

Mercer National Alliance on Mental Illness WESSENGER

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13th Annual NAMIWalks Is Coming Up!



In spite of the pouring rain, 1,200 supporters took part in NAMIWalks Mercer County 2019 on the ETS campus in Princeton. The event raised \$187,000 in support of our mission.

et ready for the 13th annual NAMIWalks Mercer County! Planning is well underway, and with your assistance, we can make this another great event. We will be returning to Educational Testing Service (ETS) in Princeton for the 5k Walkathon on Sunday, May 3, and hope to raise \$160,000 to support the programs and services that we offer at no cost to people with mental health issues and their supportive friends and family. NAMIWalks Mercer County is one of about 115 similar events scheduled around the country in

The nationwide theme for the 2020 NAMIWalks events is "Mental Health for All." Participants are encouraged to champion "Mental Health for All" by raising \$100 to earn the nationally branded NAMIWalks T-shirt. Our affiliate will participate again in the Walk Recognition Program, in which participants who raise \$250 to \$2,000 are eligible to receive other NAMI-Walks-branded items.

NAMI Mercer Board Member Jerilyn Angotti, serving as chair for the event, continues to manage by example. Jerilyn captains a family-based team in memory of her cousin, Judy Baranowski, and will be assisting in the effort to bring in new corporate sponsors.

To launch the 2020 Walk season, NAMI Mercer invited po-

tential new team captains and sponsors to a fun-filled rally on Monday, February 3 at 7:30 pm, where they were entertained by Deadbeats and Hustlers, a Princeton-based improvisational comedy troupe.

NAMI Mercer will hold its Kickoff Dinner on Tuesday eve. March 10, at Janssen Pharmaceuticals in Titusville. This event is designed to give both new and returning team captains all the information they need to run a successful Walk team. The complimentary dinner is open to anyone interested in

learning more about the Walk. We hope you can join us in support of NAMIWalks Mercer County! Our website is open for team and walker registration at www.namiwalks.org/mercercounty. For more information, call (609) 799-8994 Ext. 13 or contact walk@namimercer.org.



RSVP to 609.799.8449 by Monday, February 10th

Executive Director's Message

From Trauma to Healing

Trauma shatters the basic assumption that the world is a safe, predictable place, and when we experience trauma, we are often unable to process what has happened. We feel completely helpless and alone. As Michele Rosenthal writes, "Trauma creates change you haven't chosen."

For some people, trauma takes on a life of its own with long-term negative consequences

There are times when a traumatic event occurs that immediately impacts an entire community. In Mercer County, this is when the Traumatic Response Team is called into service. Last spring, I was invited to represent NAMI Mercer as part of this group of dedicated professionals and community members who, among other things, respond with support and interventions to promote resilience in the aftermath of a crisis.

When the trauma is caused by the unexpected death of a young person by suicide, providing comfort and assisting those who loved them cope with their loss is an enormous challenge. This particular traumatic event calls into sharp relief the importance of doing something to intervene well before a crisis point is reached. During a recent response to a youth suicide at a local school, I spoke with one grieving young woman who noted, "I'm going to start being kind to everyone because you never know who is next." On one hand, her commitment to greater kindness is admirable; on the other, such uncertainty about the future is a heavy burden for a 12-year-old to carry.

We know that supportive relationships and community connectedness can help to protect people from suicide even when other risk factors are present in their lives. It is also critical in helping people come to terms with traumatic events. The second half of Rosenthal's quote reads, "Healing is about creating change you choose."

At NAMI Mercer, we endeavor to be companions on the journey from trauma to healing. We are dedicated to

establishing and strengthening networks of support and providing opportunities for people to choose the change that will help them lead healthier, happier lives.



Janet Haag

not already

done so, please invite your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors to engage with NAMI Mercer - as members, program participants, walkers, donors, friends. Together, we can change the world!

Jaret M. Hog

NAMI Mercer Welcomes New Development Director, Dawn Dannenbrink

n February 10, Dawn Dannenbrink will join the NAMI Mercer Management team as our new director of development. You may have met Dawn, her husband Tom, and son Jacob at last year's NAMIWalks, where they were all engaged as volunteers. Dawn also served on our Night Out with NAMI Committee this past fall.

Dawn has a passion for our mission, is a smart, talented relationship-builder, and knows how to craft a story to make the experience of giving a satisfying, rewarding one. She also holds a master's degree in Healthcare Administration and has professional experience in pharmaceutical sales and higher education.

Although we are hosting a "WALK" on May 3rd, Dawn will have to "hit the ground RUNNING" as we prepare for

this big event. We are counting on a little extra patience and support as we navigate the transition.

Dawn says, "I am thrilled to join the NAMI Mercer family and look forward to building on your solid foundation in order to reach yet more people in need throughout Mercer County." We say, "Welcome, Dawn! We are excited to have you with us and look forward to working with you to continue to grow NAMI Mercer."



Dawn Dannenbrink

CALLING ALL WRITERS AND ARTISTS

If you would like to submit an original story, poem, memoir or photo of your artwork to be considered for publication in the newsletter, please contact home@namimercer.org with "Submission to The Messenger" in the subject line.

President's Message

Good Job and Good Luck, Christine!

By Tom Pyle

In November, we sadly learned of Christine Bakter's resignation from NAMI Mercer. After concluding another great fundraising year for us, she set out on her new professional journey before Christmas.

Over the several years she served NAMI Mercer, Christine has been a dedicated and effective development professional. Starting out as a part-time Walk manager, she grew her role into our full-time development director. During her tenure, our NAMIWalk revenue grew 30% and 0ur Night Out with NAMI event became ever more creative and successful. Under her direction, our deployment and optimization of DonorPerfect consumer relationship management software elevated our development operations and enhanced our stewardship. For her good work for us, she was recognized during NAMI National's recent convention in Seattle.

Personally, I particularly remember Christine in action at the last NAMIWalk KickOff at Janssen Pharmaceutical Headquarters. She impressed me by the way she enthusiastically worked the room, paving the way for all of us to do our best fundraising, for our Janssen friends to offer their best efforts, and for NAMI Mercer to strengthen this critical corporate partnership.

It was impressive!

NAMI Mercer has much benefited from Christine's hard work. Though sad that she now takes her leave of us, I am heartened that NAMI Mercer will continue to reap the fruits of her labor from the solid development foundation she has set for us.

Please join me in wishing Christine all good things.



Christine Bakter

NAMI Mercer Interns at Work

ver the last several years, NAMI Mercer's internship program has grown exponentially. In 2018, we hosted twelve students; in 2019, that number doubled to twenty-four. Our interns have included graduate and undergraduate students, representing a total of fourteen different institutions of higher education. These young adults bring vitality and creativity to their work with us and demonstrate great generosity of spirit. They become part of our amazing corps of volunteers, mentored both by staff and other volunteers who share their time and talent on a more regular basis. We are grateful to have this opportunity to help shape the next generation of mental health providers. educators, and advocates.

NAMI Mercer is fortunate to have been selected as a preferred partner with The College of New Jersey's Department of Public Health. Each academic session, a few of their students select NAMI Mercer as the site where they will complete their capstone project. The students have general goals they have to meet, as well as one project for which they are required to take the lead. This enables them to develop their leadership skills

and make a significant contribution to our mission.

If you are wondering what our students do - they have coordinated outreach to faith communities and local businesses for stigma-free Mercer, contacted local schools to schedule Ending the Silence (ETS) presentations and created follow-up tools for the students and teachers to utilize in their classrooms. launched time-limited social media campaigns, designed program marketing collateral, assisted with grant-writing and fundraising events, fielded Helpline calls, and provided all sorts of administrative support. A number of our interns have become young adult presenters for ETS – continuing to be part of the team well after their internship has finished.

Two Spanish-speaking interns have reached out to the Latino community, making presentations to caregivers and youth at La Futura through the Latin-American Defense Fund. One intern trained to be a facilitator for Connection and still leads one of our groups.

Our student interns learn quite a lot from being with us, but we also learn from them. They are tech-savvy digital natives who frequently awe us by what



Emma Preslar telling her story

they can do and how quickly they can do it! They occasionally teach us new words and new digital tools — like Kahoot (a game-based learning platform we can now utilize in connection with ETS).

In addition to all the wonderful crossgenerational exchanges that occur, our interns inspire us with hope for the future and add fun to our days. NAMI Mercer is fortunate indeed to welcome these young people, build community with them, and expand the mental health movement for a better tomorrow.

NAMI Mercer Receives Gift from Son of John Forbes Nash

AMI Mercer has received \$25,000 from the sale of several documents and materials from John F. Nash's personal library. John Stier, Nash's first-born son, reached out to NAMI Mercer to offer the gift in recognition of all we do to support families affected by mental illness.

Nash won the 1994 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences for his great contribution to Game Theory. Some of his papers were auctioned at Christie's in New York on October 25. They included a group of rare 1950s offprints, a first edition of Nash's 1951 doctoral thesis, and a handwritten lecture on the history of Game Theory that Nash gave at Princeton University. The Nobel Prize Medal sold for \$735,000 at the same sale.

John Nash and his wife Alicia, who both died in a car crash on May 23, 2015, had a long relationship with NAMI Mercer. A gold leaf has been added to the NAMI Mercer Giving Tree in their memory. In 2002, Nash was the recipient of our affiliate's first "Distinguished Contribution Award" for helping to defeat the stigma surrounding mental illness. He was the honorary chair of the inaugural Night Out with



NAMI on January 6, 2002, which featured the showing of "A Beautiful Mind" at the Garden Theater in Princeton. Both he and Sylvia Nasar, author of the book on which the film is based, spoke at the event.

Nasar's biography chronicles Nash's years at Princeton and MIT, his work for the RAND Corporation, his family, and his struggle with schizophrenia. Nash's 60-year-old son, John Charles Martin Nash (Johnny), who holds a doctorate in mathematics from Rutgers University and also suffers from schizophrenia, has been a long-time member of NAMI Mercer's Just Friends social group. A portion of the gift has been allocated to supporting Just Friends activities.

In commenting on his father's contribution in 2015, Johnny said: "He's a great hope for all of us; anyone with mental illness can look at Dad and say it's possible to recover."

Poem for My Grandfather

By Ayesha Karim

I remember you Randy. You were Randolph Nicholson. A handsome man, who like my grandmother, reminds me of alcoholic drinks and celebration music. Nat King Cole CDs I play at Christmastime and Kwanzaa remind me of you.

The holiday season was just here again.

I celebrate with alcoholic drinks a few times a year.

A cold glass of wine, maybe a wine cooler

Miss you grandpa.

I turned 39 this January. I get carded all the time. I show my ID. I look 25 but I am 39 like I said. I never want to abuse alcohol. I stick to planning my wedding.
Every time I meet a nice man,
I say marry me before we go further.
I need a commitment we can both honor.

I'm shining bright now.

I'm a poet, a blogger, a memoirist, a mentor and a granddaughter who remembers you all the time. I thought of you today.



A Proud Farewell to Two Distinguished NAMI Leaders

Robert R. Demers (1937-2019)

AMI Mercer lost a beloved friend and leader with the death of Robert (Bob) Demers on October 29, 2019. In 2014, Bob and his wife Pat received our organization's highest honor—The Pillar Award—in recognition of their extraordinary, long-term contribution to NAMI's mission through volunteerism, leadership, advocacy, and charitable giving.

Like so many of our volunteers, Bob first discovered NAMI Mercer when he needed help within his own family. Bob's son had begun to act incoherently and, at times, abusively. "I was totally unprepared for such behavior and must admit that mental illness was not in my vocabulary," recalled Bob. "I was in desperate need of education and guidance."

Bob began volunteering to repay the organization for supporting him during his son's crisis. When NAMI Mercer founders Chomy and Tom Garces asked Bob to join the Family Partnership, a group of family members that monitored conditions at Trenton Psychiatric Hospital (TPH), Bob initially did so out of a sense of obligation.

Over time, Bob's obligation became his mission. He was particularly troubled by the plight of long-term patients, Board of Trustees, and sat in on all public Board of Trustee meetings. He also broadened the scope of monitoring beyond the physical environment to include how the programs were run, how the staff treated patients, and how the hospital dealt with families.

Bob remained an active NAMI Mercer member until his final ill-

ness, attending events and supporting fundraising efforts. The Demers NAMI-Walks team has consistently ranked among the top fundraisers each year.

One of Pat Demers' favorite quotes was spoken by Robert F. Kennedy who said: "Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope." NAMI Mercer will remember Bob Demers for generating countless ripples of hope for Mercer County families affected by mental illness.



Bob and Pat Demers accepting the 2014 Pillar Award from Board President Karen Marguis.

made numerous presentations on the subject.

One such presentation was to the Neuroscience Department of Wyeth Pharmaceuticals about 15 years ago. June Sonnenberg Reines, Senior Portfolio Manager for the Neuroscience Department, recalls the impact of his talk on her and her colleagues: "Many times scientists compartmentalize the drug discovery process from the actual needs of the patient. Robin spoke openly about the life that a person affected by schizophrenia endures. Although drug intervention was able to modify his symptoms, they also carried very bad side effects." June came to realize that many forgo treatment because of adverse reactions. "The biggest take away from his talk was that we as scientists had to do more."

Robin served on the NJ Governor's Council on Mental Health Stigma, the board of directors of NAMI NJ, and the board of governors of Greater Trenton Behavioral Health Care. In 2018, he was featured in the BBC documentary, "Voices in My Head" and published "Descent into Chaos, a Memoir" that chronicles the onset of his schizophrenia and its devastating impact during his teen years.

What an extraordinary man Robin was. He showed us that with the help of pharmaceutical drugs and determined perseverance, persons affected by schizophrenia can lead productive and rewarding lives.



Board Member Carol Kivler with Robin Cunningham at Night Out with NAMI in 2011.

many of whom had been rejected by society and even by their families. For nearly 10 years, Bob led the Family Partnership, made up of representatives from Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, and Burlington Counties. He scheduled teams of volunteers to observe the four TPH units each month, designed and submitted evaluation forms to the TPH

Robin Hugh Cunningham (1942-2019)

he amazing life story of Robin Cunningham, who passed away on December 28, will serve as an inspiration to every NAMI Mercer family. Diagnosed with schizophrenia at the early age of 13, Robin led an incredibly full and successful life. He earned an MBA from the University of Washington, went on to serve as a senior corporate officer with several major in-

ternational corporations, and then pursued a second career as an entrepreneur forming several start-ups.

Twenty years ago, Robin became a dedicated advocate for families affected by mental illness. He was a national trainer for NAMI's In Our Own Voice program, wrote a series of blogs about living with mental illness, and

Night Out with NAMI





Left: Herschel Rabitz, the "Man in Black."





Top: At the entrance to the "No Lone Rangers Ranch."

Above left: Farm Tree Road Band.

Above: Vice President Maddy Monheit and Executive Director Janet Haag.

On left: Darla Tarpinian, Rich Tarpinian, Jacki Chadwick.

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Night Out with NAMI raises \$69,000

n November 1, NAMI Mercer supporters put on their cowboy boots for a "rootin tootin" County/Western dinner/dance at the Boathouse at Mercer Lake in West Windsor. Guests feasted on an old-fashioned barbeque served from chuck wagons, line-danced to live country music, and tried their luck at blackjack, roulette, and craps at our "No Lone Rangers Saloon." NAMI Mercer also honored outstanding persons for their contribution to our mission: Dan Schuberth (Pillar Award); County Executive Brian Hughes (Visionary Partner Award); and the Township of Robbinsville (Community Partner Award).





Above: NAMI Mercer President Tom Pyle honoring County Executive Brian Hughes with the Visionary Partner Award.



Top: Guests at the roulette table. Above: Doing the Cowboy Boogie. Below: Guests from Robbinsville, winner of the Community Partner Award. Pillar Award winner Dan Schuberth is front and center in white hat.



How to Appeal an Insurance Rejection

hank you to NAMI Mercer
Board member Lauren Agoratus, MA, for her informative article on how to challenge decisions by health insurance companies. Lauren, the parent of a child with multiple disabilities, serves as the coordinator for Family Voices-NJ and as the central/southern coordinator for NJ's Familyto-Family Health Information Center.

Excerpted from "What to Do when the Insurance Company Says No!" Exceptional Parent Magazine, July 2019

Families may not know that they have options when a private health insurer or Medicaid denies a claim or reduces or eliminates a service. There can be both internal and external appeals processes depending upon the type of plan. An internal appeal is a second look by the insurance company by representatives not involved in the original decision. An external appeal is when a neutral third party independently reviews the documents.

Appeals 101

Insurance companies, whether public or private, depend on families taking "no" for an answer, just going away, and not fighting. Remember, it's in the company's financial interest to deny claims to save money. Most families (two-thirds) don't even try to appeal. For families with both private and public insurance, this offers the best coverage, and many times Medicaid (the payer of last resort) will cover the remainder of the bill after the private insurer pays as much as it will cover

It's worth appealing. In 50 percent of first-appeal cases, the insurer decides in favor of the consumer.

Do everything in writing, keep copies, and send appeals to insurers by certified mail with a return receipt. (It is hard to prove that a conversation took place.). The starting point will be the EOB, "Explanation of Benefits," form or denial letter. This will give the reason for either denying or cutting



Courtesy of Exceptional Parent Magazine

services. Sometimes it's something as simple as an incorrect CPT (current procedural terminology code) that defines what was done. Alternatively, the ICD10 (International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems), which is the diagnosis code, could be incorrect. It could be something as easy as the doctor's office forgetting to include their tax ID number. Many times, additional documentation is all that is required.

Obtain a doctor's note of medical necessity. If the consumer has more than one condition, multiple doctors' notes will strengthen the case if the service is treating multiple conditions.

Keep at least one copy of everything used in the appeal. Many times, families will have to resubmit the same information if there is a multi-step appeals process. This is particularly true for external appeals as this is the first time the independent reviewer has seen any of the information from the beginning of the process.

Be persistent. Submit all required documentation by deadlines.

Note that even if a plan is exempt from federal regulation under the ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act), families should still file appeals and copy their State Commissioner of Banking/Insurance because these could be the very same companies trying to get state Medicaid contracts, and the state should be aware of systemic problems/concerns.

Make use of online resources for more information. If needed, get an advocate or legal help.

Resources

WebMD How to Appeal a Rejected Claim

https://www.webmd.com/health-insurance/how-and-when-to-appeal-insuranceclaims#1

Family Voices/Family-to-Family Health Information Centers http://familyvoices.org/

intep://aminy voices.org/

National Disability Rights Network https://www.ndrn.org/about/ndrn-member-agencies/

Legal Aid by State

https://www.lawhelp.org/find-help/

National Health Law Program https://healthlaw.org/

Catastrophic Illness in Children Relief Funds

(click on "Title V in Your State" at bottom of page)

https://mchb.hrsa.gov/maternal-child-health-initiatives/title-v-maternal-and-child-health-services-block-grant-program

State Commissioners of Insurance https://www.naic.org/state_web_map.

February is Membership Month

Te are who we are because you are who you are! When we join together, we exert a collective influence that makes the quality of life in Mercer County and beyond significantly better for the many individuals and families living with mental illness. As we launch our 2020 membership campaign, can we count on you to renew your membership or join us for the first time, making NAMI Mercer and our community "stronger than stigma" and an undeniable force for good?

As a member, you...

- **Have access** to programs and services that promote recovery and mental wellbeing.
- Obtain up-to-date information on policy, research, and news affecting all those who are impacted by mental illness.

Name as it appears on card: _____

Validation code: ______ Signature: _____

- Build relationships and enhance your capacity to handle difficult situations through the NAMI Connection.
- Receive the following publications: The NAMI National Advocate; The NAMI New Jersey Alliance; and The NAMI Mercer Messenger.
- Vote to elect the NAMI Mercer Board of Directors, as well as representatives on the state and national boards.

The annual membership fee is:

- \$40 for Regular membership for an individual
- **\$60 for Household** membership (all members living at the same address)

• **\$5 for Open Door** membership for an individual with limited financial resources

Joining or renewing your membership online is quick and easy at https://namimercer.org/getinvolved/join/. Or, complete and mail the form below.

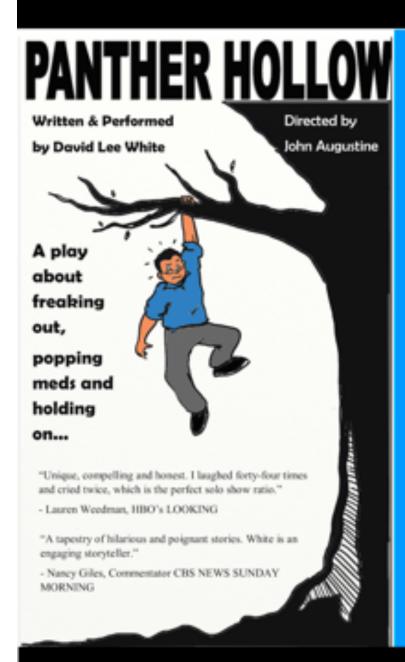
At NAMI Mercer, we are all about community, emphasizing caring relationships and inviting people to share their gifts and talents, to add their voices to hundreds of others in advocating for better policies and services for individuals and families affected by mental illness.

Help us tip the balance in favor of a more compassionate society that promotes mental health. Do your part and become a member of NAMI Mercer today!



Account # Expiration:

NAMI MERCER NJ & RWJUH HAMILTON present:



You are invited to come and explore the serious subject of mental health from a lighthearted, creative perspective with storyteller and monologist David Lee White!

> Thursday, March 5, 2020 6:30 pm

RWJ Fitness & Wellness Center 3100 Quakerbridge Rd. Mercerville, NJ 08619

Free Admission & Open to the Public

RSVP by Monday, March 2nd to helpline@namimercer.org

NAMI Mercer

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of Mercer County

Whitehorse Executive Center 1235 Whitehorse Mercerville Rd. Building C, Suite 303 Hamilton NJ 08619

609.799.8994

namimercer.org

NAMI MERCER PROGRAMS

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Family-to-Family

Multi-session program for family members of adults living with mental illness. Thursdays, Feb. 20th –April 9th, 6:30–9 pm, NAMI Mercer Center.

In Our Own Voice and Ending the Silence

Presentations to promote awareness and instill a message of hope through personal stories of recovery. Call to book a presentation

COMMUNITY EDUCATION Panther Hollow

A play written and performed by *David Lee White*Thursday, March 5th at 6:30 pm, RWJ Fitness & Wellness Center, Hamilton, NJ. See Page 10 for more information.

Check the website for additional community education programs.

SUPPORT GROUPS

NAMI Connection

Recovery support group for adults living with mental illness. First and third Wednesdays, 2—3:30 pm. Second and fourth Thursdays, 7—8:30 pm at the NAMI Mercer Center. Walk-ins welcome.

IFSS/NAMI Support Groups

For families of adults living with mental illness. Mondays, 5:15— 6:45 pm at Lawrence Road Presbyterian Church. Tuesdays, 5:15–6:45 pm at the NAMI Mercer Center.

The Parent Support Network of Central New Jersey

For parents/caregivers of youth, under age 24. Held monthly in two locations: Hamilton & Hightstown. Offered in partnership with The Youth Mental Health Project. Call for details.

Hearing Voices Support Group

For adults who hear voices or have other unusual sensory experiences. Mondays, 2–3 pm at the NAMI Mercer Center.

Just Friends Social Support Group

Peer-led group that meets regularly for fun activities and good times. (NAMI Mercer membership is required along with attendance at a Meet and Greet, held the first Wednesday of the month, 3-4 pm).

NAMI Mercer Center.
Call in advance to confirm.

Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshops

For adults who experience fear in social situations.
Intro. Session: Wednesday, April 22nd, Workshop, Wednesdays, April 29th – June 17th, NAMI Mercer Center.
Offered in partnership with Find Your Voice.

VOLUNTEER ORIENTATION

First Wednesdays, 5:00–6:00 pm NAMI Mercer Center. Call to confirm.

All NAMI Mercer support groups, workshops and classes are offered at no cost to participants. Registration is required for education classes, Family to Family, and the Overcoming Social Anxiety Workshop.

The NAMI Center of Mercer County 1235 Whitehorse Mercerville Rd. Bldg. C, Suite 303 Hamilton Township, NJ 08619 (609) 799-8994 https://namimercer.org

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