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What Drives Cope Garrett's Philanthropy



Our Mission

Community Impact Powered by Philanthropy

Our Work

We unite people and organizations to create opportunities for families across generations to improve their lives through cultural, educational, economic, and social support.

Every one of us has the potential to impact another person, a cause, a community.
Be The One.

LETTER FROM OUR PRESIDENT AND CEO



Dear Friends:

When I stepped into this role in January, I committed to listening first—not as a phase, but as a discipline. These past months have been filled with conversations with our team, our board, our donors, our nonprofit partners, and many of you across the community. I have spent time attending events, visiting organizations, and seeing firsthand the work happening every day to strengthen and support this region.

Many times, we may never fully know how our words or actions impact others. At our recent Legacy Luncheon, a donor approached me afterward and asked if I would share the words I offered from the stage so they could pass them along to a loved one navigating a difficult moment.

In my remarks, I reflected on partnership and what it means to stay in it together: “Some days one of us is stronger. Some days one of us sets the pace. Endurance is not about equal strength. It is about staying in it together. Choosing, again and again, not to quit on the climb or on each other.”

While this is certainly true in the more difficult personal moments we face in life, I see how deeply it applies to community, as well. There are times when one organization carries more. Times when one donor steps forward in a significant way. And times when many come together, each doing what they can, to move forward.

Having worked in philanthropy for nearly two decades, I do not take partnerships and the trust they are built upon for granted. Generosity exists in many places, but what defines this community is how deeply generosity is rooted in relationships. There is a willingness in our community to lean in and work together to solve complex challenges. That spirit is both energizing and meaningful, and it is something each of you helps make possible.

We saw that on full display during our 10th Giving Challenge in April, when more than 50,000 individuals came together to donate \$16.7 million to a record 751 nonprofits. Overall, 87,814 gifts were made this year, benefiting nonprofits working in a wide range of fields, from health care to housing, arts and culture, education, the environment, and more. This year’s generosity brought the cumulative impact of the Giving Challenge to nearly \$110 million since the first challenge took place in 2012.

The numbers are important, but what stands out even more is what they represent. Tens of thousands of people coming together in just 24 hours to support the organizations they care about. Nonprofits lifting each other up. Donors giving at every level. Friends and neighbors inviting others to be part of something bigger. It is a powerful reflection of who we are as a community.

I am incredibly grateful for the warm welcome so many of you have extended over these past few months. Nearly every conversation has reflected a shared desire to see this community continue to thrive. That spirit is both energizing and affirming.

Thank you for your partnership, your generosity, and the many ways you show up for this community every day.

Jessica Muroff,
President and CEO

AN EVOLVING APPROACH TO HELPING PETS AND WILDLIFE

A recent round of grants is supporting animals with emergency needs and complicated conditions.

Support for animal welfare organizations has been a key part of the Community Foundation's work and an important priority for many of our donors for decades. In recent years our approach has evolved to prioritize delivering funding for advanced equipment to more effectively treat animals in critical condition and to provide animals with lifesaving treatments that may otherwise be out of reach.

We recently awarded \$191,985 in grants to 15 nonprofits that help animals ranging from domestic cats, dogs, and birds to wild birds, rabbits, turtles, manatees, and more. (For a full list of organizations receiving support, see the sidebar on the opposite page.)

Our funding approach aligns with growing need across our region. According to the University of Florida's College of Veterinary Medicine, Florida and the southeast United States in general experience higher



A turtle rescued by The Paul A. & Veronica H. Gross Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida



A dog being cared for by the Humane Society at Lakewood Ranch

animal intake numbers and higher euthanasia rates per capita than other parts of the country. The college attributes that to the region's warm climate, high poverty rates, large rural communities, and what the school calls "veterinary care deserts."

In Sarasota County, rising costs are a further strain. United Way Suncoast's most recent ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) Report shows the household "survival budget" for a family of four with an infant and a toddler now exceeds \$104,000, a 10 percent increase from the previous year. Those increasing living expenses can leave many families struggling to care for and feed their pets.

At the same time, wildlife rescue centers are seeing unprecedented demand as human development spreads and natural habitats shrink. The Paul A. & Veronica H. Gross Wildlife Center of Southwest



IHOP's Story

One recent anecdote from the Humane Society at Lakewood Ranch shows how the foundation's grants are making a difference. The Humane Society took in a young stray dog with an injured right leg that hampered his ability to run. Because

of funding from the Community Foundation, the organization was able to work with a local vet to have the leg amputated, and today the dog—rechristened IHOP because of the way in which he hops around—is able to frolic and play like any other dog.

Florida, for example, began in 2004 as a small grassroots nonprofit that took in 315 animals annually. Today, it treats more than 6,000 animals each year.

These pressures underscore why the Community Foundation is investing in advanced equipment and emergency care. Wildlife injuries can occur because of attacks by nearby pets, auto collisions, fishing line entanglement, exposure to toxins, and more, and they most commonly affect the animals we see in our yards, like birds, rabbits, and raccoons, but also rarer creatures like bobcats, coyotes, and deer. With its recent grant from the Community Foundation, the Wildlife Center plans to purchase veterinary ultrasound equipment, strengthening its ability to diagnose and care for animals in critical condition.

“Animal welfare nonprofits in our region often find themselves overwhelmed by the sheer number of animals that are in need of their care, as well as the complicated medical conditions that the animals sometimes arrive with,” says Kirsten Russell, the Community Foundation’s vice president of community impact. “With this latest round of funding, nonprofits will be able to upgrade their ability to respond to urgent needs and provide more comprehensive care even as the challenges facing them grow.” 🏠



A bobcat at the Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida

Organizations Receiving Support

The recent grants from the Community Foundation fall into two categories: Some will enable nonprofits to purchase specialized equipment to improve care for animals, while others will help cover emergency veterinary treatments and other pressing medical needs.

The nonprofits investing in upgraded technology include:

- Animal Rescue Coalition
- Florida West Coast Avian Society
- Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium
- The Paul A. & Veronica H. Gross Wildlife Center of Southwest Florida

Nonprofits that will now be able to expand their emergency veterinary treatments include:

- Canine Castaways
- Cat Depot
- Farmhouse Animal & Nature Sanctuary
- Humane Society at Lakewood Ranch
- Humane Society of Sarasota County
- Nate's Honor Animal Rescue Center
- Parrot Outreach Society
- Satchel's Last Resort
- St. Francis Animal Rescue of Venice Inc.
- Sugar's Gift
- Suncoast Humane Society

INVESTING IN RESILIENCE

How the Community Foundation is working to protect and restore our natural environment.

Making a commitment to become a better steward of our natural environment often starts with a simple realization: There's no other Earth out there, so all of us are charged with caring for this one as best we can.

Or as Dr. Jennifer Shafer—one of the co-executive directors of the Science & Environment Council, a nonprofit that brings together 47 science-based environmental nonprofits and government agencies—put it during a recent panel discussion hosted by the Community Foundation, “We live in a closed system.” The trash we roll out to the curb every week isn’t taken to a magical far-off land; it’s hauled to a landfill in our community. The forever chemicals that end up in our wastewater aren’t carried away to a distant ocean; they end up in our bays and estuaries. Plastic bottles on the side of the road don’t just disappear; they break down into microplastics that can show up in our own bodies. The decisions we make and the actions we take every day don’t just affect an abstract entity we think of as “nature.” They affect our beaches and waterways, our wildlife, our parks and preserves, our friends and neighbors, our children and grandchildren, and, ultimately, ourselves.

But individual action only goes so far. Building an environmentally resilient community takes sustained commitment from citizens, activists, elected officials, and business leaders, and our area’s environmental nonprofit sector is playing a leading role in strengthening that commitment by collaborating across disciplines, attacking environmental challenges from multiple angles, and working to inform and engage with the public.

That was evident from the foundation’s panel, which, in addition to Shafer, included Tanna Horner, the president and CEO of Peace River Botanical &



From left to right: Community Foundation Vice President of Community Impact Kirsten Russell, Oyster Boys Conservation President and CEO Dominic Marino, Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens President and CEO Tanna Horner, Science & Environment Council Co-Executive Director Dr. Jennifer Shafer, and Big Waters Land Trust Director of Land Protection Brooke Langston

Sculpture Gardens; Dominic Marino, the president and CEO of Oyster Boys Conservation; and Brooke Langston, the director of land protection at Big Waters Land Trust. The panelists emphasized how deeply interconnected our ecosystems are and that, while their nonprofits’ missions vary widely, they each create ripple effects that make our community more resilient in a holistic way.

Big Waters Land Trust, for example, concentrates its efforts on working with landowners to conserve natural areas and ranch lands. That benefits wildlife because it gives animals more space to roam, but conserving land also plays a critical role in keeping our waterways clean. That’s because natural areas like marshes, prairies, grasslands, and forests absorb, clean, and store rainwater. In contrast, when rainwater hits pavement, it washes directly into nearby streams and other bodies of water, bringing pollutants and trash along with it.

But what do you do with waterways that are already impaired? That's where Oyster Boys Conservation comes in. The organization creates what they call vertical oyster gardens—ropes studded with oyster shells that dangle in the water and provide safe settlement areas for juvenile oysters. One oyster can filter up to 50 gallons of water every day, absorbing excess nutrients and other elements and cleansing the water around them. Oyster gardens also serve as an important habitat for creatures besides oysters, sheltering barnacles, mussels, worms, crabs, and small fish.

The interconnectedness of environmental resilience extends beyond the natural world and touches human lives, as well. Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens is a 27-acre sanctuary in Punta Gorda situated on low-lying ground that blends marshlands, wetlands, mangrove forests, and other ecosystems. Created to showcase sculptures and rare botanicals, it also serves a vital role as a place of healing and recovery for people who have been affected by storms and flooding. Each month, the property hosts 20 different free wellness programs that allow survivors to experience the calm that comes with spending time in nature. Those offerings build up our community's mental and emotional resilience, in addition to the role the garden plays as a hub for natural resilience.



A yoga session at Peace River Botanical & Sculpture Gardens



Top: Oyster Boys Conservation's vertical oyster gardens; above: an oyster garden shell

All these nonprofits, and many others in our region, are weaving together different strands to create a strong web of environmental resilience, and philanthropy has a key role to play in fortifying that web. The enduring red tide outbreak of 2018 and the catastrophic hurricanes of 2022 and 2024 have made the links between land conservation, water quality, and human health clear. With the right investments and smart decisions about urban planning and infrastructure, our resilience will rise and we, as a community, will be better prepared for whatever might come our way.

Luckily, we already have the nonprofit know-how and the technology to make that happen. As Shafer pointed out, "We know how to do this." 🏠

“The decisions we make and the actions we take every day don't just affect an abstract entity we think of as 'nature.' They affect our beaches and waterways, our wildlife, our parks and preserves, our friends and neighbors, our children and grandchildren, and, ultimately, ourselves.”

New Data Dashboard Highlights Environmental Challenges and Opportunities

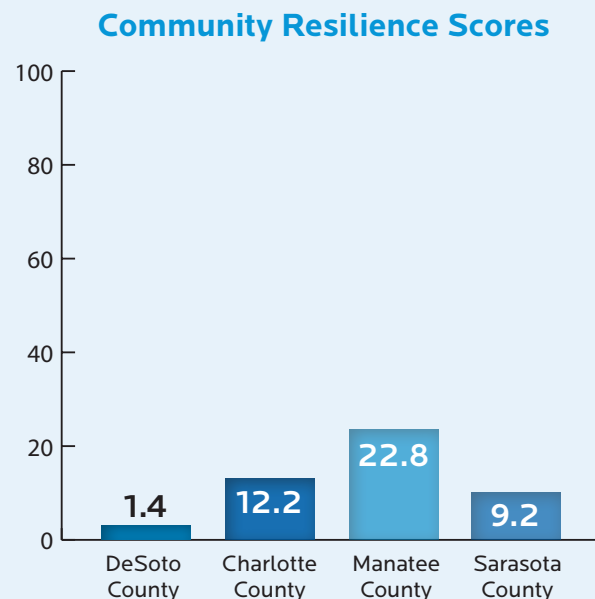
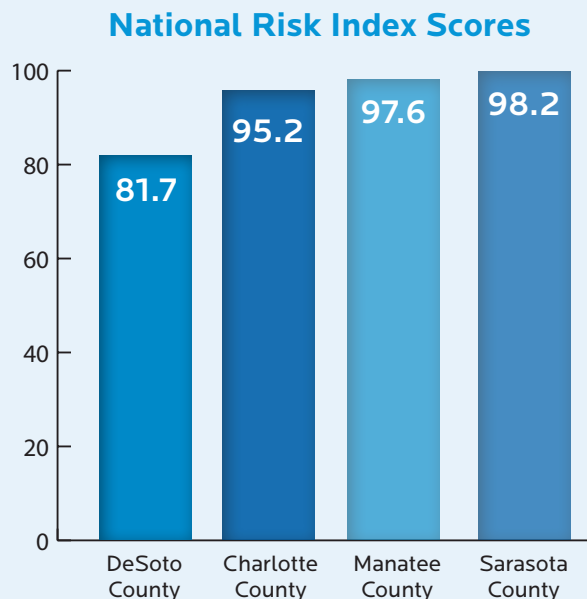
In addition to supporting environmental nonprofits through grants and programs, the Community Foundation also recently updated our Community Indicators Dashboard with a host of new data points related to the environment.

For example, every two years, FEMA issues what are known as National Risk Index scores for counties around the United States. A score of 0 means that a community is at no risk for natural hazards, while a score of 100 indicates the highest level of risk. Last year, Sarasota County scored a 98.2, while Manatee County was rated 97.6, Charlotte County sat at 95.2, and DeSoto County was ranked at 81.7. Numbers like these show our region's vulnerability to natural hazards, and detailed maps show where the risk is greatest.

The University of South Carolina's Community Resilience Scores, meanwhile, estimate a county's ability to prepare for natural hazards, adapt to changing conditions, and recover rapidly. A score of 0 represents a county with no resilience, while a score of 100 indicates the most resilient. Sarasota County's score last year was a 9.2, while Manatee County's was 22.8, Charlotte County's was 12.2, and DeSoto County's was 1.4.



Explore those data points, and many others, by using the QR code.



Sources: FEMA, University of South Carolina

“Our area’s environmental nonprofits are playing a leading role in strengthening resilience by collaborating across disciplines, attacking challenges from multiple angles, and working to inform and engage with the public.”

Supporting the Next Generation of Environmental Leaders

Created with funding from an anonymous donor at the Community Foundation, the Environmental Discovery Awards Program has become a significant connector between environmental nonprofits and college students pursuing degrees related to environmental studies. When summer arrives, many of those students are faced with a difficult choice: Work at a job that may not be related to the field they want to go into, or apply for an internship that may be unpaid? The Environmental Discovery program funds paid internships at environmentally focused nonprofits, allowing students to gain valuable experience while fortifying the missions of the organizations.

The students come from New College of Florida; Ringling College of Art and Design; State College of Florida, Manatee-Sarasota; and University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee, and the work they undertake is vital. Last summer, students did everything from creating marketing materials to caring for trees and plants, studying marine life, and more. That variety highlights the fact that environmental studies is not just a field for budding scientists, but can be a pathway for students with all kinds of skills—from graphic design to virtual reality—to careers in which they can help protect and restore our natural world.

2025 Nonprofits That Participated in the Environmental Discovery Awards Program:

- Big Waters Land Trust
- Community Harvest SRQ
- Minorities in Shark Sciences
- Mote Marine Laboratory & Aquarium
- New College of Florida
- Peace River Wildlife Center
- Ringling College of Art and Design
- Sarasota Bay Watch
- Sarasota Dolphin Research Program
- Suncoast Waterkeeper
- Sunshine Community Compost
- University of South Florida, Sarasota-Manatee



Helping Homeowners Build Back Stronger

While the 2025 hurricane season was a quiet one in our region, the work of long-term recovery from previous years remains ongoing. The foundation's Suncoast Disaster Recovery Fund, which was activated in 2022 as Hurricane Ian approached Southwest Florida, has issued \$868,500 in grants over the past year to organizations across the region.

In Charlotte County, for example, a grant will make it possible for Senior Friendship Centers to launch a senior services resilience navigator position. That person will provide individualized support to seniors whose lives were disrupted by recent storms, a pressing need in a community where more than 40 percent of the residents are 65 or older.

A grant to the Newtown Business Council, meanwhile, will help that organization hire a resilience navigator who will work with Newtown residents and businesses to help them increase housing stability, apply for disaster relief assistance, and prepare for future storms. The goal is not just to help residents recover from past storms, but to develop deeper long-term resilience so they can better weather future crises.

And in Arcadia, a grant from the foundation is helping Habitat for Humanity complete its multi-parcel Maple Street Village community, which will fill gaps in affordable housing exacerbated by the damage the area experienced during Hurricane Ian. The homes are being built to be resilient to future storms, with stronger roofs, windows, and other features.

‘THE GIVING GENE’

What drives Cope Garrett’s generosity.

In 1998, Alfred Cope Garrett started thinking about posterity. He was 65 years old, and during a visit to a garden in Maine, a memory struck him. Many years earlier, he had ventured out on what he calls a “walkabout,” a five-month journey that took him from the South Pacific, Australia, and New Zealand up through Southeast Asia and all the way to Japan.

Garrett—known as “Cope” to friends and family—was traveling by himself, and while he was having fun, he would occasionally grow lonesome. On one such day, finding himself in Christchurch, New Zealand, he decided to visit the city’s famed Hagley Park and Gardens. Roughly half the size of Central Park, Hagley Park has been at the heart of public life in Christchurch since the 1850s, and it is lined with pathways that snake through gardens teeming with majestic old-growth trees, colorful azaleas and camellias, and other magnificent displays. Overwhelmed by the beauty he discovered, Garrett spent two full days exploring the grounds.

Those memories rushed back at him as he stood in that garden in Maine in 1998. Before leaving, he happened to notice that a local foundation had supported the creation of the garden, and so when he returned to Sarasota, he reached out to a former attorney of his and asked who he should call about setting up a fund to create a garden of his own. The answer that came back: the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

With that guidance, Garrett planted the seed for what is today the Garrett Garden and Green in Mount Washington, Massachusetts. Garrett’s great-grandfather had purchased land in the area decades before and built a house on a ridge near a spring-fed lake. The family began to spend their summers



in Mount Washington, a tradition carried down to Garrett’s generation.

The region maintained a special place in Garrett’s heart in part because that was where, in 1943, he met Anne, whom he would reconnect with and marry decades later, in 1997. Anne was a land planner and expert gardener, and she and Garrett used rotary mowers to clear the land for what would become Garrett Garden and Green themselves. At the time, Garrett and Anne were too old to have children, but Garrett says the garden became the couple’s “baby.” After the land was cleared, 60 trees were planted, and these days, the grounds are free and open to the public.

The Mount Washington garden is just one of many causes that Garrett has supported over the decades, and his legacy has touched dozens of nonprofits in Sarasota and beyond. In fact, as he likes to joke, he’s “addicted to giving.”



Garrett (right) on a boat near Loggerhead Key in the Dry Tortugas in 1949

Garrett will turn 93 this year. He's lived in Sarasota off and on since 1948, when his parents brought him here as a child from Philadelphia. The family lived on Siesta Key, and Garrett only recently moved from the island to the mainland after becoming what he calls "hurricaned out."

In the '40s, Sarasota was a "jewel of a small town," Garrett says, but it was tough on his father, who was a highly educated board-certified physician who ran into resentment from other doctors in the area. But the family stuck it out, and Garrett found his place on the football field. He played left end for Sarasota High School, a position that often forced him to block the opponent's biggest players. When his mother saw him get knocked to the ground during a game, she told him, "Son, if you're going to play this game, you're going to have to toughen up." He did. He made first team at Sarasota High during his junior year and was voted the team's most outstanding player by his teammates during his senior year. "I never played as well before or after that," Garrett says. Football eventually earned Garrett a scholarship at Florida State University.

Garrett served in the Coast Guard from 1952 to 1956, traveling everywhere from the Caribbean to Japan. With the help of the G.I. Bill, he finished college in 1961 at the age of 28 and returned to Sarasota to



Garrett (right) in the Marquesas Keys, about 20 miles west of Key West, in 1949

become the first admissions officer at New College. He eventually turned to commercial real estate and became a key player in the development of Siesta Key and other areas around Sarasota. Married three times, he has three children, and has been a member of The Field Club for 51 years. On Dec. 5, 2012, while having lunch at the club with several friends from the Community Foundation, Garrett suffered a stroke, but thanks to quick intervention from the waitstaff and care from Sarasota Memorial Hospital, he recovered. Every year on Dec. 5, he hosts a lunch at the club to celebrate those who helped him.

Over the years, Garrett became a major benefactor for many nonprofits. He has supported Sarasota Ballet, Sarasota Orchestra, Ringling College of Art and Design, Sarasota Art Museum, the New College Foundation, the Sarasota Memorial Healthcare Foundation, Seminoles Boosters, and St. Boniface Episcopal Church on Siesta Key. He's also been a consistent supporter of the Community Foundation's Season of Sharing initiative, which provides emergency help to families in crisis.

One recent project has united Garrett's commitment to giving back with his love for gardens and green space. Garrett went to high school with Elling O. Eide, who passed in 2012 but whose legacy lives on at the Elling Eide Center in south Sarasota. Eide graduated



The Elling Eide Center

from Harvard University with a degree in far Eastern languages and studied in Taiwan, collecting Chinese literature and art and eventually amassing more than 60,000 objects. Garrett remembers Eide as “absolutely brilliant.”

The Eide Center, which opened in 2016, is a private research library that houses Eide’s collection of rare books, manuscripts, art, garments, and textiles—much of it from pre-modern China—and it attracts Asian scholars from all over the world. It is situated amid a 72-acre nature preserve, right across Little Sarasota Bay from where Garrett lived for decades. The property is a significant archaeological and anthropological site in its own right—a place that was home to the indigenous people of Florida for centuries.

A recent gift from Garrett will help the center purchase and plant a number of Asian and native plants on the Eide Center grounds. The donation was made in honor of Garrett’s mother, Adelaide McCulloh Jefferys Garrett, who was born in Shanghai in 1907 to missionary parents before being brought back to the United States at a young age. Nearly three decades after helping create Garrett Garden and Green in Massachusetts, Garrett is doing something similar

here at home. “I decided I’d like to have a hand in a garden in Sarasota,” he says. “It’s pristine land, and there’s not much of that left.”

Looking back on his decades of philanthropy, Garrett says he inherited “the giving gene” from his parents and those who came before him. “My mission,” he says, “is to give to people who have needs.” 🏡



Garrett Garden and Green in Mount Washington, Massachusetts

FOUNDATION UPDATES



Season of Sharing Campaign Generates \$4.2 Million in Donations

The Community Foundation's 26th annual Season of Sharing campaign, which concluded in January, resulted in \$4.2 million in donations, contributions that will be critical in the year to come to support households in crisis. Fully 100 percent of the money will go to help individuals and families in Sarasota, Manatee, Charlotte, and DeSoto counties pay for basic living expenses like housing, utilities, childcare, and transportation.



Scott Swan Joins the Community Foundation

The Community Foundation recently hired Scott Swan as a philanthropic advisor. Swan joined the foundation after a distinguished 38-year career in banking, most recently serving as a senior vice president and senior fiduciary advisor at PNC Private Bank. While there, he administered complex trusts with more than \$3 million in assets under management, collaborated with clients to review and execute estate planning strategies, and more. As a philanthropic advisor at the foundation, he works with donors to help them realize their charitable goals through social impact investments.



Mischa Kirby



Kirsten Russell

Foundation Leaders Participate in Conference Panels

Mischa Kirby, the Community Foundation's vice president of strategy and communications, and Kirsten Russell, the foundation's vice president of community impact, each participated in recent conferences hosted by national and state-level organizations, highlighting their expertise as leaders in the philanthropic field.

Kirby participated in this year's Florida Philanthropic Network Statewide Summit on Philanthropy, joining a panel titled "Lighting the Way: Philanthropy's Role in Revitalizing Local Journalism." Russell, meanwhile, attended the Beyond School Hours national education conference, moderating a panel titled "Advancing Economic Mobility Through a 2Gen Lens: Empowering Parents Through Education and Workforce Development" and sitting on a panel titled "Behind the Grant: A Conversation With Funders."

LEADERSHIP

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COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OUT & ABOUT



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