



Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai Newsletter Autumn 2024

President's Message



Linda Asato
President

Warm greetings to our dear members and friends!

As autumn settles in, bringing cooler temperatures and a beautiful display of changing leaves, it's the perfect time to reflect on a wonderfully busy summer filled with festivals and our delightful summer picnic.

In June, our talented performers, together with the Chimu don don group, launched the Japan Festival with great enthusiasm, delivering an exciting 30-minute performance that showcased karate, Okinawan dance, sanshin music, and Eisa taiko. Despite the sweltering 90-degree heat, our dedicated performers worked tirelessly to entertain the audience, who came primarily from the Midwest.

July brought our summer picnic, where we savored delicious homemade bentos created by Michiko Ishikawa, featuring popular Okinawan dishes. Then, in August, we were treated to an extraordinary performance by the talented Yasuhide Uezu, who traveled from Okinawa to collaborate with our performers and the Chimu don don groups. Over 500 guests reveled in a grand display of traditional and contemporary Okinawan dances and music.

- *A heartfelt thank you to all the performers, volunteers and sponsors who contributed to these events, proudly representing Chicago and the Okinawa Kenjinkai community.*

Wishing everyone a safe and peaceful holiday season, and we look forward to a prosperous 2025!

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--News and Announcements--



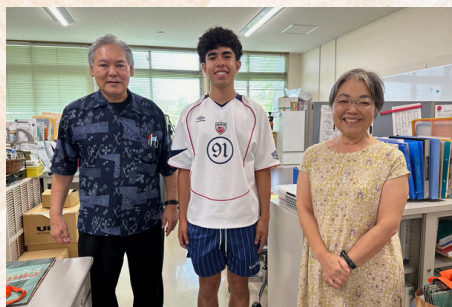
**Ikuko Nichols accepting the Foreign Minister's Award
from Consul General Jun Yanagi**

Ikuko Nichols, recipient of the Foreign Minister's Award

On Friday, Oct. 11, 2024, Ms. Ikuko Nichols received the prestigious Foreign Minister's Award from the Consul General of Japan, Jun Yanagi. The award was given for her service as the Okinawa Prefecture's certified Uchina Ambassador for 20 years and for contributing greatly to the preservation and dissemination of a wide range of Okinawan culture through traditional Okinawan music, dance, martial arts, crafts, and food, as well as through cultivating the next generation of leadership.

She has also contributed to the development of mutual understanding between the U.S. and Japan through her dedicated support of the activities of the local Japanese American community, and her active cooperation in introducing Japanese and Okinawan culture at Japanese festivals and other events.

Furthermore, as a Japanese language teacher at a public elementary school on the south side of Chicago for 10 years until 2004, she contributed to the promotion and understanding of Japan through the spread of Japanese language and culture to young people. This is the first time this award was presented to a member of the Chicago Okinawan community. We are very proud of Mrs. Ikuko Nichols. *Congratulations from the Kenjinkai!!*



**Kobo Michaeli (center) with Yuichi Uza,
brother of Uza sensei of Chicago**



A Foreign Student in Okinawa

by Kobo Michaeli

This summer, I was given the opportunity to attend Okinawa Shogaku High School in Okinawa known as "Okisho" as a foreign student. I attended Okisho last summer as well, and my experience this year was even more fulfilling. Two highlights of going to school were the karate and soccer experience.

As a soccer player in the U.S, going to Japan and playing soccer with the school team was surprisingly different than in the U.S. For one, they played on a sand field, which we don't have except for baseball in the U.S, and the style of play was much less focused on the physical aspect as it is in the U.S. I also enjoyed the soccer and sports culture of highschool clubs as respect was a big part of the culture. Respecting the coaches, other teammates, ground, equipment, and managers were all major parts of the practice routine. The players are also responsible for the equipment and cleaning up the field as if it was not touched for the next day.

Karate is required to be taken once a week at Okisho and was mostly frowned upon by the students. The class was still very school-like, with there being a test on memorizing a sequence of moves and to execute them with the correct form. As a student in Japan, you are assigned to one class, where you take almost all your classes with. Karate and P.E. were the only exceptions, meaning that I also had the opportunity to interact with students from other classes. The only downside to the karate class was the Okinawan humidity whilst in heavy karate uniforms, but in all, the experience was something I will never forget.



2024 Japan Festival at Millenium Park





YUIDEN - Love - A Review

--Preserving Okinawan arts and culture in Chicago--

In August 2024, the Okinawa Culture show "Yuiden" was held at New Trier High School for the first time in five years. The event was named "Yuiden" because it represents the idea of uniting and sharing everyone's thoughts and passions. The event was a collaboration between the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai Performance group and Chimu don don group (St. Matthew's Eisa Team). With over 70 performers, we invited Mr. Yasuhide Uezu from Okinawa to direct and support our effort for the show. The show opened with a dynamic flag dance followed by the Ryubu, karate, sanshin, Eisa, and the shishimai lion performances. Approximately 500 guests attended who came from as far away as Wisconsin, Canada and Japan to share this powerful and energetic performance with us and to support the wonderful display of Okinawan culture in Chicago.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation for the warm support and cooperation of our officers, volunteers, and sponsors and the entire audience who came to see us! Thank you! It is my sincere wish to continue to share and create a warm and inviting Okinawan community in Chicago and pass on our passion and "chimu gukuru" (gentle spirit) to the next generation. Ippei nifei deibiru!

-- Minori Yamaki, Vice President



2024年8月、ニュートリアハイスクールにて、5年ぶりの沖縄カルチャーステージ『結伝 (ゆいでん)』が行われました。ステージタイトル『結伝』とは、家族への愛情、周りへの思いやり、優しく支え合う事の大切さなど、私達の大切にしている想い、『ちむぐる』をみんなで結まとめ、次世代に伝えていきたい。そんな願いが込められています。今年もシカゴ沖縄県人会パフォーマンスグループ、ちむどんどん (聖マタイエイサーチーム) のコラボステージとなり、沖縄からは上江洲安秀先生をお招きし、琉舞、空手、三線、エイサー、獅子舞の演舞に加えて、新しく旗の演舞も加わり、総勢70人のパフォーマー達による迫力ある活気あふれた演舞を約500人のお客様へご披露する事ができました。お客様の中にはウィスコンシン、遠くはカナダ、そして日本より応援に駆けつけてくださり、シカゴの地で素晴らしい沖縄の文化を分かち合える事ができました。公演の計画、運営、練習から本番まで、運営役員、ボランティア、スポンサーの方々の温かいご声援、ご協力心から感謝いたします。これからもシカゴの地で沖縄の文化を通して『ちむぐる』をみんなで分かち合い、その温かさを次世代へと伝えていけたらと思います! いっぺーにふえーでーびる! 感謝を込めて、八巻 希



Scenes from the YUIDEN performance at New Trier H.S. Winnetka Campus



Thank you Volunteers!



In Memoriam - Misao Higa



**Misao Higa
1925-2024**

We fondly remember Misao Higa who passed away peacefully on Tuesday, August 27, 2024, two days after her 99th Birthday in the Chicagoland area. She was the Beloved Wife of George Higa for 67 years and mother of two sons, Robert and Perry Tadashi Higa. She was born on August 25, 1925 in Aiea, Hawaii to Kiho and Sada Asato and was raised in Kitanakagusuku, Okinawa, Japan. Misao was one of the original members of the Kenjinkai that was started by her brother-in-law, Tokujin Asato. We thank the Higa family for their decades of support and contributions to our organization.

Misao is survived by her sons, Robert and Perry Tadashi Higa, her sisters and brothers, Yoshie (106 yrs) and Miyeko (100 yrs), Ikuko and Katsumi, her grandsons, Bill and Chris (Mary); her great grandchildren: Charlotte and Lucas George; and many nieces & nephews.

In Memory of Seikichi Iha, Karate Sensei **National Living Treasure from Okinawa** **1932-2024**



Seikichi Iha was a son of Okinawa and a Lansing, Michigan treasure.

He was born in 1932 on the small island prefecture less than 500 miles south of mainland Japan. He lived through the Battle of Okinawa, among the bloodiest of World War II, and at 18 began studying karate. He came to the U.S. and by the early 1970s settled in Lansing, MI.

In the 50 years since he arrived, Iha raised a family, opened his dojo and taught countless students that karate — the martial art that, like him, came from Okinawa — could be used for more than self defense.

"It was a way of life for him," his daughter Uto Iha said. "And it was much more of an art than (anything else)."

Iha, known as Sensei Iha to his many students, died on Aug. 3. He was 92.

His dojo, Original Okinawa Karate Iha Dojo in Lansing, held a celebration for Iha's life on Aug. 31 at the Japanese Garden at Michigan State University.

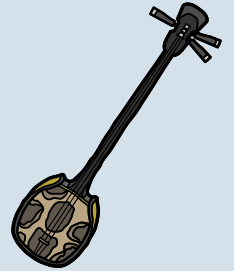
Iha's life was karate. He'd spent about 75 years learning and teaching the craft. It was everything to him, but it didn't isolate him. Friendship, cooperation and balance is what he taught.



MEMBER'S SPOTLIGHT

Introducing the Wrenn family who actively participate in practices and performances with the sanshin group. Here they talk about their initial contact with the Kenjinkai, current involvement and their musical journey.

A Musical Family - Yukako, Kaito and Jeremy Wrenn



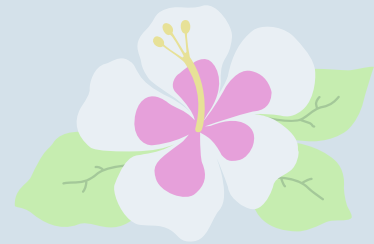
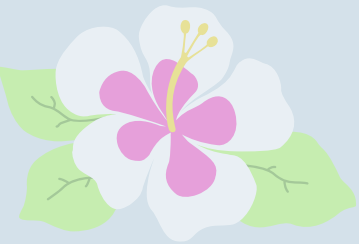
The Wrenn Family with sanshin group members at a book signing performance for Jami Nakamura Lin

Yukako, Kaito, and Jeremy Wrenn have been performing for several years together. It all started when Kaito joined St Matthew's pre-school at age 4. Minori-sensei encouraged her students to learn Okinawan culture and taught them how to perform Eisa, Okinawa's traditional drum-dance. Kaito has performed in the Chimu Don Don group since then, moving from paranku (small hand drum) to O-daiko (large shoulder strap drum), and now performs in the Shishimai (lion) group. He is also learning tsugaru shamisen in his spare time.

Yukako began learning sanshin shortly after and with the Chicago Okinawan Kenjinkai sanshin group has performed in multi-state events, and has even performed in Okinawa, in the Uchinanchu international event in Uruma and Naha. She practices sanshin every day and also studies the Okinawan languages in her spare time.

Jeremy joined the sanshin group with Yukako, but quickly switched to the role of playing taiko, guitar, and samba to support the sanshin players. Jeremy has been playing guitar since age 14 and has performed internationally with his own band, Airiel. He was fortunate to also attend the Uchinanchu event and perform in Naha with Yukako and Kaito. He is always amazed with watching his family grow musically. Like his son, he is also learning Tsugaru shamisen in his spare time.

We would like to thank the Chicago Okinawan community for always being so kind and supportive. The events are always fun, and the food is absolutely amazing!



Wrenn Family - continued

御総様。今日拝なびら。

レン家のJeremy、海渡 (Kaito)、庸華子 (Yukako)です。

私たち家族は夫がIN州出身、息子は生まれも育ちもシカゴ、私は静岡の出身で、本当の意味で沖縄の文化、芸能に触れるようになったのは、ここシカゴからでした。

海渡は聖マタイ幼稚園の在園中に、八巻先生からエイサーを習い始め、今もエイサーを続けています。大太鼓へのステップアップで彼のモチベーションはグンと上がりました。最近では獅子舞の練習も始め、ますます沖縄芸能への想いが強くなっています。

親の私たちは、息子の卒園式の謝恩会で、ヴィスコンデ美和さん、パルンボ可奈さん達と一緒に『海の声』を弾くことになったのがきっかけで、ジェレミーはギターで参加し、私は人生初の楽器、三線を購入しました。今では唄三線が私の生活にはなくてはならないものになりました。

県人会三線グループとの出会いは、ミツワの練習に顔を出したのがきっかけです。その時は1度参加しただけでしたが、その後、現リーダーのまゆみさんが「一緒にやりませんか」と声をかけてくださり、今に至ります。家族と一緒に打ち込める何かがあることは幸せだと思う日々です。

このコミュニティで、私たちは色々な方に支えられて今があり、とても感謝しています。これからも、どうぞよろしく願いいたします。

Cooking Corner

Okinawan Sweet Potato (*Beni Imo*)

The Okinawan or purple sweet potato has been a nutritious staple of the Okinawan diet since its introduction in the 17th century from Asia. The plant's physical characteristics made it ideal for cultivation during periods of typhoons. It thus saved many from famine and starvation. Today the purple sweet potato is commonly called *beni imo* (purple potato) because of its bright interior color. In Okinawa, the potato is used for making tenpura, mochi, manju, chips and desserts. Here is a recipe for *beni imo croquette* you can try.



Beni Imo Croquette

Yields: 18 pieces

2 cups (2 lbs)	Purple sweet potato
1 cup (1 lb)	Baking potato, boiled and peeled
8 oz.	Imitation crab, shredded
1/2 cup	Round onion, finely chopped
1 tsp	Salt
1/4 tsp	Pepper
1 large	Egg
2 tbsp	Flour
1	Kamaboko, finely chopped
1/2 cup	green onion, chopped
2	Eggs, beaten
1 pkg	Panko (Japanese style bread crumbs)
	Oil for deep frying

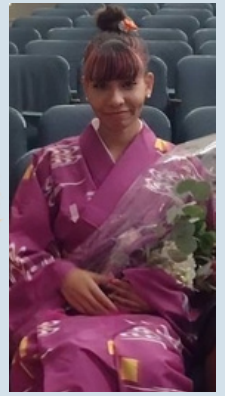
Mash together both types of potato. Add crab, onion, salt, pepper, one egg, flour, kamaboko, and green onion. Mix thoroughly. Shape into oval patties. Dip into beaten eggs, coat with panko and deep fry until golden brown.

Helpful Hint: Place the whole, unpeeled potatoes in 1/4 cup of water, seal with plastic wrap and microwave on HIGH for 15 minutes. To mash, put potatoes in a zip-lock bag, release air, seal and mash with a rolling pin.

FEATURE PROFILE

Niina Nishihara

One of the newest sanshin member, Niina Nishihara talks about her experience in America and her excitement to play with the Chicago Okinawa sanshin group.



Haitai! Hajimiti~ya. Wanne~ Niina Nishihara yaibin. (Hello. Nice to meet you. I'm Niina Nishihara)

I came to Illinois last December to study English. I was born and raised in Okinawa, and here I am staying with my aunt, who is also from Okinawa, and her family. When I was in high school, I participated in the "Uchina Junior Study Program," where the children of overseas Okinawan emigrants were invited to Okinawa to live with local students of the same age and learn about Okinawan history, culture, and nature. This experience made me want to get involved with the local Okinawan Kenjinkai when I came to the United States. I learned from the website that there would be a New Year's party in April, so I invited my aunt and cousin, and we attended a Kenjinkai event together for the first time. After the New Year's party, I spoke to Minori-san, the Vice President, and she introduced me to Mayumi-san, the leader of the sanshin group.

Afterward, I was also introduced to Uza-sensei, who teaches Karate. I started practicing the sanshin in earnest for a performance called, Yuiden. I had only learned a few simple songs in music class before and had never played while singing. As I started practicing sanshin, I began to understand the meanings of the lyrics in Okinawan dialect that I had heard many times before in Okinawa. But it wasn't until I came to the U.S. that I truly understood them. There were about three months until the performance. I often felt frustrated and down when I couldn't play well, but I was determined to catch up with everyone more than anything. I enjoyed the time spent practicing together, so I worked hard at it every day. The practice sessions with the members of the sanshin group were always fun yet serious, and they were kind enough to encourage me as a beginner and patiently practiced with me until I could play properly. They also gave me advice not only on the sanshin but also on life in America. When someone said, "I'm so glad you joined us, Niina-chan," it made me happier than anything.

On the day of the Yuiden performance, I was very nervous because my family was coming to watch, and I felt so close to the audience. However, by the second half, I was enjoying it so much that I was dancing Kacha~shī~ with enthusiasm. I realized once again how much I love the familiar sound of Okinawan music.

Participating as a performer in this Yuiden and other Kenjinkai events made me deeply moved to see people so far away from Okinawa. They love and take pride in Okinawan culture and are eager to pass it on to the next generation. I truly respect them. At the same time, it made me realize how little I knew about my own Okinawan heritage, even though I was born and raised there, and how much more I needed to learn and pass on. Soon, I will be returning to Okinawa, but I want to continue to practice sanshin, and I hope to return to the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai one day. I will do my best in Okinawa to make that happen. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Minori-san, who first introduced me to everyone at the New Year's party, to Uza-sensei, who taught me karate, to Mitsue-san, who let me experience Eisa with my cousin, and to Mayumi-san, the leader of the sanshin group, as well as all the members. I am also very grateful to everyone else in the Kenjinkai who supported me. I hope to cherish these connections and look forward to reuniting with everyone from the Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai at the Worldwide Uchinanchu Festival, which is held once every five years in Okinawa, and I hope I can help at the event.

Lastly, I would like to end with a phrase that symbolizes the Okinawan culture of valuing human connections and mutual support.

"Icharibachō~de~. Ippe~nife~de~biru" It means, "Once we meet, everyone becomes family." and "Thank you."

Niina Nishihara - continued



【清書】

はいたい! はじめていや。わんねー西原新菜やいびーん。ゆたくうにげーさびら。

私は去年の年末から英語の勉強のためにイリノイ州に来ています。私は生まれも育ちも沖縄で、ここでは沖縄出身の私の叔母の家族のもとに滞在しています。高校生の時に沖縄県の「ウチナージュニアスタディー事業」という海外移住者の子弟を沖縄県に招待し、県内の同年代の学生と生活をともにしながら沖縄の歴史や文化、自然などを学習するプログラムに参加した経験から、アメリカに来たら現地の県人会と関わりを持ちたいと思っていました。ホームページで4月に新年会があることを知り、叔母と従妹を誘って共に初めて県人会のイベントに参加しました。新年会が終わった後に司会を務めていたみのりさんに声をかけ、三線グループリーダーのまゆみさんを紹介していただきました。

その後、宇座先生も紹介していただき、空手の練習にもできる限り参加しながら、三線は結伝でのパフォーマンスに向けて本格的に練習することになりました。三線は音楽の授業で簡単な曲を少し習った程度で、これまで歌いながら弾いたことなんて一度もありません。唄三線をするにあたり、これまで沖縄の色々な場面でたくさん耳にしてきた音楽の方言での歌詞の意味をアメリカに来て初めて知ることになりました。本番まで約3か月。練習はなかなか上手く弾けないのが悔しくて落ち込んだりもしましたが、とにかく皆さんに追いつきたくて、何より一緒に練習する時間が楽しく、毎日練習に励みました。三線グループの皆さんとの練習は毎回楽しい雰囲気ながらも真剣で、初心者の私に優しく声をかけて、できるようになるまで根気強く練習に付き合ってくださいました。三線以外にもアメリカでの生活についてアドバイスをしていただきました。「新菜ちゃんが仲間になってくれてよかった」と言ってもらえた時には何よりも嬉しかったです。結伝本番は家族が観に来ること、お客さんとの距離が近いことにずっと緊張していましたが、後半にはノリノリでカチャーシーを踊るくらいに楽しんでいました。やっぱり耳なじみのある沖縄の音楽の音色が大好きなのだとは再認識しました。

県人会のイベントや今回の結伝にパフォーマーとして参加したことで、沖縄からこんなに遠く離れた場所で沖縄の文化に誇りを持ち、好きでいてくれる人がいること、そして次世代へつなげていこうとしている人がたくさんいてくださることに改めて感動しました。それと同時に、私は生まれも育ちも沖縄なのに全然知らなかったのだな、もっと知って繋げていかないといけないと思いました。私はもうすぐ沖縄に帰ってしまうのですが、練習はずっと続けていきたいですし、またシカゴ県人会に帰ってこられるように沖縄でも頑張りたいと思います。新年会で最初に人脈を繋げてくださったみのりさんはじめ、空手を指導して下さっている宇座先生、従妹も一緒にエイサーを体験させてくださった光枝さん、そして三線グループのリーダーまゆみさんをはじめとしたメンバーの皆さん。他にも関わってくださった県人会の皆様、本当にありがとうございます。またこのご縁を大切に、5年に一度沖縄で開催される世界のウチナンチュ大会などでもぜひシカゴ沖縄県人会の皆さんと再会し、お手伝いできたら嬉しいです。最後は沖縄の言葉で締めくりたいと思います。

『いちゃりばちょーでー。いっぺーにふえーでーびる。』

西原新菜

Donations from June 2024 - Present



Special Donation \$1800: In memory of Mrs. Misao Higa. Donated by family and friends of Robert and Perry Higa.

Special Donation \$500: In memory of Mr. Paul Doi. Donated by Tonko Doi and family.

Special donation \$100: In memory of Mr. Yusuke Arakaki. Donated by Wanda Arakaki

Platinum Level: Michiko Ishikawa \$250

Gold Level \$100 - \$200: Tom and Nozomi Corrao, Hayako Kikuchi, Ikue Matsuda, Akiko Maeda, Yoshiko Taki Murakami, Emil and Tomiko Schumaier, Miyako Tsuchida, Ritsuko and Dennis White, Miyoko Whiteside

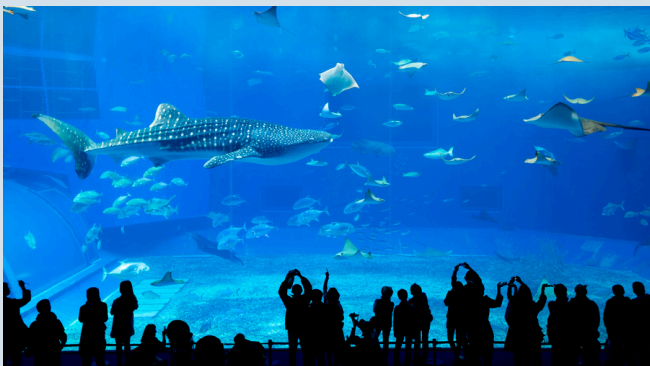
Silver Level under \$100: Mayumi and Nathan Aaberg, Katsuko Grigsby, Masayuki Negoro, Chris Deiters, Kumiko Walker, Tomoko and Mike Flowers

Welcome New Members!!



We want to welcome 3 new members to our Kenjinkai family. We hope they will take advantage of the many benefits our organization offers. Our apologies if we left anyone out.

Vito Gervasi, John O'Toole, Betty Segal



Scenes of Okinawa



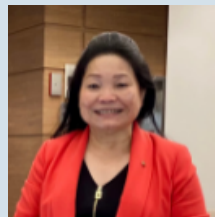
2024 Officers, Goodwill Ambassadors and Performance Group Leaders



Linda Asato, President
773-593-4009
lhasato1@gmail.com



Minori Yamaki, VP
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Michiko Ishikawa, Treasurer
Goodwill Ambassador
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Satsuki Morgan, Secretary
satsukikitty@gmail.com



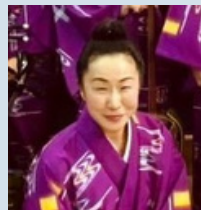
Yujiro Uza
Goodwill Ambassador
uzadojo@yahoo.com



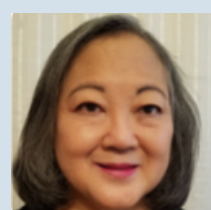
Taiko & Ryubu Dance
Mitsue Koch
773-706-0813
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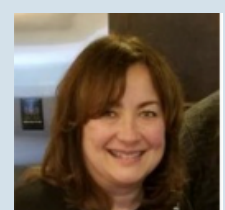
Okinawan Karate
Yujiro Uza
uzadojo@yahoo.com



Okinawan Sanshin
Mayumi Tonks
630-303-7005
mseino@hotmail.com



Ukulele Group
Kathy Serikaku
630-213-4343



Performance Contact
Kathy Nichols
kathleen_nichols@hotmail.com



Chicago Okinawa Kenjinkai
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