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**Private juvenile de-
tention? County seeks
new owner for closed
Shuman Center**

By Charlie Wolfson & Amelia Winger
PublicSource

Pittsburgh - Allegheny County is looking for a company to operate a privately run juvenile detention center, just over a year after its own Shuman Juvenile Detention Center closed with no apparent plan to replace it.

Though there is broad agreement among government officials and judges that the county needs such a facility, some experts and elected officials are questioning the decision to privatize what had been a county-run operation until the September 2021 closure.

The county is moving to sell the former

See **Shuman** | pages **2 & 12**



ABOVE: A staff member with the Western PA Conservancy teaches volunteers about proper tree-planting techniques during a Nov. 5 event at Garfield's Healcrest Green. Turn to page 7 for more arboreal action. Photo courtesy of Madeline Weiss.



ABOVE: BGC luncheon guests enjoy some mealtime mingling at the Omni William Penn Hotel. See more on pages 4 and 10. Photo by Lauren Lubarski.

**City weighs conservatorship
for vacant houses & lots**

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Pittsburgh - In what could be a breakthrough to help address the serious problems posed by city-owned houses and lots, city officials are reportedly considering new options – like allowing these properties to become targets of conservatorship petitions filed by nonprofit, community-based organizations (CBOs).

Allegheny County Common Pleas Court, where motions to appoint nonprofit groups as conservators for abandoned properties are heard, has never permitted a city-owned property to be the object of such a petition. If a private or nonprofit developer were to

try to push one through the conservatorship process, either the judge or the city itself would torpedo the effort. The net result is that the property, and many like it, will likely sit vacant and deteriorated for another lengthy period of time. And to groups like the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), this policy can perpetuate rundown conditions in less affluent neighborhoods and make investment in them that much harder.

“If the city’s land bank were functioning and

See **Conservatorship** | page **6**

Shuman *continued from page 1*

Shuman site to a developer, with a “strong preference” for a developer that would operate a juvenile detention facility, according to a request for proposals released Oct. 6. Some members of County Council are skeptical of the move, though, and are concerned about the financial and quality-control implications of privatization.

The state revoked the sparsely populated facility’s license last fall after a string of violations, including medication errors, a heroin overdose, and thefts. Rather than try to regain certification, the county administration abruptly decided to close the facility.

Judges, law enforcement, and elected officials have said recently that a new juvenile detention center is sorely needed in the county, but the decision on who operates it appears to rest with County Executive Rich Fitzgerald’s administration.

“The availability of juvenile detention beds is one of the most important issues facing the court right now,” said President Judge Kim Berkeley Clark at a county council hearing Tuesday night [Oct. 18].

She said the inability to detain youth who commit “serious offenses” presents a “se-

rious issue in terms of community safety and protection.”

Last year, judges in Allegheny County held 198 detention hearings involving juvenile offenders, and hearing officers held another 365. The court system’s annual report does not say how many were detained.

In a press release at the time of the closure last year, County Manager William McKain said youths could be sent to detention facilities in other counties. It’s unclear whether the County viewed that as a long-term solution, and a spokesperson did not address that question when it was posed by PublicSource.

But at [the Oct. 18] hearing, Clark said available beds are hard to come by - some youths are even sent out of state to Jefferson County, Ohio, she said - and as a result, Allegheny County judges don’t typically have the option to commit a child to a detention center with Shuman closed.

Public or private?

Until its closure, the County’s Department of Human Services operated Shuman Center with an annual budget of about



ABOVE: The Shuman Center, shuttered in Sept. 2021, could become a privatized, juvenile detention facility. Photo courtesy of PublicSource.

\$10 million. It’s too soon to know whether a private company would cost the County more or less.

The decision to seek a private-sector solution came as a surprise to members of council when it was brought to their attention at [the Oct. 18] budget hearing. At least a handful of them are skeptical of the move.

Councilwoman Michelle Naccarati-Chapkis said in an interview that prospective operators would need to be reviewed carefully.

“We have to make certain that we’re going about it in the best interest of the youths,” said Naccarati-Chapkis, emphasizing the value of rehabilitation and life skills training. “I would be concerned that a for-profit facility would have competing interests and not center the goals that we want to see at the forefront.”

Jeffrey Shook, a social work professor at the University of Pittsburgh, said there

are few differences between the environments at privately operated juvenile detention centers compared to public facilities. However, private operators - whether for-profit or nonprofit - may have their own financial motivations.

“When you build a facility based on a contract, you often get paid based on the beds that are filled,” he said. “I’m just not a believer in that kind of model at all. We should hope to have empty beds.”

County Controller Corey O’Connor likewise said he’d be concerned about the financial implications. “Private companies are out to make money and that’s not generally in the public’s interest,” he said.

Councilman Bobby Palmosina, chair of the council’s budget and finance committee, said he would prefer the facility be run by the County directly, citing concerns about oversight and transparency with a private operation.

“With what [the County] has at the Health

- continued on page 12 -



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BGC student spotlight: Eliza Gonzalez

A Message from BGC Youth Programs

Garfield - Eliza Gonzalez is a conscientious, creative, and hardworking student with a passion for art, design, education, and social justice. In her four years at Pittsburgh Allderdice High School, she has maintained a 4.0 GPA and completed a challenging curriculum of CAS (Center for Advanced Studies) and Advanced Placement (AP) courses.

Eliza is a member of the National Honor Society and has received the AP Scholar with Distinction Award. She has completed three long term projects (LTPs) on the subjects of feminism, drag performance, and prejudice+ fear; each included multimedia art pieces to complement key ideas. Eliza's teachers nominated her to present all three projects to incoming freshmen at the "Expo of Excellence."

In the Feminist Student Union at her school, Eliza worked with club members to petition for a gender-neutral bathroom and also helped write an infographic on LGBTQ+ identities, which the club then presented to the Allderdice health classes. A regular at her school's Student Voice meetings, she is currently a member of the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council. Eliza also performs with the Chamber Choir at school concerts, including two solos at the "Cabaret" show, and organizes cultural events & art activities for the Spanish Club.

By participating in the Learn & Earn program with the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), she has been able to explore work and internship opportunities while gaining valuable, hands-on experience in her areas of interest. One of these opportunities involved working as an art intern for the design teacher at Manchester Craftsmen's Guild. At another worksite, the Department of Education at the Carnegie Museum of Art, Eliza performed research on increasing the museum's family/youth engagement, and helped facilitate art classes for middle-schoolers.

She also worked on park improvements and community projects in the Hill District with the Student Conservation Association (SCA). Eliza even traveled to Yellowstone National Park with Manchester Craftsmen's Guild, and to Costa Rica with her Spanish teachers; both trips enhanced her appreciation for nature and conservation.

Eliza's College & Career Readiness Program coordinator [Judy Lubarski of the BGC] recommended her for an opportunity with the University of Pittsburgh Library to curate a special exhibit from the August Wilson Archive. The Black History Month exhibit will be on display throughout February 2023 at the City-County Building downtown.

Eliza will graduate in June 2023. She is currently a finalist for a \$250,000 QuestBridge Scholarship, and hopes to pursue her interests in art, education, museums, and the natural sciences at her top-ranked college. ♦

BELOW: Allderdice High School student Eliza Gonzalez, a national finalist for the QuestBridge Scholarship, looks to challenge herself in college. Photo courtesy of Judy Lubarski.



the Bulletin

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with the mission of reporting on issues affecting underserved communities and facilitating local residents' exchange of ideas.

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BGC hosts 18th annual luncheon

Photos by Lauren Lubarski

BELOW: Chief Operations Officer Pamela Schön (right) delivers closing remarks at the BGC's 18th annual luncheon on Friday, Nov. 11, at the Omni William Penn Hotel in Downtown Pittsburgh. Turn to page 10 for profiles of the Aggie Award winners.



ABOVE: Celeste C. Smith, cultural leader and co-founder of 1Hood Media, delivers the keynote address on Nov. 11.



ABOVE: BGC Board President Jarmele Fairclough-Tolbert (left) joins forces with former BGC Board President Roxanne Thomas.

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Sts. Peter & Paul Church: ELDI wins \$2.5 million award for renovation plans

A Message from East Liberty Development, Inc.

East Liberty - East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) has been granted \$2.5 million through the Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program [(RACP), administered by Pennsylvania's Office of the Budget] for the renovation of Saints Peter & Paul Church in Larimer.

RACP funding is awarded to projects that focus on the acquisition and construction of regional economic, cultural, civic, recreational, and historical improvement projects. These projects should either increase or maintain current levels of employment, tax revenue, or other measures of economic activity.

"The renovation of the Saints Peter & Paul church is such a unique and exciting opportunity to revitalize a beautiful, well-known space and bring it back to life for community members," said State Senator Lindsey Williams. "I was proud to support this state investment, as it will provide for millions of dollars in economic output through jobs, tourism, and taxes that will benefit the entire city and region."

This funding will provide us and our development partners at The Rooney Sports & Entertainment Group and Stone Planning LLC with the much-needed funds to begin the revitalization of Sts. Peter & Paul church into a multi-purpose arts and entertainment venue - one that can also be used by local community organizations for concerts, weddings, business meetings, and conferences, among other things.



ABOVE: A rendering of ELDI's plans to redevelop the Sts. Peter & Paul Church in Larimer. Graphic courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.

"One of Pittsburgh's monikers is 'Confluence City' and the reuse of Sts. Peter & Paul Church is a confluence in its right that it fulfills a strong community desire to preserve an important part of East Liberty's history, the chance to serve performing nonprofit organizations with rehearsal and showcase space, and as a venue for many other uses in varying capacities and configurations that add commercial value to the region's marketplace," said Tom Rooney, founder and CEO of The Rooney Sports & Entertainment Group.

Plans for the church include a complete renovation of the sanctuary space as well as a two-story addition to the side of the church, which can be used for meetings and potentially smaller-scale theater performances. ELDI has also enlisted the help of Carnegie Mellon University's Master of Arts Management program to evaluate the feasibility of creating an artist residency program at the church in partnership with local arts institutions.

With this initial funding secured, ELDI begins the task of securing additional funding to make this concept a reality. The organization is deeply grateful for this critical influx of capital that will help us save this amazing and historic community centerpiece so that it might serve the community for another 100 years. ♦

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Conservatorship *continued from page 1*

effective, then using the conservatorship process to force the sale of city-owned properties would be unnecessary because the cost to the petitioner can be \$7,500 per petition or higher,” said Rick Swartz, the BGC’s executive director. “But with the land bank still trying to get out of the garage, we really don’t have any other options in dealing with these properties.”

The land bank was created out of legislation passed by Pittsburgh City Council in 2014. As of this fall, only one property had moved from the city’s possession over to the land bank, currently housed at the Urban Redevelopment Authority.

Under the state’s conservatorship law, if a state court agrees with the petitioner’s claim that a property has been abandoned by its owners, it can appoint the petitioner as the conservator, or caretaker, for the property. The conservator can then take steps to clean up the property and secure it. That could extend to shoring up the roof or wall systems if they are threatened with collapse. If the negligent owner fails to respond within a limited time period, the conservator can then ask that the property be sold by the court to the conservator for a fair-market price. A sales price is then established by a court-ordered appraisal.

City-owned properties have long been considered off-limits for conservatorship, primarily because judges are reluctant to cross swords with municipal officials, and deprive them of recovering all or part of the real estate taxes that they may have lost on the property over the years. According to Swartz, most city-owned properties that are ripe candidates for conservatorship are in poor condition; they might cost \$150,000 or more to renovate, and building a new home on a vacant lot now costs \$400,000 or more. In his opinion, those numbers can make buying city-owned properties undesirable in a neighborhood like Garfield, unless a developer has “pretty deep pockets.” But if left abandoned, these properties will, in most cases, become major nuisances or hazards to neighboring owners, and can drive up their property insurance rates. To Swartz, this is the essential “lose-lose” proposition faced by many city neighborhoods.

“We have a long-time homeowner in the 5300 block of Kincaid Street who’s been waiting for over a decade for the city to do something with the vacant row house nextdoor to him,” Swartz noted. “The city-owned property is rodent-infested, and raccoons continually try to

break through the party wall separating the city-owned house from his. He has retained an attorney and is paying a significant amount in legal fees to sue the city and force its hand on that property.” Swartz said the BGC added the house in question to a list of 20 other city-owned properties in Garfield that will - if an agreement can be reached with the city - hopefully be subject to conservatorship hearings.

Wayne Cobb, a Monaca-based attorney, has been working with several local groups, including the BGC, to formulate the language for a consent decree - which the city would willingly execute to allow abandoned, city-owned properties to be targeted for conservatorship by nonprofit community groups or their development partners. Cobb has represented East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) and Rising Tide Partners, Inc. as they have pursued acquisition of privately-owned, albeit abandoned properties in Larimer and Garfield.

“The court is looking for a signed consent decree, whereby the city will relinquish its right to contest conservatorship actions on a select group of properties, provided certain procedures have been followed,” Cobb stated recently. “One of those steps will have to include support for such petitions on the part of both the neighborhood and City Council. No judge wants to get held up for criticism because he or she allowed a nonprofit group to take control of a city-owned property, and then came to learn that nobody really was aware of what they were doing. The nonprofit petitioner will also have to show a plan for the property that is consistent with whatever neighborhood plan may be on record.”

During a mid-November meeting held at ELDI’s offices, Ted Melnyk, a senior development manager for the organization, announced that the court finally granted ELDI title to an abandoned, privately-owned property in Garfield (in the 700 block of N. Atlantic Avenue). The house was originally targeted for conservatorship almost two years ago in a petition filed by ELDI, which was appointed as the caretaker for the property. Melnyk contends that ELDI’s caretaking is what kept the property’s condition from deteriorating any further.

“Had we waited for the city to take the abandoned house on North Atlantic through the process it uses for tax-delinquent properties, it would’ve been 5 to 6 years before it emerged out of that process,” Melnyk explained. “Now we can renovate it and make it affordable for a lower-income family to own. What we did with the North Atlantic property, which was privately-owned, is exactly what we want to try and do with city-owned properties, if the city and the courts will give us the leeway that we need to do so.” ♦



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Volunteers from BGC, PULSE plant trees at Garfield's Healcrest Green



ABOVE: Three volunteers work together planting a fir tree at Healcrest Green in Garfield. Photo courtesy of Madeline Weiss.

BELOW: Madeline Weiss (kneeling), the BGC's Greenzone Coordinator, joins green-thumbed volunteers, including State Rep. Martell Covington (third from left), in celebrating a successful Garfield tree-planting effort on Nov. 5. Photo courtesy of Madeline Weiss.



ABOVE: BGC Board Member Sam Hoffman (left) and Chief Operations Officer Pamela Schön plant a new tree at Healcrest Green. Photo courtesy of Madeline Weiss.



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‘BOOM Times’ for artists in Garfield

By Deborah M. Todd *The Heinz Endowments*

Garfield - When multimedia creative J. Thomas Agnew and visual artist D.S. Kinsel first opened the doors of what would eventually become BOOM Concepts in 2014, the raw, unoccupied storefront was a template for what you'd find in most of the area.

That block of Penn Avenue in Pittsburgh's Garfield neighborhood, dotted with single-family homes, mom-and-pop convenience stores, and residential walk-ups atop transient storefronts and small neighborhood restaurants, was on the cusp of a commercial transition that would, nearly a decade later, transform the community into an arts and entertainment corridor on par with its more affluent neighbors to the east and west in the adjacent East Liberty and Lawrenceville communities.

BOOM Concepts would become an integral part of that transition. But first, both the duo and the community had to survive the growing pains.

Before creating BOOM Concepts - a gallery & art space that serves today as an artist development incubator and Garfield community hub - Kinsel showed his work out of the best available spaces he could find, which were usually near the same Penn Avenue corridor close to BOOM's current location.

"I remember folks would come to the exhibitions and people would remark how dark it was on the main street in comparison to Lawrenceville and East Liberty," Kinsel said. "It was a main thoroughfare and it was really dark, the sidewalks were all uneven. You couldn't even skateboard because the sidewalk was all jacked up. It had a really DIY vibe to everything."

Once the space opened, things didn't change overnight.

"Our first year, we were behind a fence for almost nine months," Agnew recalled. "They were redoing the whole corridor. They had to dig up the street, and were redoing the sidewalks. We were behind a fence from late 2014 until the summer of 2015. But the community supported us, and they showed up for us."

The support wasn't by happenstance. The same time BOOM was emerging, an era of abundance for local Black culture, music, and community in Pittsburgh was coming to an abrupt end.

The Shadow Lounge - a legendary East Liberty gathering space for hip hop, R&B, alternative funk, soul, rock, local art, and overall camaraderie - shuttered its doors in 2013. Its sister venue, Ava Bar & Grill, closed three months later, and the void that was left was filled with boutique eateries, luxury condominiums, and high-end retailers. Lawrenceville's 720 Music, Clothing & Cafe - a music and cultural institution - shut its doors in 2014.

The venues closed, but the communities they forged remained. Former patrons of the Shadow Lounge and Ava - Kinsel and Agnew among them - found each other at events hosted across the city by musical acts and visual artists who were former regulars in the shuttered spaces.

At that time, Agnew, a graphic designer, was primarily working on the youth culture and entrepreneurship publication *Jenesis Magazine* and hosting events around the city to raise its profile. Kinsel, a visual, performance, and multimedia artist whose work ranges from vibrant canvases and towering sculptures to the BOOM Derby Project, a "mobile public art project" that blends graffiti and derby car culture, was doing individual exhibits and seeking a spot of his own to show his work.

Agnew, a native of Fremont, Ohio, who set his sights on a career in the arts early in life, headed to Pennsylvania in 2002 to attend the Art Institute of Pittsburgh. Kinsel - a native Pittsburgher who grew up steeped in the hip-hop traditions of graffiti and performance art - was on the cusp of a career path that would take him from early childhood education to national artist residencies and commissions highlighting his passions.

What began as a shared interest in finding a permanent space became a combined vision to shed a positive light on Garfield and provide a new venue and opportunities for Pittsburgh's Black artists and entertainers.

"We were just like where are we supposed to congregate? Where's our space of culture, our space to refine our practice, challenge each other, get better?" Kinsel said.

The effort to create a space and combine the synergies of artists serving as voices of the oppressed invokes images of similar struggles during the Harlem Renaissance. Artists as divergent as poet Langston Hughes, painter and muralist Charles Henry Alston, and renowned sculptor and art teacher Augusta Savage lived in homes or opened studios in Central Harlem within blocks of one another around the 1930s. And while community spaces such as the Utopia Children's House were creative hubs for emerging artists such as painter Jacob Lawrence, the drive to house and support artists of color didn't pick up until after the Federal Art Project launched in 1935 to support out-of-work artists during the Great Depression.

Bringing that vision to fruition for BOOM - a name Agnew said made the founders "think about the boom of the economy," or "the growth of something" - took not only time, but funding and expertise that Agnew noted doesn't come easily for many Black-owned businesses. He credited a connection with Justin Laing, who then worked at The Heinz Endowments, and Richard Swartz from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC) for helping them find the space at 5139 Penn Ave. The BGC also served as their fiscal sponsor and guided them through the ins-and-outs of entrepreneurship.

"There are just so many pieces to running a business, let alone a storefront, that [many Black artists and entrepreneurs] don't have the resources or the information to do so successfully," Agnew said. "Most businesses and spaces close within a year to two years. In that time, you're trying to figure out programming or trying to

- continued on next page -



ABOVE: Agnew stands beside the work of his favorite artists at BOOM's 5139 Penn Ave. hub in Garfield. Photo courtesy of The Heinz Endowments.

January Bulletin Deadline: Wednesday, Dec. 14th

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BELOW: D.S. Kinsel, co-founder of BOOM Concepts, reflects on the creative process at his artist workshop. Photo courtesy of The Heinz Endowments.



- continued from previous page -

figure out marketing for whatever type of business you're doing. It's really taken us doing multiple sides of programming to stay open."

Today, the Penn Avenue storefront hums with activity. Bold canvases, delicate watercolors and bright, aggressive abstracts being sold by local artists line walls and sit in stacks along the floors, awaiting exhibition. The middle of the space, packed with bookshelves filled by the works of Toni Morrison, Yaa Gyasi, Roxane Gay, and others, temporarily served as the Black Unicorn Library - a collection authored by Black and femme writers, curated by librarian Bekezela Mguni.

A gray loveseat with plush fuchsia pillows tops off the homey atmosphere, which Agnew said is the ambiance they were aiming to create. Prior to the pandemic, the space regularly transformed "at least nine times in 12 months" to accommodate new exhibits, programs and conferences, but the team shifted efforts to be what Kinsel described as more "artist-centric" once opportunities to gather became limited.

And while the gallery's profile was boosted early on through participation with the BGC's Unblurred First Friday - a monthly celebration showcasing Penn Avenue's art galleries, restaurants, and small businesses - BOOM Concepts' efforts beyond its walls have gained [the duo] equal traction.

"We try to connect [artists] with different jobs, teaching assistant positions," Agnew said. "We're always doing public art and murals. When we work and connect with other organizations, we often hire other artists to help us so they know what it feels like working within these cultural spaces."

To support these efforts, in 2015, they started the BOOM Universe Residency Program, which offers 60- and 90-day residencies, \$500 to \$1,000 stipends, installation support, and proposal & artist development, among other features. The goal, Agnew said, was to help fill that void in education, networking, and expertise that

"We want to pay artists. It's not about exposure or uplifting; we want to compensate artists for their intellectual property, for their labor, for their presence."

- D.S. Kinsel, BOOM Concepts Co-founder

holds back Black and LGBTQ artists and entrepreneurs in the region.

"We've definitely been part of that middleman that had been missing," he said. "Between 2014 and now, we have led in areas where we're trying to educate and help people build their careers in their way."

With a \$150,000 grant from The Heinz Endowments and the Ford Foundation through the Pittsburgh's Cultural Treasures Initiative, the two are looking for even more ways to support the community.

Kinsel, who has partnered with individuals and organizations such as Carnegie International-renowned muralist James "Yaya" Hough and Pittsburgh's August Wilson African American Cultural Center, in addition to several solo exhibitions throughout the years, emphasized that BOOM's most important work involves making sure the artists it serves are getting work of their own.

"Black artists typically are at the intersection of all marginalized groups, whether it be single-parent households, queer people, people with disabilities. We know when you have Black skin, there is an added level of oppression," he said.

"We want to pay artists. It's not about exposure or uplifting; we want to compensate artists for their intellectual property, for their labor, for their presence."

As Agnew looked through a stack of frames in the gallery, he noted that while the wall art was a consistent feature these days, with the COVID-19 pandemic waning, the space could soon transform at any time, depending on the community's needs.

"A lot of people that come have said, 'Every time I come here, it looks different,' and that's great for a space to be able to transform like that," he said.

"Whatever needs we hear from the community," Agnew added, "if we're able to do so, we try to work that out and provide resources for the people."

[This story (reprinted in full) is the property of The Heinz Endowments.] ♦

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BGC luncheon celebrates 2022 Aggie Brose Award winners

Photos by Lauren Lubarski



ABOVE: Dr. Kendra Ross is the head of social impact at Duolingo, headquartered in East Liberty.

BELOW: Kristin Hughes (left), Carnegie Mellon University professor and founder of the Octopus Garden in Friendship.




ABOVE: Joann Monroe, executive director of Garfield Jubilee Association.

BELOW: A.J. Monsma, community outreach coordinator for Garfield Community Farm.



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Allies responds to increase in STIs, changes testing procedures

A Message from Allies for Health + Wellbeing

Pittsburgh - Beginning on Monday, Nov. 14, Allies for Health + Wellbeing changed the way it provides testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well as its PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) appointments.

Allies offers testing for HIV, hepatitis C, gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis. Under the new process, anyone visiting Allies for STI testing also will be seen by one of Allies' medical providers in its clinic and will have blood drawn.

Patients coming to Allies for their three-month PrEP appointments will have blood drawn as well. Visits will be billed to insurance for insured patients.

Allies will also continue to provide free testing on Sundays, and at community outreach events. Visit AlliesPGH.org or follow Allies on social media (@AlliesPGH on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) for a schedule of community outreach events where testing will take place.

"With the unprecedented increase in syphilis cases over the last year, it is vital that providers look for signs of infection that can go unnoticed," said Mpande Mwape, MSN, RN, director of health services at Allies. "Additionally, not all patients are knowledgeable about STD symptoms that could be easily identified by a trained professional."

Allies saw a 26 percent increase in syphilis cases between fiscal years 2020-21 and 2021-22. According to the Centers for Disease Control's "Sexually Transmitted Disease Surveillance 2020" report (the most recent set of federal data), gonorrhea rates are up 45 percent from the last report in 2016, and syphilis rates are up by 52 percent.

Additionally, due to health disparities such as access to care, Black & Hispanic patients and men who have sex with men are disproportionately impacted by STIs, particularly syphilis and gonorrhea.

Anyone who is sexually active can contract an STI, and while many STIs have few noticeable symptoms, they can cause significant damage if left untreated.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends yearly testing for gonorrhea and chlamydia for all sexually active women and yearly syphilis, gonorrhea, and

chlamydia testing for gay & bisexual patients and men who have sex with men. Anyone who has new or multiple sexual partners may want to consider getting tested more frequently.

"STIs are preventable. Regular testing and using condoms consistently and correctly are both highly effective ways to stop the spread of STIs," Mwape said. "We encourage anyone who believes they may have been exposed to an STI or who has not kept up with regular testing to make an appointment with their healthcare provider."

In addition to the new processes for testing and PrEP, visits will be billed to insurance for patients with insurance.

Free rapid testing for HIV, hepatitis C and syphilis will be available at Allies' offices (5913 Penn Ave.) on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and at community outreach events.

Walk-in testing is available only on Sundays. Allies staff members are available to answer any questions patients may have about the new process.

Allies' testing hours:

- Monday, Wednesday and Thursday: 8:30 a.m. to noon (Appointments only)
- Tuesday, Friday, Saturday: Closed
- Sunday: 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (Appointments, walk-ins)

PrEP appointments are available:

- Monday and Friday: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday: 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.
- Saturday and Sunday: Closed

Patients seeking appointments for testing or PrEP may call 412-345-7456 or visit AlliesPGH.org and click the "Request an Appointment" button. ♦



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Shuman continued from page 2

Department and the Department of Human Services, I believe we could put the right people in place to give children what they need," Palmosina said.

Councilwoman Olivia Bennett said, "I do not agree with privatization at all."

Council President Pat Catena, who, like Naccarati-Chapkis and Palmosina, was caught off guard by the privatization move, said he needed to see more details before passing judgment on the administration's plans.

Catena and others noted, though, that the specter of the Luzerne County "Kids for Cash" scandal looms over any decision to privatize juvenile detention. Two judges there were convicted after they closed a county juvenile detention facility, sent children to a for-profit facility, and collected millions of dollars in illegal kickbacks.

Amie Downs, the County Executive's spokesperson, did not answer PublicSource's questions about why the County is looking to privatize the operation rather than revisit a county-run model. She said the RFP was released after "discussion with the courts about its needs."

Companies had until Oct. 28 to submit proposals to the County, and it's not known how long the County will take to select one, if it selects one at all. McKain told the budget committee that the administration would seek council approval for the chosen proposal.

Dennis Jones, a former member of the County's now-defunct Juvenile Detention Board, is "very, very leery" of privatizing the center because he worries it will jeopardize the transparency of its operations. But he was similarly concerned about the oversight mechanisms that were in place at the former Shuman Center.

Jones, executive director of the nonprofit Youth Enrichment Services, said the former board was "pretty much non-func-

tional." Members were rarely provided with information about issues within the center and had little real input or contribution to its operations.

"We were really nothing more than a figurehead, and for that I feel very sad. I feel like we need to apologize to the citizens of the County," Jones said.

Does the County need Shuman?

Council members, the judicial branch, and the County Executive agree on at least one thing: A year after Shuman's closure, the county needs a replacement.

Most say they need it badly, even though

only 20 children were detained in the facility when it closed.

Clark - who, as president judge, is at the top of the County's judicial branch - left little room for debate at the hearing.

"At this particular time, we just need it to open," Clark said. "It's really frustrating and we're really, seriously concerned for the safety not just of the community but of many of the juveniles who are charged in these serious offenses [and] can be targets themselves" while their case works its way through the courts. "Detention is really what needs to happen for some of them."

McKain said [on Oct. 18] that the admin-

istration now thinks the community needs the facility back up and running. He said a developer could open a facility to serve the broader Western Pennsylvania region, rather than only Allegheny County. Clark said she spoke with president judges from other counties who told her they would make use of such a hub.

Pittsburgh Mayor Ed Gainey, who has no control over legal or correctional systems but is responsible for the county's largest police force, said at a news conference that, "We should have never closed Shuman without a plan."

Pittsburgh Police Commander Richard Ford said at the news conference that without a detention center, youths are "being released that are repeat offenders, with previous gun charges, and they're still out there."

Bennett said whether the new facility is county-run or private, it must improve on the way Shuman operated prior to its closure. "What they had before was always out of compliance," Bennett said. "I want to have something actually up to par on how a juvenile detention center should be operating."

Sara Goodkind, a social work professor at the University of Pittsburgh, said many discussions about opening juvenile detention facilities pit youths against their communities. For a facility to be successful in deterring youth crime, the County will have to take supplementary actions to improve young people's safety, like addressing barriers that keep them from accessing basic needs or mental health care.

"When young people are safe in their communities, in their schools, in their homes, then we will all be safer," she said. "And that is the best prevention."

[PublicSource is an independent news organization in Pittsburgh. Visit PublicSource.org.] ♦



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- Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville, & Stanton Heights -

Real Estate Sales for the month of September 2022

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, Residential Realtor

Bloomfield

Andrew Beck to Christina Elizabeth Ricci at 4206 Main St. for \$237,000.

Andrew S McIntyre to Ignatius 1013, LLC at 533 S. Winebiddle St. for \$294,999.

Diana F & Harold L Rossey to 339 Taylor St., LLC at 339 Taylor St. for \$195,000.

Kenneth Bradbury to Daniel Tolomeo at 4808 Cypress St. for \$296,250.

Kenneth J & Mary V Schivins to Jacob Mcclerland at 4658 Rosina Way for \$249,000.

Robert B & Georgann Meyers to Lewis Gilday at 151 Pearl St. for \$340,000.

Tanya Randall to Ilmar Akhmedjanov at 406 S. Evaline St. for \$380,000.

Friendship

Jayne L Bower to Brad M Palmisano at 316 Roup Ave. for \$860,000.

Garfield

Bloomfield-Garfield Corp. to Nicolaus Aboud at 5337 Brown Way for \$4,500.

Cartus Financial Corp. to Jared Wickerman at 4923 Broad St. for \$210,000.

City Of Pittsburgh to Akia Williams at 0 N. Aiken Ave. for \$200.

Kyle Fisk to Cartus Financial Corp. at 4923 Broad St. for \$210,000.

Ryan & Veronica England to David P Woods at 5203 Gem Way for \$55,000.

East Liberty

David H & Grace P Ferguson to Fnu Shushruth at 726 N. Euclid Ave. for \$605,000.

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Sierra Parm at 339 Enright Ct. for \$100,000.

East Liberty Partners, LLC to 6116 Stanton Ave. Holdings, LLC at 6116-6122 Stanton Ave. for \$647,000.

Farm Hill Holdings, LLC to Donni R Black at 6300 Saint Marie St. for \$215,000.

Leila J Dallal to 5404 Black St. PA, LLC at 5404 Black St. for \$195,000.

Pittsburgh Equitable 02 LP to Mellon's Orchard Acquisition, LLC at 0 Rural St. for \$32,656.

Ricardo T Walker to Dorothy I Carter at 738 N. Beatty St. for \$24,742.

Sean Riggs to Jaih Hunter-Hill at 5454 Black St. for \$461,500.

Lawrenceville

Adam Backer to GNRL 46th Street, LLC at 168 46th St. for \$597,431.

Ashley M Byrne to Alexa Walls at 4020 Arsenal Pl for \$275,000.

Betty Ward to Stephen Choder at 7309 Butler St. for \$50,000.

Blaise W & Julie Abramovitz to Irrevocable Trust Of Neil E Strosnider at 155 55th St. for \$765,000.

Brian S Goodman to Sarah Welsh & James Richard Burdord Jr. at 4065 Saint John's Way for \$669,250.

Charles J Tytler to Dane D & Victoria Benko at 130 Home St. for \$520,000.

Daniel J & Elizabeth A Wilkerson to Emily F Edson at 3942 Howley St. for \$210,000.

Dawn L Martin to Todd E Lewis at 275 Main St. for \$430,000.

Donald H Manley to Paul K & Laura J Livingston at 307 46th St. for \$318,500.

Elizabeth B Galardy to Michael & Jennifer Tepe at 4204 Bruce St. for \$200,000.

Janelle Donaldson to Grand Old Properties, LLC at 5624 Harrison St. for \$100,000.

Jeff Burks & Andrea J Mascara to 3501 Butler Holdings, LLC at 3501 Butler St. Unit 3B for \$383,875.

Jennifer Jablonsky Dubina to Renew 412, LLC at 246 Ater Way for \$60,000.

Jordan P Cavanaugh to Ryan Shanahan Luther at 5279 Holmes St. for \$532,000.

Kevin J Koehler to Mmr Development, LLC at 5206 Duncan St. for \$105,000.

Michael P Lambert to Connor Schlegel at 168 47th St. for \$264,000.

Paula Sauers-Rehn to Aimee Frank at 5202 Butler St. Unit 1 for \$373,000.

Pittsburgh Malt Industries, Inc. to Goon Nation Ent, LLC at 4125 Butler St. for \$250.

Ronald Jardini to GPG Butler, LLC at 3401 Butler St. for \$810,000.

Sfr3-000, LLC to Neuman Investing, LLC at 3937 Howley St. for \$145,000.

Suzanne J Templer to G.A. Butterbaugh LP at 5563 Berlin Way for \$665,000.

Tammy P & Eric John Edmondston to RB Property Group, LLC at 4416 Davison St. for \$385,000.

The Robert J Kreppel Living Trust to Stay 412 at 181 39th St. for \$365,000.

Thierry Callier to Stephen Thomas Somma at 141 45th St. for \$637,000.

Timothy G Williamson to Sam Duerr at 3619 Charlotte St. for \$630,000.

William & Nancy Coleman to Sarah Chappel at 5111 Holmes St. for \$163,500.

Y&Q Management, Inc. to Omni Wood Solutions, LLC at 6634 Butler St. for \$37,500.

Stanton Heights

Carol M Crystian to Julie A Walsh at 4810 Coleridge St. for \$200,000.

Dean Family Trust to Nasha LP at 1002-1004 Woodbine St. for \$230,000.

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Nathan N Taylor at 0 Elena Ct. for \$35,000.

Kristyn L Heiry to Chad Penny at 1132 Ogleshorpe Ave. for \$268,000.

Megan L Datsko to Mervyn Lopez-Galindo at 4337 Stanton Ave. for \$235,000.

Schalljason to Michael Grapner at 1521 Woodbine St. for \$162,500.

This column, which uses data from Allegheny County's online portal, contains occasional errors. If something looks off, let us know.

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Staying the course: why Eddie Lesoon never gave up on East Liberty

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

East Liberty - “It’s just a matter of time,” Eddie Lesoon is quoted saying in a 2011 *Pittsburgh Business Times* article discussing the rebirth of East Liberty.

And that time has finally come.

Lesoon is the president of Asia Carpet and Decorating Co., a family-run floor-covering business [on Broad Street in East Liberty] started by his grandfather and father back in 1933. He’s also a real estate developer who began buying property in the neighborhood in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Over the years, Lesoon has been a pillar within the East Liberty community, dedicated to restoring the neighborhood to the thriving community and business district it was before urban renewal. To that end, he has restored and maintained several historic buildings to prevent them from decay and retain the character of the neighborhood, including Keystone Plumbing, VFW Post 166, Walsh’s Bar, The Original Brass Rail Restaurant, Sun Drug Store, Kelly and Cohen Appliances, Alexanders Men’s Clothing Store, Murray Meats, National Record Mart, and Henne Jewelers. Lesoon was a founding member of East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) and is currently a board member of the East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce (ELQCC).

As ELDI’s executive director Maelene Meyers remembers, “Even when East Liberty was bad, he always defended it. No matter how bad it got, he acted like the godfather. It was

our bad to fix.”

We sat down with Lesoon to hear his perspective. He shares stories from his long history in the community, explaining what it took to transform East Liberty and why he always had faith that things would eventually turn around.

ELDI: *To start, can you tell us about Asia Carpet and Decorating Co, including the products and services you offer and how it all got started?*

Lesoon: “My grandfather and father started the company in 1933. It was originally opened in the heart of East Liberty, at the corner of Penn Avenue and Beatty Street (now, the new Whole Foods). The company, called John Lesoon & Son at the time, was located in a storefront rented from the Enright Theater (they rented out several storefronts of their building). East Liberty was thriving at the time; the MC of Enright Theater was Dick Powell, a man who later married Betty Grable (the Hollywood actress whose legs were famously insured for a million dollars). Our company only stayed in that building for two years before moving to Baum Boulevard where my father bought a house with a storefront. They renamed the company Asia Carpet (because they were in the oriental rug business) and we stayed on Baum Boulevard from 1935 until 2016 when we moved back to East Liberty. Today, we’re a commercial and residential floor covering company. We sell wood, carpet, rugs, tile - basically anything that goes on the floor.”

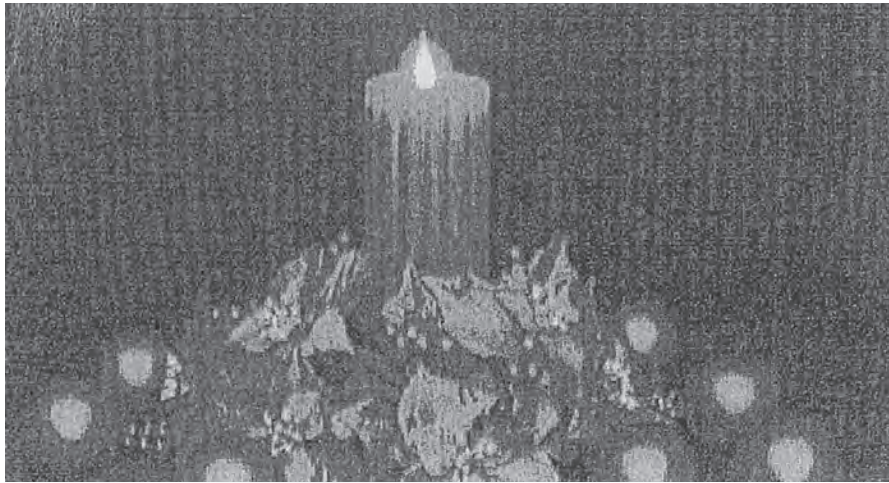
ELDI: *When did you start to see East Liberty deteriorate from a thriving community to an abandoned community?*

Lesoon: “In the 1960s, the city redeveloped the heart of the East Liberty business district to make it walking-only, so you would park your car in the rear and walk to go shopping in the front. Cars weren’t even allowed on Highland Avenue, only buses. It looked great, but it wasn’t good for the neighborhood. Most business owners didn’t weather this transition well and many closed up shop. Some residents who lived in this center could afford to move elsewhere and they did. Others who could not afford to re-establish their lives elsewhere were forced to re-settle in new, high-rise, Section 8 housing nearby. So, here you have this beautiful looking business district on paper, but there were very few businesses, very few residents, and increasing poverty because of bad housing policies.”

ELDI: *What was East Liberty like in the 1980s and what was your role in helping turn it around?*

Lesoon: “Around 1980, East Liberty was at its worst. The East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce got a few people together that were invested in the community. It was really Ward Olander (Real Estate Enterprises) who pioneered this. With his encouragement, Eve Picker A.I.A. and I got on board. In 1981, a group of us, 12 chartered members in total, founded ELDI, with Dave Thomas of Mellon Bank as our chairman. That’s when a few of us became small developers. We continued investing for a good 10, 15, 20 years as ELDI became stronger, more influential, and more nurturing for the community. ELDI helped create consistency in East Liberty. It really took off when developers like Walnut Capital and Mosites changed the neighborhood’s entire image by developing large buildings with the help and support of ELDI...Between us restoring the small buildings - and we got a lot of help from ELDI and the URA, who lent us money to redevelop the buildings, put new facades on, and eventually bring in new types of tenants - and ELDI, who bought some of the big buildings, East Liberty has gone from one extreme to the other. Now, there’s practically no crime, and it’s a very healthy community. And for that reason, we decided to move our company from Baum Boulevard, about a mile and a half away, back to the heart of East Liberty.”

- continued on next page -



During this Holiday Season, more than ever, our thoughts and prayers turn to those who have lost a loved one this past year. We are lighting a candle in our funeral home in remembrance of all the families that we have been privileged to serve. And it is in this spirit that we simply, but sincerely say...May the Peace and Joy of the Christmas Season be yours throughout the New Year.



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continued from page 14

BELOW: Pictured (left to right): Edward J. Lesoon III, Jonathan Lesoon, Edward Lesoon II. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.



ELDI: At what point did you start buying property in East Liberty?

Lesoon: “We started buying a few properties in the 1970s and early 1980s. Some buildings were so deteriorated that we bought them just to stop them from physical decay. We purchased the buildings and boarded them up one by one, and then restored them from the inside out. And finally, we started to rent them out to new businesses who were excited about building a new East Liberty with us. And we’re still doing it today.”

ELDI: Where did your motivation to restore and revitalize East Liberty come from? Just your love for the neighborhood?

Lesoon: “Yes, it was basically that. My father, who lived in Highland Park at the time, would drive through East Liberty to get home from our Baum Blvd. store. We witnessed together how East Liberty was decaying. He would always say, ‘We should do something about this.’ So, during his life, he and I began to invest in the community together. Today, we’ve got a good balance of restored and new buildings. We have a nice, younger generation of people coming in, and they are making changes and creating new things, new jobs, and new businesses. It’s unbelievable.”

ELDI: Did you and the other small developers have a strategy for buying real estate?

Lesoon: “Our philosophy at the beginning, as small businesspeople, was that the big developers would be on the outside coming in, so we should go right down the middle and expand out. The core was the worst part - crime-wise and deterioration-wise - but we took

on the task of coming into the core, primarily on Broad Street, and restored it with new sidewalks, new facades, and the first historic lights outside of Downtown Pittsburgh. We just totally brought it alive, and we came and met the big guys on the outside.”

ELDI: What were some lessons that you learned through your experiences in East Liberty?

Lesoon: “You can’t do anything unless you commit to the whole community - everybody. We need everyone’s input as to what’s going to be created in East Liberty. You can’t just go out there and start to develop and hope that the people will come. No, the people have to drive the development. You have to listen to what their needs are, their demands and requests. When you do that, then you can build a healthy community.”

ELDI: Do you remember any specific moment that stands out for you as a turning point for the neighborhood?

Lesoon: “I’d say about eight years ago, when an international tech company leased some space from us. Even though the neighborhood looked nice, I didn’t think somebody that big would come in. This company, with over 100 employees, produced a lot of foot traffic in the center core of East Liberty which really gave way for other businesses to open nearby.”

ELDI: What gave you the faith that East Liberty would eventually turn around?

Lesoon: “As corny as it may sound, I’ve always taken that Don Quixote mentality of ‘dream the impossible dream.’ If you work hard enough, you can make it happen. Well, we worked hard on it, one step at a time. It was only natural that this place would come back to life again.”

ELDI: Can you explain the difference between the East Liberty Quarter Chamber of Commerce (ELQCC) and East Liberty Development Inc. (ELDI)?

Lesoon: “The ELQCC supports all businesses in East Liberty. If you are a local business owner, you can reach out to the ELQCC for support in advertising, beautification projects, organizing a festival (like the East Liberty Wine Festival), or anything else you need. ELDI worked with the community to develop a vision for the future of the neighborhood, as outlined in the 1999 and 2010 East Liberty Community Plans, and they have supported the realization of those plans by supporting the construction of major development projects in East Liberty. Although they serve different purposes, both the ELQCC and ELDI support the economic life of East Liberty’s central business district.”

ELDI: What are your thoughts on the future of East Liberty?

Lesoon: “Any community is guided by its people, and as long as a diverse set of people come into East Liberty and help guide it, the neighborhood can only continue to grow and succeed. So, if Maelene retires and I retire, it’ll continue on. She established a very strong foundation for it, and I helped a little bit along the way. East Liberty, as we see it, is here to stay.” ♦



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Remembering Celeste Scott, fearless housing advocate

A Message from Lawrenceville United



ABOVE: Celeste Scott worked to provide housing opportunities for Pittsburgh's marginalized communities. Photo courtesy of Sisters PGH.

[“Celeste was as stalwart a warrior as there is in fighting for folks who find themselves with the short straw in life. The city’s Housing Opportunity Fund would likely have never been created in 2017 if not for Celeste’s rallying cries. Several thousand lives have felt the impact from that Fund, whether through getting help with delinquent rent or utilities, moving into new apartments or homes, or receiving help with their down payment in purchasing their first home.” - Rick Swartz, BGC Executive Director]

Lawrenceville - Our team at Lawrenceville United (LU) is mourning the loss of Celeste Scott, who tragically passed away in November. Celeste was a locally- and nationally-recognized champion for housing and racial justice, a former Lawrenceville resident & LU Board member, a close colleague, and a trusted friend.

LU got to know Celeste through our participation in the Housing Justice Table (a coalition she convened through her role at Pittsburgh UNITED) - which was initially formed to pass, and fund - the City’s Housing Opportunity Fund. Many Lawrenceville residents participated in that campaign and, thanks to Celeste’s efforts, the Housing Opportunity Fund has deployed \$10 million dollars each year for affordable housing all across Pittsburgh - supporting seniors with necessary home repairs to age in place, creating new permanent affordable housing (like Community Land Trust homes), helping low-income tenants get rent and utility assistance, preventing foreclosures, and so much more. Our staff could take you to almost any block in Lawrenceville and show you the impact that the Housing Opportunity Fund is having here for our neighbors, all thanks to Celeste’s efforts!

Celeste was also key in Lawrenceville’s efforts to adopt inclusionary zoning, a policy that has already mandated the creation of 40 new units of affordable housing in our community. During the campaign for inclusionary zoning, she attended all the Lawrenceville community meetings alongside residents, provided important infrastructure to the campaign, held one-on-ones with elected officials, and convened partners across the City to support the campaign, always while uplifting the voices of those who were most marginalized and impacted by the housing crisis in Lawrenceville and beyond.

Our neighborhood and the City of Pittsburgh is a better place because of Celeste’s efforts, and we will miss her dearly. A fundraiser and community memorial are being hosted to honor Celeste’s life and provide funds for her family during a very difficult time. Please make your donation at gofund.me/7f4815ea. LU will be making a \$1,000 donation, and we encourage all Lawrenceville residents and community members to give as generously as Celeste gave to our neighborhood. ♦

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