleyball at Fat Daddy's and Saturday brunch with friends at Café Benelux. We were delighted to learn, though, that when moving to the suburbs, our social life wouldn't skip a beat.

When first roaming our third of a New Berlin acre as two newlyweds in our 20s, we were greeted by a couple who emerged from the line of 15-foot arborvitae at the edge of our backyard: "If you hear music, come over and have a drink."

While it took some time to adjust to a new version of adulthood – so much lawn mowing! – our suburban neighbors surrounded us with a sense of safety that seemed from another era. They brought our garbage cans up the driveway when I was home alone with a baby, texted us when we left our garage door open and inquired about a suspicious message written in blood on our window (a now-retired Halloween window cling). They were looking out for us.

The neighborhood would continue to churn out eclectic personalities, gifting us friends that share our sense of humor and thirst for fun. Now, a walk around the neighborhood might take three hours as we stop to chat with friends while kids chase each other around the yard. A trip to the mailbox may turn into an impromptu afternoon playdate and happy hour, followed by an 8 p.m. pizza dinner on a patio scattered with toys. We're friendly with each other's parents and good friends. We plan dinner dates and holiday round robins. We've grown together as our families grow, and we've kept the party going – celebrating a shared love for the community that, together, we've made a home. – LAURA BENGIS



A nod to...
WAUKESHA

SUBURBAN OASIS

CAMOUFLAGED IN THE TALL GRASS, a stout green heron stood with its wiry feet covered in marsh water. I watched intently for its next calculated move; it was clearly on the hunt. Suddenly, the bird stabbed its sharp beak into the water, yanking out a frog in a triumphant catch.

In that moment, it was easy to forget the nearby roar of traffic and the fact that I was just a two-minute walk from a strip mall full of chain stores. The Fox River Park Boardwalk – a marshy oasis right off of Sunset Drive – was not the kind of place I expected to find in Waukesha. Nor did I anticipate that life in the suburbs would help me kindle a deeper love for nature.

When the pandemic started, my partner and I spent a lot of time watching birds

in the giant pine tree outside our Waukesha apartment. Cardinals, chickadees, sparrows and woodpeckers thrived in its branches, coming and going freely when we could not. We eventually got a bird feeder, and started going for walks to spot as many species as we could with our cheap binoculars.

Places like Fox River Park, the Glacial Drumlin State Trail and Retzer Nature Center became a refuge for us. Watching wildlife was not a distraction from reality; it was a way to remind us that other realities exist.

– JENNIFER WALTER



Why I Love...

Menomonee Falls

ANITA GUPTA

My husband and I moved to the Milwaukee suburbs from India in 2002 when he got a job here. We raised our daughters in Menomonee Falls, and we feel very happy and fulfilled. People have been generally accepting of us as locals, but there are also so many opportunities to connect with our Indian culture here.

There's a large concentration of Indian people and businesses in the suburbs surrounding Menomonee Falls, especially Brookfield. I am the chairperson for community outreach and education at the Hindu Temple of Wisconsin in Pewaukee, a religious and cultural center for Hindu people. Whether we're celebrating an

Indian festival or hosting a language class, our goal is to help others learn about and practice Indian traditions – even those who don't share our background.

My work also allows me to give back to the community in a meaningful way, which is a core tenet of Hinduism. My parents always taught me that being of service is just as important as praying. Whether I'm planning an event at the temple or tutoring kids at the Kumon franchise I own in Waukesha, I'm happy to be able to live out that part of my identity here. – AS TOLD TO ASHLEY ABRAMSON

BURB BITE

Though he never visited and has no official ties to Greendale, a cement statue of Norman Rockwell painting a canvas sits in front of the village hall. Residents often adorn the uber-American artist with seasonal hats.

A nod to...
GREENDALE

Unrefused Refuse

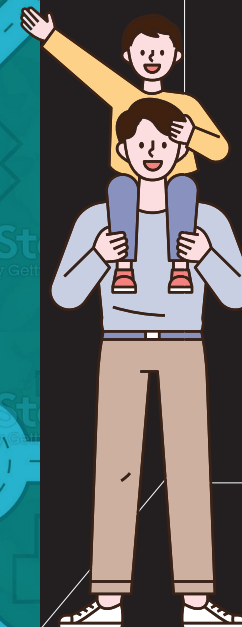
THERE ARE MANY reasons to like Greendale, but my husband has one that speaks uniquely to the suburban experience: It has an awesome dump. The village's Refuse and Recycling Center makes cleanup after his weekend home renovations easy, accepting stuff (from residents only) that's usually hard to dispose of: demolished cabinets, drywall, broken doors, brick, old furniture, carpet, even old yard toys. It's not exactly a reason to live in Greendale, but it is a nice fringe benefit. – LAURA BENGIS

A nod to...
OAK CREEK

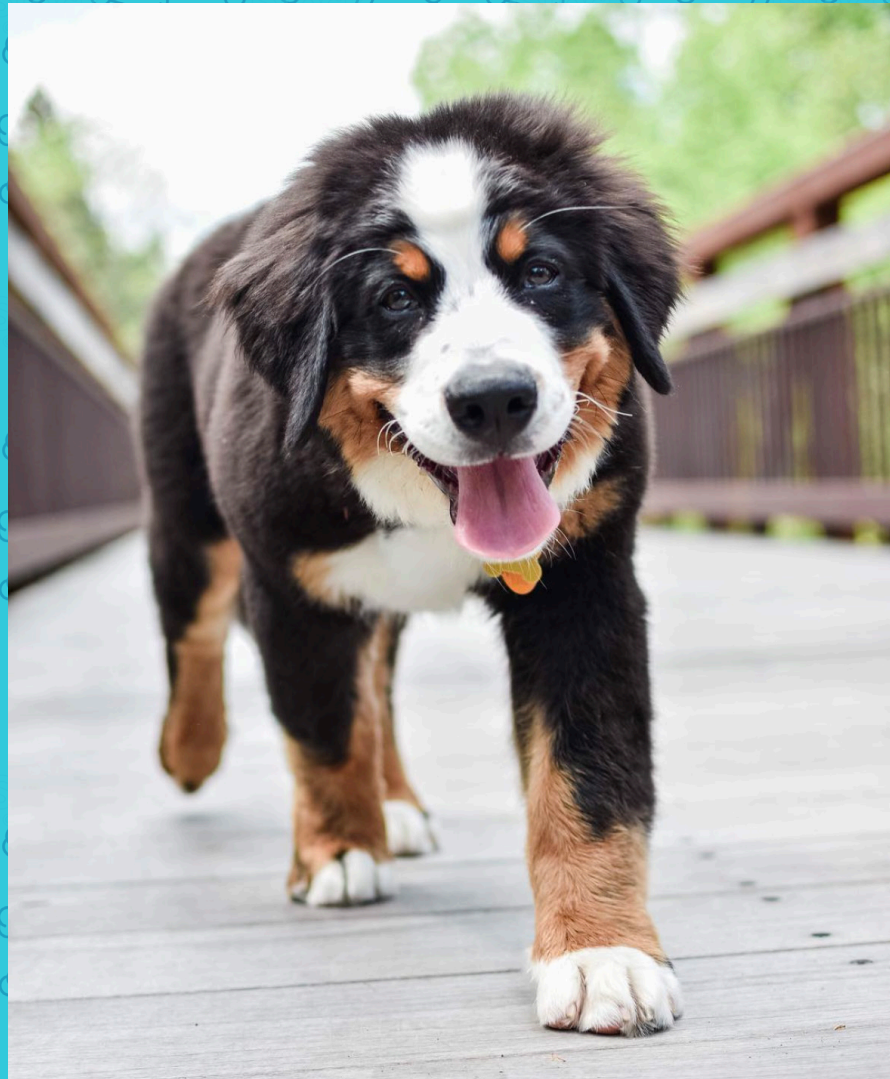
Coming Into One's Own

WHEN I WAS 4, my father would bring me on walks around Oak Creek's Tanglewood Apartments. He'd hoist me on his wide shoulders for a better view. It was the turn of the millennium, and there wasn't much to see on the strolls – our little apartment complex, a few scattered stores, a nearby Wendy's that I considered the finest of dining. Otherwise, Oak Creek was a place of open fields and empty lots. My dad, a Boston transplant, wasn't above the occasional "middle of nowhere" dig.

We moved to Kenosha shortly after that, and for the next 20 years, we would visit the old homestead every few months. With time, each visit turned into a snapshot of a rapidly changing suburb. Fields turned to construction turned to new stores, a bustling town center, dining even finer than my beloved Wendy's. Tiny Tanglewood isn't just an isolated outpost anymore – It's one complex among many, with new housing on the way. As I've come into my own, I've watched the city do the same. And while a small part of me remains nostalgic for the quiet place I spent my first years, a stronger part is glad to see it thrive. – ARCHER PARQUETTE



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Xxxx's dog
Xxxx takes
a stroll in
Fox Point

A nod to...
FOX POINT

FOR THE DOGS

DOG WALKING IS A GOOD WAY TO meet your neighbors – the furry ones, especially, but sometimes we learn the owners' names, too. And it may be a small thing, but there are marvelous places for this necessary pastime in Fox Point: relatively easy access to Lake Michigan, a paved path along Lake Drive and lakeside streets lined with beautiful homes.

To keep things tidy, the village has installed nine "DogiPots" that dispense poop bags and accept the bagged deposits. Three years ago, during a particularly snowy winter, village plows even removed a two-foot-wide section off the side of roads to make it easier for dogs to do their business. Talk about civic doody. – LARRY SUSSMAN



A nod to...
SHOREWOOD

The Un-Burb

I HATE THE SUBURBS. Always have, always will. Yet my life and my wife landed me in Shorewood, and I've come to love this place.

I try not to call it a suburb, except that it is one, so I make myself feel better by saying it's an old-growth, inner-ring suburb. Gives it a vintage

and arboreal feel, which is accurate. Most residences are built of bricks, and generations older than the people in them. The yards are tiny and the neighbors close. You won't find tacky subdivisions or 6,000 matching silver SUVs on the roads.

The village does a good job with the disguise it wears as a Milwaukee

IN DEFENSE OF A COMMUTE

WHEN THE PANDEMIC shutdown forced many of us to set up shop at home, a silver lining emerged: no more commutes. For WFH warriors, time spent driving to the office was instead put toward evening responsibilities or checking a few more items off of the work to-do list.

The excitement wore off, though, when we realized what we were missing. The average car commute in the Milwaukee area is 22 minutes each way, and that time decompressing alone puts much-needed mental and physical distance between our work and home lives. It's a window to replay moments from the day or sort out the challenges coming tomorrow. Or, maybe, to just sing Adele really, really loudly, purging negativity and cleansing the palate before an evening with the husband and kids. It's hard to fit all of that in a 15-second walk from a workstation. – LAURA BENGIS

BURB BITE

New Berlin is not named for Germany's capital city but rather the town of New Berlin, New York, population 2,500. Our New Berlin shares its "New BURB-in" pronunciation with its upstate namesake.

neighborhood, and because Shorewood got its start pre-automobile, it was built for walking. We walk our daughter to school and can stop at the library en route. We walk to the beer garden, to the dentist, the doctor, the barber, to lunch.

But having it both ways means we're loaded with contradictions, too. We believe we're diverse but we're not. We think we're mixed income, but the median home price is half a million. I tend to think of Shorewood in terms of my more modest neighborhood, but most outsiders probably see it as the mansions they pass on Lake Drive. Someone described Shorewood as one square mile surrounded by reality, which couldn't be more accurate. I'm happy to live in this bubble, the village that, for me, puts the *urban* in *suburban*.

– DAN SIMMONS



Why I Love...

Lake Country

MIKE CALLIES

The live music scene in Lake Country has a really strong sense of community – and some outstanding musicianship. When my band, Fat Andy, plays at venues like NIP's in Pewaukee, I can count on there being many faces in the crowd that we've seen before – whether they're part of the bar's regular crowd, neighbors, family and friends, or people I've met through my son's school who've come to watch us play.

Events hosted by local parks – like Hartland's Nixon Park concert series and Waterfront Wednesdays in Pewaukee – lend really well to that tight sense of community. Looking out into the crowd makes me feel so fortunate to be someone who can bring the joy of music to people who support their parks and communities. And there's nothing quite like playing outside in the summer as the sun sets and the stars start to come out. – AS TOLD TO LAURA BENGIS



A Conversation About...

Wauwatosa

IF THERE'S AN ILLUSTRATION OF THE TWO TOSAS and the joys each can bring, exhibits A and B might be my home and that of our art director, Chelsea Mamerow. We both live near Wauwatosa's central North Avenue axis – I'm 10 blocks from Milwaukee; she's literally across the street from Elm Grove. We've both lived on the other side of town, too. We talked about that juxtaposition and what we like about each side of our suburb. – CHRIS DROSNER

CM: We're as far west as you can be in Tosa, and we wonder if it's the largest privately owned housing lot. It's like 1½ acres, but the No. 1 reason that we live here is that it's two blocks from my kids' school, so every morning I send them out the door, waving while I'm still in my pajamas. It's glorious. But I do miss the activity that the east side has.

CD: I'm on 70th Street, classic east Tosa, those 1920s bungalows that are arranged: house, driveway, house, driveway, house. I like that intimate living. We can't have our croquet parties back there like we used to in our old west Tosa place, but I can walk to a couple restaurants and bars and taprooms. If I were a little less lazy, I could hop on my bike and get pretty much everything I need.

CM: I really miss that. This neighborhood doesn't have

sidewalks, and we're on 124th, so it's very busy. But the yard is a big silver lining. We've got the backyard trampoline with plenty of room to spare. The neighbors behind us have an in-ground pool and immediately invited the kids over to swim. And it's quieter, and dark. On a summer evening, you just watch the bats swoop through our yard, and fireflies all across the lawn. We've had so many deer in the yard, which is just part of living over here. And there are no rats! I think what we're kind of dancing around is that west Tosa has the more stereotypically suburban life, while east Tosa is closer to city life.

BURB BITE For decades before refrigeration, enterprises on Pewaukee Lake harvested hundreds of thousands of tons of ice each year to support Milwaukee's breweries and Chicago's meatpacking industry.



Why I Love...

Brown Deer

WANDA MONTGOMERY,
Village President

I think Brown Deer is the hidden gem of the North Shore. I was born and raised in Milwaukee. My husband and I moved here in 2015 – our kids were grown and gone, and we were looking for a good place to spend our later years.

When I ran for village trustee, I campaigned door-to-door in winter, and people would invite me into their homes. “Come on in. It’s cold out there. Have some tea.” They loved the area, and they’d tell me what they thought needed to get done. I did the same thing when I ran for village president [in 2019].

For the last two years, I’ve visited every new homeowner in the village and welcomed them to Brown Deer. I’ve been able to engage with so many different people from so many walks of life. It’s a diverse community. In the 2020 census, Brown Deer had 52% people of color and 48% white. It’s Asian, Latino, Black, it’s a good mix. It’s a place where you can really learn from other people, and they can learn from you.

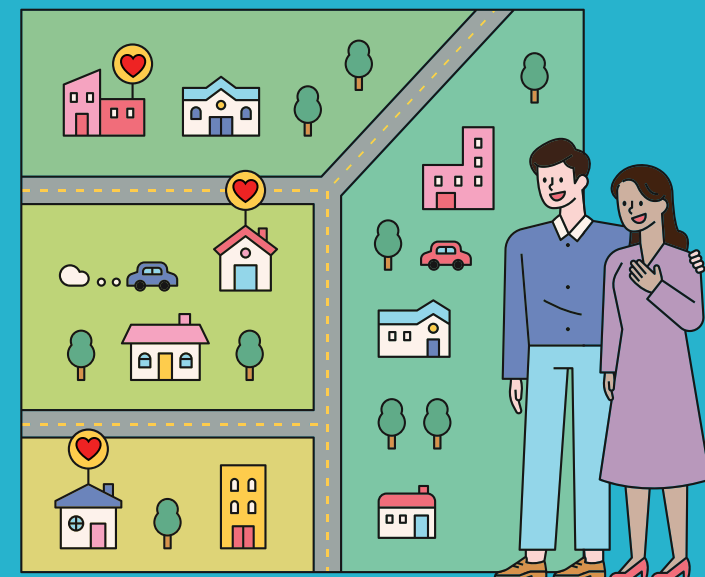
When we have events here, the community comes out. When something happens to one of our neighbors, people step up and support. I think that’s important, to live somewhere where you’re not isolated, where you’re engaged and you can make a difference. – AS TOLD TO ARCHER PARQUETTE

**A nod to...
THE SOUTHWEST SUBURBS**

Finding Community, Three Times

HOME, FOR ME, IS MILWAUKEE'S SUBURBS. I was born in Franklin, growing up in a house with a backyard that butted up to a grassy field. My best friends to this day lived on 79th Street with me. We’d bike around town, chasing the ice cream man. My memories from those days are a montage of round robins, bonfires, capture the flag and ghosts in the graveyard. It was where I found my first community.

I left the burbs for a bit with stops in Madison and Washington, D.C. When I came back, my parents had moved to Muskego. Like a true millennial in my 20s, I moved in for a bit, saving up for a wedding and a down payment on a house.



The folks’ new address traded the field for a humble but swimmable lake. Our old neighbors visited for beach days, mingling with the new next-door neighbors – notorious pranksters. Once again, I found that the best part of living in the burbs was the people.

When my husband and I toured houses, we wanted to find that community feel. We’d pay attention to the street. Were there people walking around? Would they smile and wave back at us? We found that in Greendale, where we now live in the “A section” of the historic village. We sip wine with the neighbors on warm summer nights and share gardening tips. The kids next door are free to play in our backyard. They bike on the street. It reminds me of my own upbringing, and it makes me feel very much at home. – ALLI WATTERS

Why I Love...

The North Shore

RACHEL CONFORTI



From the time I was growing up on Staten Island, my Judaism has been an important part of my life. Jewish traditions and holidays brought my family together, and the neighbors surrounding us celebrated the same things. My Catholic husband and I decided to raise our son with both religions, without forcing either one. It was easy to uphold the Jewish side in New York City, where Judaism is very mainstream.

When we moved to the Milwaukee area in 2021, I was worried about my son missing opportunities to connect with his Jewish side. We chose Whitefish Bay in part because we knew of the Jewish community in the North Shore. It’s not like New York, but it’s been easier than I thought to embrace both aspects of our family identity. I’ve already met people who are raising their kids in two religions. We’ve invited non-Jewish neighbors over to celebrate Jewish holidays, and a Jewish family invited us to their daughter’s bat mitzvah. We just joined the Jewish Community Center, and I’m excited to meet more families to share cultural experiences.

I used to love celebrating with people who shared my background at family get-togethers, and I want my son to have the same experience. The North Shore has so many opportunities to do that. – AS TOLD TO ASHLEY ABRAMSON ●

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