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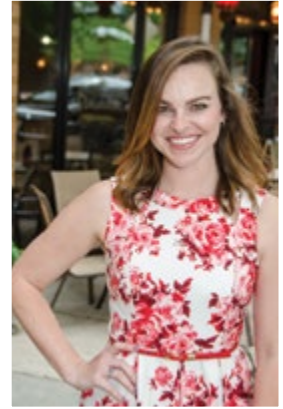
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Dear Readers,

People have described 2020 in many ways. It has been a year of hardships for many, confusion for most, and an opportunity for a fresh start for all. I know many of us are looking forward to a “new normal” in a new year soon.



Here on the Gulf Coast, our community has faced devastating damage due to Hurricane Sally. Many in the CSU family have experienced flooding, damage and days without power.

Despite setbacks, our Knights are inspiring. The ways you give your all every day—to your careers, families and communities—is a beacon of hope. You embody all of the traditional, and modern, attributes of a Knight.

One inspiring Knight is Felicia Rucker-Sumerlin. Through determination, patience and grit, Felicia beat the odds and was named deputy sheriff in Jefferson County, Alabama. In doing so, she became the highest-ranking woman in her sheriff’s office 200-year history. You can read her story of triumph on Page 12.

I’d also like to point you to the Boast Post on Page 19. Our alumni are doing great things! We’d love to boast about you, too, in a future edition of the CSU Alumni Magazine. Send an email to CSU-Alumni@ColumbiaSouthern.edu with the subject line “Boast Post” to tell us about your latest accomplishment.

Thank you for taking the time to read the stories within these pages; we hope they put a smile on your face. Remember that you are always an important part of the CSU alumni family, despite how long it’s been since you’ve received your diploma.

Above all, spread love and be kind.

Happy reading,

Libby Reilly

LETTER FROM THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Hello my fellow Knights,

As we are all very aware, we have reached a pinnacle in our lives that many of us would never have thought would occur.

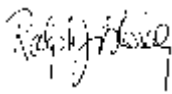
Although this year's commencement ceremony will look different from years past, it is still a joyous time. I envision next year's graduation to be a grand affair with many of our 2020 graduates joining our 2021 grads in one big celebration! If you earned your degree this year, I hope you take a moment to celebrate your hard work and commemorate your educational journey and accomplishment, even if it is not in the way you originally planned.

This year, many universities have opted to embrace online learning, albeit with a few hiccups. I am grateful that we have a dedicated support staff, faculty and administration who have made the flexibility of online learning a priority from the very beginning. My hat goes off to them, and to you, for being ahead of the curve.

Many of you are involved in your local communities, helping to overcome the day-to-day hurdles of these unprecedented times. I am heartened to see how you are all striving to make the world a better place, in uniform and public service, and to accomplish extraordinary things. Thank you.

Like many of you, my occupation requires me to travel all across the globe. I am always surprised at the number of CSU graduates I encounter on the road, and I am very proud of the camaraderie that I have found. This says a lot about CSU and the connection we all share as Knights. As we continue to forge on in this new normal, I look forward to the day that we can connect again. Until then, take care, stay safe and stay strong.

Sincerely,



Ralph J. Blessing
Alumni Association President
M.S. Occupational Safety and Health, Class of 2007



Get to Know Your Fellow Knights

Win CSU Swag

One of the great benefits of joining an alumni chapter is the networking with fellow CSU graduates.

Be on the lookout for the “Get to Know Your Fellow Knights” post in your alumni chapter Facebook feed. In each alumni chapter’s Facebook page, you will find a link to a questionnaire containing fun, easy questions that will give your fellow Knights a little insight into who you are. It is a great way to break the ice and get acquainted with other chapter members. Plus, you can win CSU swag!

Haven’t joined a chapter yet? You can join anytime. Alumni chapters are open to all graduates with an associate, bachelor’s, master’s or doctoral degree from CSU. To join your local alumni chapter, visit ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni-Chapters.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Eric Simmons

An Outstanding Safety Professional

“Completing my degree opened up doors for me to continue to advance professionally.”

— Eric Simmons, *CSU Alumni*

Each year, CSU chooses one student or alumni who is making waves in the world of safety for the Outstanding Safety Professional Award. This year, Eric Simmons stood out above the crowd for his success and dedication at Helix Electric in Temecula, California.

While he began his career at Helix 14 years ago, Simmons stepped into the role of corporate safety director three years ago. During 2020, he has focused much of his attention on keeping employees safe with COVID-19 policies.

“When I transitioned into my role as a corporate safety director, I already had several professional safety certifications and a good knowledge of safety processes,” Simmons said.

“Both personally and professionally, I have benefited from the time management and the routines that I developed while working towards my degrees.”



“Still, I felt that it wasn’t enough. I would be directing the safety program for a large national electrical contractor and leading a team of very experienced safety professionals facing complex safety challenges daily. I decided to return to school to obtain a degree in occupational safety and health to help me gain additional knowledge about safety programs and safety management.”

Simmons completed his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from CSU, both in occupational safety and health.

“Completing my degree opened up doors for me to continue to advance professionally. It allowed me to obtain additional professional certifications and helped me to become a more well-rounded safety professional,” he said. “The process also helped me to become better at thinking critically and conducting research. Both personally and professionally, I have benefited from the time management and the routines that I developed while working towards my degrees.”

Simmons has always been drawn to the safety profession and the impact it can make in both big and small ways.

“I have always had a passion for learning and teaching others. The safety profession provides an excellent opportunity to do both of those things,” he said. “I enjoy the variety within the safety profession, both in terms of the things we do and the people we meet and interact with on a daily basis.”

This dedication and passion for safety is reflected in the numerous construction safety awards he has earned, including the Board of Certified Safety Professionals’ 2019 Construction Health and Safety Technician Award of Excellence. Simmons has licenses in 17 states and serves on national safety committees including the American Society of Safety Professionals, the National Safety Council and the National Fire Protection Association.

The Outstanding Safety Professional Award was established by the university to recognize National Safety Month, observed annually in June, and to celebrate its occupational safety and health students and graduates for their commitments to safety, professionalism and their accomplishments. 🏆



Thinking About Going Back to College?

CSU Adds 8 Degree Programs and Concentrations to its Existing Academic Catalog

Columbia Southern University is pleased to introduce many new degree programs and concentrations to its academic catalog. With many working adults rethinking their goals and strategies amidst the COVID-19 crisis, now may be the perfect time to earn your next degree.


These new degree programs and concentrations offer curricula based on current industry trends, applicant and student requests and consultations with subject-matter experts.

“We are very proud of the new concentrations as they provide students with options in relation to their education. The concentrations also ensure that our programs remain current and graduates entering the field will have the most up-to-date information available to help them be successful,” said CSU Provost and Chief Academic Officer Barry Goldstein, Ph.D. “CSU values the adaptability and flexibility that our educational programs offer to students and these concentrations will provide more opportunities in each respective discipline.”




Associate of Science
in **Emergency
Medical Services**

DETAILS




Bachelor of Science
in **Occupational
Safety and Health
Construction Safety**

DETAILS




Bachelor of Science
in **Occupational
Safety and Health
Oil and Gas**

DETAILS



Bachelor of Science
in **Criminal Justice
Forensics**

DETAILS



Master of Business
**Administration
Entrepreneurship**

DETAILS



Master of Science in
**Homeland Security
Criminal Justice**

DETAILS



Master of Science
in **Homeland Security
Emergency Services
Management**

DETAILS



Master of Science
in **Homeland
Security
Management**

DETAILS

If you are looking for a way to expand your education with a bachelor's, master's or doctorate degree, you may be eligible to use the Knight Tuition Discount. The Knight Tuition Discount is available to CSU alumni, as well as their spouses and dependents. To learn more, visit ColumbiaSouthern.edu/KnightDiscount. 🇺🇸

LEADERSHIP
SPOTLIGHT

Crisis Leadership and COVID-19

CSU professor and
EMS professional,
Aaron Rhone, speaks
on the importance of
servant leadership



“Great communication isn’t just being able to talk to people. It’s being able to talk to them, hear them and implement some of their ideas.”

— Aaron Rhone, Ph.D., *Emergency Medical Services Administration Professor*



Several of Columbia Southern University’s College of Safety and Emergency Services professors are on double-duty as they join the front lines of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.

These members of CSU’s faculty, whose expertise spans across a variety of public safety topics including criminal justice, emergency medical services administration, emergency services management, fire science, homeland security and occupational safety and health, are doing their all to combat the current crisis while still teaching others how to save lives.

“Not only are we faculty here, we’re also front-line professionals ourselves,” said Aaron Rhone, Ph.D., emergency medical services administration professor. Rhone was assigned to the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s Emergency Operations Center at the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) headquarters in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Rhone recently made a guest appearance on the EMS World podcast to speak on crisis leadership and how EMS professionals can best serve their teams.

“Great communication isn’t just being able to talk to people. It’s being able to talk to them, hear them and implement some of their ideas,” he said. “Anyone can be a manager or a supervisor, but it takes a unique individual to be a leader. We want to be able to communicate in a way that we’re believable and authentic.”

Rhone knows the importance of heartfelt EMS work, as well as the toll it can take on providers.

“One of the key things I always try to preach is we are a dynamic organization. EMS is a business but we are also health care providers. We’re caring for people and we have emotional involvement with the patients we’re dealing with so we need to be able to connect with them,” he said. “Your front-line worker represents the organization and the community; they represent health care as a whole. We need to empower them to be part of the organization as a whole.”

Rhone recognizes the unique challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, and urges leaders to flip the script.

“With COVID-19, the key word we hear buzzing around is social distancing. We need to physically distance and stay 6 feet apart, but we don’t need to socially distance. Once we start to socially distance, we’re seeing where people aren’t connecting or having that communication anymore.”



The podcast, “Crisis Leadership: EMS Professionals Who Serve Their Teams,” can be found at [EMSWorld.com/Podcast](https://www.emsworld.com/podcast). 🎧

COVER STORY

**Felicia
Rucker-Sumerlin**
B.S. Criminal Justice





RISING

Through the Ranks

Felicia Rucker-Sumerlin Shatters the Glass Ceiling as First Female Deputy Chief



“My career has been a blessing not just to me but to others, as well.”

When Felicia Rucker-Sumerlin joined the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office in 1990, she did not intend to make history.

Back then, she was 24 years old and waiting tables in Birmingham, Alabama, to provide for her two young children. She came from a family of college graduates but when she became pregnant during her senior year of high school, and again when she was 21, she put that goal on the backburner.

“You know how you work somewhere and you know, ‘This is really not what I want; this is not for me?’ she said of her time waiting tables. “But I had two young kids so I had to do something.”

One day in July 1989, she finished her shift at the restaurant and got on the interstate. Instead of heading home, however, she headed downtown to the personnel board.

“One of the positions available was for law enforcement. I applied, took the test, and in October of 1989, I was interviewing. In February of 1990, I was at work. Everyone told me that no one gets hired that fast and people wait on the list for years, but that’s how I got started.”

According to Felicia, she is still unsure how or why her hiring was fast-tracked.

“I’m kind of assertive,” she reasoned. “Everything about me should have said ‘no.’ I was a single mom. My mom was in the military. I was raised by my grandma, who was a widow. Everything about me said that what was happening for me today was not possible.”

Felicia’s career at the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office began in the jail.

“I was afraid to start that career. I thought about quitting a lot of days; cried a lot of nights,” she said. “I wasn’t afraid of the inmates, but law enforcement is so demanding; there’s a lot going on around you. You really don’t have time to fall apart. You just have to man up and handle it. Then you can go home later on and fall apart. It was rough for maybe the first four years but I wouldn’t quit, even though I thought about it. “

“I had a male sergeant tell me, ‘You don’t really want to go out there. It’s a man’s world and they’re not ready for females yet.’ I just said, ‘Well then its’ going to be a man’s world plus Felicia because I’m going.’”



Later, she started working as a patrol officer. She was the only woman on patrol at that time.

“I could go on a call with one my training officers, a big tall guy, and I’m 5’2”. He was 20 years older than I was so citizens would turn to him and ask him questions. He would say, ‘I just got hired and she’s my training officer so you’re going to have to ask her,’” she said.

Felicia stood her ground and learned the job, doing the best she could every day. But, it was not without skepticism—and criticism.

“When I was getting ready to leave the jail and go to patrol, I had a male sergeant tell me, ‘You don’t really want to go out there. It’s a man’s world and they’re not ready for females yet.’ I just said, ‘Well then its’ going to be a man’s world plus Felicia because I’m going.’”

Today, Felicia is that sergeant’s boss.

Felicia served the sheriff’s office in many capacities throughout her career, including school resources, crimes against persons, property, financial crimes and narcotics. In 2008, she was promoted to lieutenant, the second Black woman to hold that title in the department. In 2016, she was promoted to captain, the first Black woman, and third woman ever, to hold the position in that department.

In 2020, she was promoted to deputy chief. This promotion made her the first female chief in Jefferson County’s 200-year history.

“I wanted to put myself in a position that no one could deny me because I didn’t know the job. If someone says no, it won’t be because I’m not qualified,” she said of her experience working as a female law enforcement officer. “Things will change eventually but we have to work twice as hard.”

In 2016 when she was promoted to captain, Felicia was awarded Outstanding Woman of the Year by the NAACP.

“That was a milestone. When I think about where I came from and how hard things were initially, I never thought that one day I’d be making a six-figure income, that I’d be the first anything; I never envisioned I’d get an award from the NAACP.”

Throughout rising through the ranks and being nationally recognized, Felicia just wants to use her platform to help others. In 2011, she and her husband lost their home to a tornado. A neighbor of theirs also had a lot of damage and no insurance.

“He had to make a decision to leave a tarp on the roof and replace a couple of windows but...the tarp rotted,” she said. “I talked to my coworkers. We all got together, moved him into a hotel that day and started raising money to either fix his house



or get him a trailer. Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church heard about what we were doing and came forward to build him a brand new house, debt free. They gave him a car, and we hired him at the sheriff's office. So, he now has a retirement, a house that is paid for, and I see him every day at work."

It's work like this that Felicia wants to be her legacy. Her career in law enforcement has given her the opportunity to share the love in big, and small, ways.

"My career has been a blessing not just to me but to others, as well. God has something that He wants to do for people through me. Whatever I can do to take you to the next level, whatever your next level is, with my whole heart, I'm going to do it," she said.

In addition to her experience working in law enforcement, Felicia also knows what it's like to be dependent on the judicial system.

"I lost my son Kennis seven years ago. He was in the military, went to Afghanistan twice, Iraq once, volunteered for two of those tours and then he came back home and was killed over a girl. So I helped raise his little girls," she said. "I think I can relate to the people. I came up in a single parent home, I was a single parent for a number of years, I've been a victim of serious crime, and I know how the system works and when it doesn't work. I'm not afraid to speak up when I think something needs to be said."

As for her next move? She has her sights on running for sheriff.

"It's on my agenda," she said. "I've worked my way through the ranks of the largest agency in Alabama. If you're going to run a division, you should at least work yourself through the ranks." 🇺🇸

Felicia Rucker-Sumerlin earned her bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Columbia Southern University in 2011, a goal she put on hold for nearly 20 years. Today, she is an advocate for CSU within the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, encouraging young deputies to embrace higher education.



GO KNIGHTS

Join a Chapter Near You

To join your local alumni chapter, visit
ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni-Chapters

Show Your CSU Spirit

Get your Knight Gear at
Bookstore.ColumbiaSouthern.edu



Safe! CSU and the National Safety Council Bat a Thousand With the San Diego Padres

The National Safety Council's Annual Safety Congress always draws a huge crowd of Columbia Southern students and alumni, and last fall's event was no exception.

While exhibiting in beautiful San Diego, California, in September 2019, the community and alumni relations department partnered with the corporate outreach department to host one of the largest out-of-town events in CSU history. Students, alumni, guests, and CSU President Ken Styron, attended a San Diego Padres baseball game hosted at the Jalisco Star Landing Pavilion in Petco Park. Students and alumni were able to connect with each other and mingle with members of the National Safety Council. Everyone enjoyed watching the Padres bring home the win in extra innings while munching on hot dogs, peanuts and Cracker Jack.

While the COVID-19 pandemic put a damper on our travel plans in 2020, we are excited to get back out there and host more events like this in 2021. 🇺🇸



We hope to see you at a future networking event soon! Visit ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Events often to see where we may be headed next.

Social Media Etiquette for Job Seekers

Written by: Katelyn Garrison, Career Development Counselor

Social media is something we hear about every day. Pick any news outlet and they will be discussing what an actor, singer, politician or athlete has been posting about on social media. Social media has become a news source in place of the newspaper. It is common that it is the first thing people check as soon as they wake up. No matter how much you fight or embrace it, social media is a part of our culture, and therefore, our job searches. It is important to be authentic across social platforms, but also create a personal brand for future employers to view.

Being yourself online is easier for some than others, but it is still something to take seriously. There is a difference between private and public profiles. Certain platforms should remain private for friends and family, and others are meant to be public in order to market yourself for potential co-workers and employers. It is obvious that everything posted should be

respectable, even on your private profiles, because what you post can always get into someone else's hands. Treat those platforms like you are in person. If it is not something you would want someone to hear coming out of your mouth, then it's likely it shouldn't be posted on a social media platform.

What to take away from being on social media is to be yourself, be authentic, but keep in mind that people do see the posts. Potential employers are not just looking at your LinkedIn profile, but are searching for the heart of who you are across other social platforms, as well. People can post more bravely than they would act in person because they are not face-to-face. Be smart, be respectful and don't feed in to the negativity that the online world can thrive on. If you still find yourself struggling on what to post or what not to post, a good rule of thumb is that if you're questioning it, then it's probably best not to post. ■

The Department of Career Services is available to assist all CSU alumni. Services include resume review, interview preparation, job search strategies and more. Connect with a career development counselor or discover additional career resources at ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Career-Services.

At CSU, we really love to brag on you!



Maybe you stepped up to the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps you were recognized for a job well done with a new job or promotion. Maybe you made a difference in your community or earned another degree. Whatever it is, we want to give you an opportunity to shine.

If you have accomplished something “boast worthy” recently, will you share it with us?

Email CSU-Alumni@ColumbiaSouthern.edu with the subject line “Boast Post” for an opportunity to be featured in the next edition of the CSU Alumni Magazine.

Orville Wright | Class of 1999, 2001 BSBA, MBA

Wright, of Alabaster, Alabama, was awarded a contract with the Federal Aviation Administration to conduct mediation for its employees, including air traffic controllers. Additionally, Wright has secured contracts with the United States Postal Service, Social Security Administration and the American Arbitration Association.

Collin Desjardins | Class of 2020 A.S. in Occupational Safety and Health

After taking a chance on himself and changing companies, Desjardins was promoted to environmental health and safety specialist, the goal he set when he began his degree program. The single father from Spartanburg, South Carolina, says his next goal is to complete his bachelor’s degree from CSU.

Kim LaNeve | Class of 2020 MBA

Kim LaNeve is the newest loan officer at MidAtlantic Farm Credit in East New Market, Maryland. She previously worked for the company as a customer service representative. Growing up on a local grain and poultry farm, LaNeve will take her experience with the community to assist them in their financial needs.

Clay Hess | Class of 2008 MBA

After earning his MBA, Hess left his job in Silicon Valley to start his own firm, Webolution Designs, and teach at a local technical college. Hess, of Aniwa, Wisconsin, is currently working on a project with a nonprofit organization to start a college in South Africa.

Travis McGaha | Class of 2015 B.S. in Fire Administration

McGaha joined fellow firefighters to create the North Carolina Firefighter Cancer Alliance. This nonprofit organization supports those in the fire service who are facing occupational cancer. They have also developed the Concord Decontamination Model, a nationally recognized standard that is now used in fire departments across the nation, including the National Fire Academy.

Mary Goldin | Class of 2016 MBA in Healthcare Management

Mary Elizabeth Goldin has been named the executive director for the Loudoun Free Clinic in Virginia. She previously served as the executive director of consumer experience and director of surgical specialties with Kaiser Permanente.

Military Alumnus Makes the Most of his Degrees



“Growing up, I knew I wanted to pursue a higher level of education and soon realized that through the military tuition assistance program, it was easier than I had imagined.”

—Air Force Master Sgt.
Ruben Zamora

It is no secret that many CSU alumni are active or veteran members of the military.

That is something Air Force Master Sgt. Ruben Zamora, who has served for the past 18 years, can attest to.

“Many of the people who I have come into contact with from the CSU family have been fellow service members,” he said.

Like many of those students and alumni, Zamora is a lover of learning. So much so, that Zamora has earned not one, but two master’s degrees with CSU. He holds an MBA in human resources and a master’s degree in organizational leadership.

“Growing up, I knew I wanted to pursue a higher level of education and soon realized that through the military tuition assistance program, it was easier than I had imagined,” he said.

The knowledge from these two degrees has helped Zamora tremendously. “I have been able to utilize the skills I learned throughout my life as a senior non-commissioned officer in the U.S. Air Force. I am able to

speak and lead people more effectively, build a strong team and connect with my subordinates and co-workers on a more personal level,” he explained.

Not only that, his degrees have helped in dealing with the unexpected logistics that are common to his world.

“Life in the military changes in a moment’s notice and the only thing that is constant is change,” he explained. “Both of these degrees have been instrumental on my daily life. The benefits that I have gained from my education programs at CSU are wide ranging and still happening today.”

He is equally proud of his alma mater, too.

“I am a huge advocate for CSU. I wear the merchandise and I have the swag on my desk and proudly display my degrees,” he added.

Zamora is an active member of the Air Force Sergeants Association and he has won multiple quarterly awards at the squadron, group and wing level, including the Air Force Sergeants Association 2017 NCO of the Year award.

While his degrees have aided in the success of his military career, Zamora is not done with his educational journey. He wants to pursue a doctorate in business administration with CSU to complete it and if he is not deployed, attend a commencement ceremony in Orange Beach to cap it off. 🇺🇸



**STAY
CONNECTED**

**Follow CSU Social Channels
ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Social**

DET Honor Society Welcomes New Inductees

The following is the list of Delta Epsilon Tau Honor Society inductees. CSU extends its congratulations to the graduates for their outstanding work and efforts!

Lucinda Fitzhugh Ward

Jeffrey Mark Brown

Daryl James Hogan Jr.

Ernani Braganza

As an international honor society, the Delta Epsilon Tau was established to recognize the achievements of individuals who worked diligently to acquire new knowledge and skills from an accredited distance learning institution.

CSU alumni who have earned a bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate degree with a minimum of 3.8 GPA are eligible to be invited to join the DET honor society. CSU administrators submit names of potential inductees routinely to the DET president based on the current criteria for DET recognition.

To learn more, **visit ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni/Organizations/DET**.

Has CSU changed your life?
Do you know someone looking
for a change?

Refer a Friend 



ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Refer

Refer a friend, family member or
coworker to CSU and take 25% off
at the CSU Bookstore

Become a Learning Partner

Receive Exclusive Learning Partner Benefits

With more than 3,000 Learning Partners across the nation, Columbia Southern University has already provided training and education to thousands. Learning Partners have exclusive benefits at CSU. Not only are these benefits available to our partners' employees, but they are also available to employees' spouses and children.



Tuition
Discounts



Exclusive
Scholarships



To get started, visit
ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Partners



Family
Discounts



CareerQuest



Class of

This year has brought more challenges than any of us could have expected; however, we've persevered. With our loved ones by our sides, we have faced each day and made it through, coming out stronger and wiser.

Congratulations

To our 2020 graduates, we know this year's virtual commencement ceremony is not what you expected, but your tenacity and diligence are no less worthy of celebration. We congratulate this year's class, one that has risen to face challenges head-on, achieved their goals and inspired others. We expected nothing less from you, Class of 2020.

Come what may this year and for years to come, our alumni will forever be our greatest pride. Thank you for allowing CSU to continue to be a part of your extraordinary story.

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