Andrew Van Ord, Secretary (412) 795-5183 oxhilldevons@gmail.com

American Milking Devon Cattle Association

Established in 1978 to promote the conservation of American Milking Devon cattle as a triple purpose breed by maintaining a breed registry, encouraging knowledgeable and responsible breeding, and educating the public about the historic role of American Milking Devon Cattle, as well as their place in a healthy sustainable agriculture.

Properly cared for Milking Devons will work for you, not you work for them. -- Diurna Kibbe



These two young Devon owners earned their own money so they could take their animals to the Caledonia County Fair, VT in August and were richly rewarded with winning ribbons. Pictured Wyatt Clark (left) and Gabriel Michaud (right), both are Junior Members of AMDCA. Photo Courtesy of Leslie and Jeremy Michaud

FEATURE ARTICLE: IF IT WEREN'T FOR THE OX WE WOULDN'T BE WHERE WE ARE **TODAY** Part 2 of several parts

Article prepared by Editor Thomas Slater from presentations made by Drew Conroy and Ray Ludwig at the 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Milking Devon Cattle Association held on May 12th in Tunbridge, Vermont.

The American Milking Devon Cattle Association was very fortunate to have two of the world's most authoritative individuals on all things oxen present at the Association's Annual Meeting this year. Ray Ludwig, age 91, lives in Connecticut with his wife Jean and has been working with oxen for 61 years. For many of those years he worked as a 4-H leader training young teamsters and their oxen. Drew Conroy, Ph.D., is a professor of applied animal science at the University of New Hampshire and a consultant to teamsters around the world. He and his family also raise American Milking Devon cattle and train ox teams that have been featured in many magazines and films. Dr. Conroy has been working with oxen for 41 years. Ray and Drew have over 100 years of combined experience with oxen. Ray Ludwig shares that as a teenager he wasn't interested in oxen at all. His family operated an ice



Ray using a hay tedder

business with three teams of horses and they delivered ice all around the area where they lived. Horses were his thing just like a sports car or truck would interest a teenager today. His dream was to own a pair of light draft horses that he could use at home and that looked pretty sharp. That dream was never fulfilled but something did happen that changed the course of Ray's life forever. He was able to buy a Devon cow and he had her bred at the University of Connecticut. She had a bull calf, and with some help, Ray trained him. That was his first experience training animals.



Buck and Sam

One of the reasons we still have oxen Dr. Conroy states, is because of the fairs and the pulling contests. Some of these fairs are 150 years old. Many years ago the exhibitors used to walk oxen to the local fair, sometimes up to five miles. They would chain several pairs together, twenty to thirty pairs, with the not-so-well trained pairs in the middle. By the time they got to the fair the middle teams understood what was going on. Ray describes a couple of experiences he had at plowing competitions. At a competition at Billings Farm in Woodstock, Vermont, Ray hitched his first team, Tom and Jerry, to a sulky plow. He made a furrow down the field and turned the team around without getting off the plow. Many teamsters there were surprised as they had never witnessed such a thing. Ray won

that competition and Dr. Conroy, who had been observing Ray for a few years, also competed and came in second. At another competition in Massachusetts, Ray also had a younger team of two year olds there as well as Tom and Jerry. After demonstrating the sulky plow with Tom and Jerry, someone asked, "Have you ever

FEATURE ARTICLE CONTINUED

done it with both teams?" Ray indicated that he had not, but that he would give it a try. He placed the twoyear olds on lead and Tom and Jerry behind. He hitched them to the sulky plow, plowed down the field, stopped at the end, and talked to them a little bit. Without Ray getting off the sulky plow the two teams came around, with the off oxen getting into the furrow, and they went back down the field again with no problems. This is obviously a tribute to Ray's training abilities.

Dr. Conroy told the gathered members that New England and Pennsylvania took the yoke way beyond what the English did with it, even though our modern yoke is basically an English design. He attributes competition and the fairs for driving the quality of our cattle and the quality of our ox yokes. We have fit ox yokes so nicely now

that you can just stand and call the cattle and they will pull without reluctance. Our yoke is designed to tuck the bow into their neck. The African yoke is completely the opposite. They basically flip and the thing rides up on their hump. They have a little string around their neck so they are not pulling anything with their shoulders. They are pulling at the top and they have one pressure point that becomes like a gall after plowing for a few weeks. Dr. Conroy asked why they did not round up the area that touches the animal and their response was that they did not have the tools. Dr. Conroy took a machete and shaved the yoke to help with the fit.

AMDCA Director Dexter Randall offered that he had been to Cuba and had seen a lot of head yokes. Dr. Conroy informed

the group that this was due to both Spanish and French influence. They are noted for their head yokes as they tend to work better in hilly country. Head yokes went to Africa and then Latin America. Brazil is supposedly one of the only places in Latin America where they have both head and neck yokes because the Portuguese used neck yokes. The rest of Latin America and Mexico use head yokes.

Ray teaches young teamsters that in order for an ox to use a neck yoke they have to have some weight on their neck. The yoke has to sit down in that part on the back of their neck, otherwise they are just not going to be



Ray plowing in 2004

able to pull right. With horses it is just the opposite, the weight on the poll needs to be kept light.

Ray generally always had a working team and a growing team so he could use the four ox hitch as a training tool. Often after four or five years he would sell the team to historic farms. Regarding training, Ray thinks the important thing is to get the young team on a cart. The cart is light, offering little resistance and the pole in the middle requires them to learn to side step. Learning with voice commands is essential. He trains them separately to start with, teaching them gee, haw, whoa and back. The whip is used



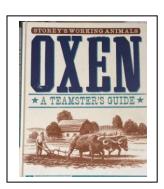
Drew with RC and Bubba on ox cart

FEATURE ARTICLE CONTINUED

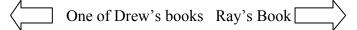
judiciously, only tapping ears as a lead up to a turn command. Once the basic commands have been learned individually, Ray puts them together in the yoke. This is like learning all over again as they have to learn to work together. They have to learn who has to step ahead and who has to step back. This is the time when they learn their fine points by using a cart. Once they have the cart down good then you can introduce them to loads. It is very important to work the weight up slowly as you do not want to discourage them and cause them to stop. Getting them going again after they have stopped can be difficult.

Ray says the loads should be introduced separately first and once mastered, put them together. Start them easy just dragging a chain, then drag a tire, then two tires, and then a cement block in the tire. Ray had a half mile track where he worked with them every day. As he was pulling he would stop every 400-500 feet, do a gee turn, a haw turn, a whoa, a back and then a let's go. According to Ray regular practice and starting the team as young as possible will improve your chances of success with the team. **End of Part 2**

Both Drew and Ray have publications. Drew has several books available through the major book sellers. Ray's



book, *The Pride and Joy of Working Cattle*, is available directly through him. If you are interested in Ray's book contact Ray at 860-875-5117 or by mail at: 552 Old Post Road, Tolland, CT, 06084





2018 Mid-Atlantic Regional American Milking Devon Show

(Article courtesy of Andrew Van Ord)

The 2018 Mid-Atlantic Regional American Milking Devon Show was a great success! This was perhaps the first Milking Devon show of this size in nearly 80 years. Thirty-one cows, heifers and bull calves representing eleven breeders were shown. Exhibitors ranged from 6 to 73 years of age. Past AMDCA President Dr. Drew

Conroy judged the competitive cattle show. The bull OGF Governor, bred, owned, and exhibited by Richard Larson was awarded Grand Champion. The cow Devons Gate Georgia Peach, bred by Leslie and Jeremy Michaud, owned and exhibited by Colonial Williamsburg was awarded Reserve Grand Champion. Following the show AMDCA members gathered to discuss topics concerning the breed association such as establishing regional groups. The following day several exhibitors enjoyed entering the Pretty Cow Contest. Winners were decided by crowd applause and the Milking Devons placed very well. Finally, Dr. Conroy conducted a Breed Standards Scoring. Every



animal was scored according to the breed standard and owners received a scorecard for each entry signed by Dr. Conroy. The AMDCA Board of Directors would like to thank Richard Larson for his hard work organizing the event, Dr. Drew Conroy for judging and all of the members who participated. Everyone's efforts contributed to the event's great success. There will be more extensive coverage of this event in the next newsletter.

ON TRAINING

Victoria Reck Ames ~ Honey Hill Heritage Devons

Do you train your cattle with treats? And if so, what do you use for rewards? People ask, and people respond with strong opinions. An energized response is the hallmark of a great question, in my book. And I like where the question leads. What *is* training? When do you train, and how? What do you seek to accomplish?

This morning I trained Laurel, a fourteen-month-old AMD heifer. Laurel is out of the Campbell line--with the nice long legs that are preferred in oxen, and with a lively spirit that has the potential to make her a handful. She has come a long way since she arrived here as a nervous youngster: She responds well to basic commands, and comes when called. She trusts me, mostly, except when I stroke her undercarriage. (Therefore, to her dismay, I stroke her undercarriage a lot.)



Laurel and Victoria

But the goal of today's training session is to get some grain into Lilly, another fourteen-month-old AMD heifer. Lilly is the runt of the herd, and too thin, in my opinion. She probably would be fine without grain, but I need to use up the supply before it grows moldy in this heat. Because Lilly is at the bottom of the pecking order, and because no bovine I have ever met is altruistic when it comes to food, and because it would distress Lilly to be pulled away from the herd even for a tasty snack, everyone has to be tied up and eating hay in the barn before Lilly can get her grain.

I walk out into the timber pasture with a rope halter and goad. The herd is clustered, eating dew-covered grass. I approach each Devon, greet each by name, touch faces and scratch under chins. I slip the halter over Laurel's horns and face, tap her rear with the goad, and tell her to come up. She starts walking. The rest of the herd is still eating. In Laurel's thought balloon is the voice of resistance: "But ... I don't want to leave them ... what's going to happen to me?" Steady, confident Fern watches, catches on, imagines the prospect of something, and joins our little parade.

Thought Balloon

Ray Clark says, "Watch your cattle." With my little game of Thought Balloon, I take his advice to mean: Pay attention to the message of bovine behavior.

Sometimes it feels like we are creatures in a humorous comic strip, especially when I'm working oxen. I have my plan--it's clear and sequential. I march out with the team to do the task. We're in the midst of it when suddenly the team, distracted, stops moving. Me, focused, emphatic: "Get up!!" Appearing in the nigh ox's puffy thought balloon: "But there's a deer in the woods on the other side of the stone wall. That's different. Just give me a sec. I need to take a good look."

I pull my attention off the work, raise my eyes, scan the surroundings. I come back to the present, and understand. In my thought balloon: "Oh, right. A deer. I wanted to see that, too! Thanks for pointing it out to me." We move on.

I like the Thought Balloon game because it releases me from ever thinking that cattle are naughty. They are hyper-sensitive to their environment (an environment that includes other cattle, and me) in ways I admire. I can learn from them, but I have to translate bovine body language into words. If I put the words into a thought balloon, I avoid the disrespect of anthropomorphizing. And I remember to appreciate the good nature -and good humor--of cattle.

Goads are essential training tools, for me. I've used lashes, and broken their woven handles with the sudden need to make a strong impression. The classic flexible hickory staff also is a thing of beauty but, sadly, I tend to break them as well.

I've gone to plastic. Long fiberglass rods-used in these parts to mark road edges for snow plow operators--can be fitted with a comfortable wooden handle. They're springy, and can be long enough to reach the off side of a tall off ox. For training young animals, I like a 3' factory-made riding crop. It's whippy, lightweight, and has a comfortable handle. I partially wrap all goads with bright yellow or orange tape, to compensate for a bad habit of losing them in the grass.

ON TRAINING CONTINUED

In fact, Fern nudges Laurel. I tap Fern with the goad: "Fern, leave it." In Fern's thought balloon: "I enjoy attention. You could pay attention to me, instead!" She gives Laurel and me our space. Now here comes Burley, the young bull. Burley makes a desultory attempt to mount Laurel, who shies away. I tap Burley on the cheek and side with a very firm "BURLEY--LEAVE IT." In his thought balloon: "Oh, all right. You know I can't help myself." Burley joins our parade. And Lilly brings up the rear.

I have to take a moment to talk about bulls. Everyone knows that bulls are the most dangerous animal on the farm. That can't be said often enough. Bulls kill people. Had any of the heifers been approaching heat (and I conscientiously track heats), even with Burley still being young enough to be tractable, and even in possession of my mighty goad, I would not have walked a mixed herd with one animal in a halter unless I absolutely had to. I constantly am training *myself* to have respect for testosterone and the unpredictable behavior it inspires in bulls.

So we continue our little parade, across the timber pasture, across the barnyard, into the barn. I walk Laurel to her place at the manger, clip her to her tie-up, and take off her halter. Fern goes to her place, Burley to his, Lilly to hers. I put out hay, and give Lilly a pan of grain. Everyone eats. Lilly finishes her grain, and the hay is mostly gone. Lilly wanders away from the manger. I release Laurel, Burley and Fern. The three more dominant cattle move into each other's places, hoping to glean overlooked morsels. I catch Lilly's eye, and slip her two homemade grain/molasses cookies when nobody's looking. She eats them appreciatively, and wanders out to the water trough.

Was this session training to treats? What treats did I use? Did I accomplish my training objectives? Well, I require my cattle to be manageable. Manageable cattle trust humans. All my training is designed to reinforce a relationship of trust and cooperation between me and my cattle. This training happens non-stop, every day, in every interaction. I work under the assumption that Devons need only three exposures --good or bad-- to absorb new lessons --good or bad. They keep me on my toes. I like being on my toes.

I train to the halter by reinforcing the experience that the halter takes cattle where they want to go: to their friends, to water, to the hay manger, to a fresh pasture--all treats, in the bovine mind. When the halter doesn't bring a natural reward, I try to supply a snack reward instead. For example, recently I spent several weeks accustoming the herd to a squeeze chute. Once loaded, each Devon received lavish praise and scratches, along with one of those ultra delicious homemade grain/molasses cookies.

Back to high-strung Laurel. This morning's short walk reinforced the concept that a human approaching with halter and goad is not threatening, that resistance to the halter is not indicated, that with the halter comes protection from others' attempts to bully or mount, and that good things are available in the barn. Bonus: Lilly got her grain. And, because she's sweet and wide-eyed and not to be neglected, also a cookie. Or two. (**See Disclaimer on page 10)

The capabilities of trained cattle

Whoever coined the expression "dumb brute" when referring to oxen never attended a 4-H working steer cart class competition.

Working against the clock, teamsters aged 18 years and younger drive their cattle, hitched to a two-wheeled cart, through a tight obstacle course. Designed by that day's judge, every course is different. The course may require the teamster to ask his or her cattle to align one wheel of the cart on a narrow plank, and keep that wheel on the plank for a distance of twelve feet. The course may call for balancing one wheel of the cart on a wooden knob, and driving the team in a circle while the wheel remains balanced on the knob. The teamster will be required to take the team and cart through a narrow passageway, with only a few inches' clearance, perhaps in reverse. Obstacles executed, the teamster backs the cart into its "barn," and releases the team. The clock stops.

Other events include a drag class, which showcases the team's ability to work with a chain and wooden sled. Some judges include a freestyle event. Given three minutes, teamsters are challenged to show their best stuff, their highest accomplishments. A teamster may unyoke the team and drive his or her cattle as if under an imaginary yoke. A teamster may leave the team and walk away, then call the animals from a distance. Some cattle are asked to sidestep, to the left and to the right. Feet are picked up and hooves examined. Every year, there's a new trick.

Here in New England, young teamsters hope to qualify to compete at the Eastern States Exposition--the Big E, in Springfield,

MA--in the fall. Teamsters of all ages congregate in Maine in October to compete

at the Fryeburg Fair. In recent years, as

many as 160 teams have been in attendance. It should come as no surprise to hear that American Milking Devons have a corner on the blue ribbons. Victoria Reck Ames practices her opinions on training and welcomes yours—in southern New Hampshire.

www.HonevHillDevons.com



Brochures Available- The Association has recently had a new batch of American Milking Devon Cattle brochures produced and is offering them free of charge to AMDCA members. If you would like some, please contact Association Secretary Andrew Van Ord. His contact information is on the last page of this newsletter.

THE HISTORICAL DEVON

This article comes from THE AMERICAN FARMER: A Complete Agricultural Library Volume 2, © 1883. Pages 14-23. Edited by Charles L Flint (*Article courtesy of Lawrence Gilley*) Editor's Note: Due to the length of this article it will be presented in several parts over the next several newsletters.

PART 4: Devons as Working Oxen

As a working ox, this breed may perhaps very justly be said to excel all others in beauty, intelligence, activity, docility, strength according to size, and the ease with which animals may be matched. They are very fast walkers on the road, and are ambitious workers, while they possess great endurance. Care should be used, however, not to overload them, or test their strength too severely, as they are of small size. They are, however, suited to all the ordinary labor of the farm, and are more hardy than some of the large breeds. Mr. Buckingham, to whom previous reference has been made, says of this race of cattle in this connection: The Devon ox grows much larger than the bull or cow; he has a long, large, symmetrical frame, with a clear, sharp-looking head, prominent eyes, flesh colored nose, and handsome upturned horns, which are quite fine at the point. Shoulders quite oblique and well placed, tug ribs well sprung from a straight back; hind quarters full and heavily muscled; his fore-arm thick and strong, but small below the knee, with good solid hoofs. I have seen two yoke of Devon cattle, weighing 3,600 and 4,000 pounds to the yoke, trot off with an empty wagon for two and one-half miles without walking a step, and then haul back 5,000 pounds of coal. The same oxen hauled 4,500 pounds of potatoes ten miles to the city, and back empty every day in the week, making the trip as quick as a good pair of horses with only 2,500 pounds of a load. At any time they can be soon fattened for the shambles, and the price of their meat at Smithfield, England testifies to the quality of the same.

In the rocky farming districts of the New England States, Devon oxen are almost a necessity. At all events, no intelligent farmer in New England who has rocky soil to till, and once possessing them, will ever consent to be without them afterwards; for on rough lands and hilly roads they are as good as the horse, without being as expensive to keep. Besides when well kept — and oxen should always be well kept— if accident befall them, they can be turned over to the butcher with little, if any loss; whereas the horse under similar circumstances would be a total loss.

As a draught ox, the Devon does not equal the Hereford, because less in size and weight; but in proportion to size and weight, no ox of any breed whatever can either out draw or outwork him.

ASSOCIATION BUSINESS

New Registration Form- Due to the changes in Registration Policy, a new Registration Form has been created and approved by the Board of Directors. A copy of the new form is attached for your convenience. **Old forms will not be accepted and registrations on old forms will be returned. Forms are also available in regular and fillable format on the AMDCA Website : <u>http://www.milkingdevons.org/forms.html</u>**

ASSOCIATION BUSINESS CONTINUED

<u>AMDCA Website</u>- AMDCA hosts a website under the direction of Webmaster Lawrence Gilley. The website contains Breeder Information, Breed History, a Calendar of Events, a For Sale Section, Association Information, Member Services, Semen Sales, Frequently Asked Questions and Relevant Links. For the months of July, August and September there were 856, 781, and 750 <u>visits</u> to the website respectively. For the same three months there were 592, 587, and 582 <u>visitors</u> per month respectively. Eighty (80) percent of the <u>visitors</u> in July had not viewed the website prior, while eighty-two (82) percent of the viewership in August, and eighty-one (81) percent in September had not viewed the website before. The statistics indicate that the For Sale page(s) are among the most frequently viewed. We encourage you to use our website as it is kept current with Association-related business. Lawrence's contact information and the web address can be found on the contact page of this newsletter.

NATIONWIDE AMDCA CONFERENCE CALL- On Monday night August 27th a nationwide conference call of the American Milking Devon Cattle Association was held. Seventeen individuals representing the states of Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania and Vermont participated in the call. Five AMDCA Directors were present to answer questions. Director Bruce Farr outlined the structure of the Proposal for Regional AMDCA Groups and Director Thomas Slater presented the specific details of the proposal. President John Hall facilitated the group discussion. An enthusiastic discussion occurred and any member wishing to begin the process of starting a Regional AMDCA Group was encouraged to contact President John Hall. This proposal was also slated for discussion at the AMDCA Fall Gathering held in conjunction with the 2018 Mid-Atlantic Regional American Milking Devon Show. During the later part of the conference call, AMDCA member Richard Larson reviewed the details of the **2018 Mid-Atlantic Regional American Milking Devon Show** which he planned and coordinated. (See related article on page 4)



Picture from the 2018 Mid-Atlantic Regional American Milking Devon Show Courtesy of Andrew Van Ord

Felicity Hart

Ray's Corner- On Lice, Pregnancy Checking and Showing

Quotes and Wisdom from Director Ray Clark

It's that time of year again when the cold weather starts and cows begin to come in the barn. Lice is a common problem, especially during cold weather. Lice suck blood from the cow and as a result a cow's condition can deteriorate. You may not think the lice are there but they likely are, so the animals should be properly treated.

If you want your cow to be pregnant through the winter and you think she is, you should confirm it with a pregnancy check. If she isn't pregnant you and your vet should try to figure out why. Consider culling cows that don't get pregnant.

Ray has heard good things about the show in Virginia. Showing cattle is good for both the breed and the breeder. In showing, animals are judged against each other within a class. The animals are judged against the breed standard and the animal *present* that comes closest to the breed standard gets the blue ribbon. So showing doesn't necessarily tell you how an animal actually measures up to the breed standard, it only tells you how the animal measures up to the other animals present at the show. Showing also teaches breeders and handlers special skills. Those who show animals have to learn how to stand an animal for best presentation, how to properly clean and groom an animal for the show and how to handle the animal in the show ring. When showing an animal, NEVER tie the lead rope to your body. Even though you may have shown an animal dozens of times you never know what might startle an animal and make it bolt. You must be able to let go of an animal if it bolts unpredictably. Ray knows individuals who were killed because a lead rope was tied to them. In one case the rope was tied around the person's wrist and he ended up losing the skin from his wrist down, causing problems throughout his life. Always hold an animal's head up high when leading them. In that position the cow can't see as well and is not as likely to bolt. Never put fingers in a halter and be ready to let go at any time should the need arise.

Classification tells you how an animal measures up to the breed standard. The breed standard is comprised of several traits and each trait has points assigned. An animal gets points for each trait in relation to how well that trait is represented in that animal. The total points comprising a breed standard is generally 100 and that would represent a perfect cow in that breed, of which there are none. Different breeds assign different points for different traits. For example, the breed standard for a pure dairy breed like the Guernsey gives more points to the udder than the triple-purpose American Milking Devon standard does. It takes a well experienced and qualified individual like Dr. Drew Conroy to judge and classify animals.

A breeder will use the classification of their animals to try to improve their herd, breeding together animals that are likely to improve a certain trait. However, the way genetics work, the outcome is not always what is desired. As Ray calls it, some genes don't "nick," they don't carry over like you think they will. Ray has seen many top cows bred to top bulls that produce substandard calves. That is often why some breeders use line breeding. Historically line breeding is responsible for the natural development of breeds. Animals isolated geographically will breed within their lines which naturally selects for certain traits over time. Ray says if you were to breed a bull back to his mother, the resulting calf would have only 25 percent of genes in common with the mother because of the way genes work.

The reason we have a breed standard is to promote longevity (i.e. resistance to disease and general good health), milk production, beef production, ox traits, and repeatability of these desired traits. Most breed standards have been developed over many, many years and different breeders will look to emphasize different traits within their herds. Ray would like to remind the readers that he doesn't recommend; he shares his experiences and opinions with the readers.

Page 10 DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION OF ARTICLES FOR JANUARY NEWSLETTER IS DECEMBER 15, 2018.

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FEEDBACK- Your comments, ideas and "constructive" criticism are always welcome. I would like to know what topics interest you that could become feature articles. The best way to reach me is through e-mail patriotsretreatfarm@yahoo.com . If you don't have e-mail call me at (518) 868-9328 or mail me at Thomas H. Slater, 303 Cripplebush Rd., Central Bridge, NY 12035.Thank you in advance for your assistance with this newsletter.

AMERICAN MILKING DEVON CATTLE ASSOCIATION

The Registrar, 610 East Pond Meadow Road, Westbrook, CT 06498

REGISTRY APPLICATION

Registration Fees:

< 1 yr. \$5.00; 1 yr. but < 2 yrs. \$10.00; 2 yrs. but <3 yrs. \$25.00; 3 yrs. but <5 yrs. \$50.00

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the American Milking Devon Cattle Association as	f to all the provisions of the Constitution, bylaws, and rules of registr s they now exist or may from time to time be amended, knowledge c SUARANTEE THAT ALL MATTERS STATED HEREIN ARE
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