Holiday Magazine

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The cost of a gift is not the measure we use to tell how much someone truly likes us. Well, perhaps that’s the way kids tend to see it, but as adults we understand that what we truly need can’t be gifted to us. Because if it could, we would be asking for someone to pay off the mortgage, take care of that pesky student loan debt or perhaps pay for that add-on to the house we’ve been trying to save up for. Instead, we take solace in the simple things.

It’s a true pleasure when a friend finds that bottle of wine you mentioned at the last get-together, or perhaps when your wife picks up a trinket on a whim that ends up becoming a fixture of your home for decades. What those items usually have in common is that they are uniquely made. They didn’t come from a corporate assembly line where an employee who punches a clock works hard to put widget A into box B. Rather, they are carefully planned and crafted to fit their customers’ tastes. Before the buyer knows it, the gift they bought becomes a lasting memory long after Christmas has been packed away. It is those gifts that Holiday Magazine lives to highlight.

Where national media campaigns meticulously study piles of data to figure out just how to make you want to buy their product, the folks who work tirelessly to bring their gifts to you do so out of their manifested passions. Merryman Station was once a place where people would jump off the train before heading into town. Now, thanks to Amanda Thomas, it is a venue people can rent for a special occasion, and a gift shop where locals can sell their hand-crafted products. The likes of Twice Upon a Time have reached across the country to bring an idea back home, predicated on the altruism of others. The point is that right here in Tulare County, people are fulfilling their dreams by working outside of the corporate monotony to craft something characteristic of our collective home to shoppers for the holidays.

So as you turn through the pages letting the feeling of the paper brush against your fingertips, take a few minutes to read about the people, shops and products that are right in your own backyard. And perhaps, if you find the time to mosey on over to that store during your holiday shopping trips, pick something up that would be just right for that special someone this holiday.
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Walk into any major department store or corporate clothing retailer and you can find men’s clothing ranging from extra small to triple extra large. Within a few minutes, most men can find a screen T-shirt, polo or dress shirt that fits their size reasonably well in the neck, shoulders, chest and midsection.

Women reading this know that the female shopping experience is not this convenient, and, for plus-sized women, it can be infuriating, or worse, down-right demeaning! The variety in shape and where those shapes take shape on a woman’s body are as individual as the fingerprints furiously flipping through hangers to find the right blouse. And forget about shopping online, where it seems like corporate retailers each have their own definition of what size 18 really means.

Growing up a bigger girl, Melissa Andrade knows the struggle of plus-sized women. She remembers being bullied in school for her weight, having trouble finding the right clothes for job interviews and finding it difficult to be comfortable with herself when her clothes aren’t comfortable.

“I know what it’s like to want to cover everything up and how it brings you down to where your self esteem is really low.”

Melissa Andrade
Owner, The Curvy Closet

It was a time of low self esteem that ultimately inspired Melissa to hang up her old purchasing routine and put on a new outlook. Just months after being a cost-cutting casualty of corporate fast food, Melissa decided to open a store for plus-sized women. But after months of looking, she was starting to think her search for a dream store was just another shopping trip with skimpy results. Then, one night, she was driving through downtown Visalia when she noticed a “For Rent” sign hanging in the window of a cozy retail space on Willis Street. Melissa said she felt the butterflies in her stomach and knew this was her spot to take the first step in her new life and to take a stand for plus-sized women.

“I was missing out on my kids’ sports and activities,” said the 44-year-old single mom. “I told myself, ‘If I’m going to work hard, it might as well be for myself and doing something that makes me feel good.’”

She opened the store at 114 N. Willis St. and called it The Curvy Closet, a store for plus-sized women that literally began in her closet. “I didn’t have any clothing to start to the store except what was in my closet and my sister’s closet,” she said. “So that’s what I did, and people really seemed to like the store.” The popularity of the store prompted her to expand into the space next door just nine months after opening.

The Curvy Closet is one of the few stores in Tulare County that carries plus sizes for women, and if you take national retailers Lane Bryant and Torrid out of the equation, it is the only boutique store in the county that specifically caters to plus-sized women. Melissa opened the store in March.
2013 as a dream job to help women like herself find the right clothes for their unique body type.

“When they leave my store they feel good about what they purchased and how it looks on them,” Melissa said.

In addition to plus-sized clothing, Curvy Closet is one of the few stores that offers a excellent mix of gently used and new clothing. Melissa said about 60% of her clothing and accessories are consignment and the rest are new.

“When I first opened I thought I would run out of clothes because there wouldn’t be enough to fill the store,” Melissa said. “I can’t think of a time when the store wasn’t full and we do a really good consignment business.”

Melissa said she has online retailers to thank for most of her consignment because most plus size women who buy online are inevitably disappointed when the clothes they clicked into their shopping cart are too tight in the wrong places. Just like her caring personality, Melissa is generous with her more than 800 consignment partners. She gives them nearly half (40%) of every sale to spread the cheer to those helping keep her shelves stocked.

“It has to be good, quality clothing but I want women to find things they like without always having to buy brand new,” she said. “We sell a lot of one-time purchases such as a mother of the bride dress, holiday dresses and [items for] special events like costume parties or themed parties.”

Blouses at the store range from $19 to $30 and dresses from $30 to $35. She carries brand names like Torrid, Lane Bryant and Maurices. She also carries new and consignment purses such as Montana West concealment purses, and brand name shoes. For more information on The Curvy Closet, call store owner Melissa Andrade at (559) 713-1033.

“We have a great supply of holiday dresses that are perfect for a professional office party or a night out with friends,” Melissa said.

Top: The Curvy Closet in Visalia offers a wide selection of both new and consignment clothing, such as blouses. Left: Owner Melissa Andrade also sells accessories, including the popular concealment purse line from Montana West.
Drinks are imbibed, Santas are everywhere and gifts are handed all around: if that sounds like a Christmas party that’s because it is. But more importantly than seeing your normally professional co-workers cut loose for one night out of the year, is where it is hosted. For any party planner, the venue must be just right. And this holiday season, there is one place people are clamoring to book, Merryman Station in Exeter.

Originally named after R.C. Merryman who planted slopes of citrus near what is now Badger Hill Estates before the turn of the 20th Century, the building known as Merryman Station has undergone a number of remodels and purposes. At first the rail line that the station served was used to ship oranges for more than four decades before it was abandoned in 1960.

The majority of rails were taken out in the
1990s. Between the 1980s and 1990s the station was remodeled into a restaurant. By 1999 the building was ravaged by fire, but the restaurant was closed by that time. It wasn’t repurposed until 2004 when Doug and Luci Long took on the venture to convert it back into a restaurant titled Orange Blossom Junction. The restaurant closed less than 10 years later in 2012. But during their stay Orange Blossom Junction invited a number of premier musical artists into the area.

For Exeter residents, the challenge to make a place like Merryman Station work on the eastern stretch of Highway 198 just past Spruce is well known. It seemed as if turning that place around revolved more than a top. But owners Amanda and Darren Thomas decided that Merryman Station doesn’t need to be anything more than what it is. And by 2015 the two embarked on their “two year labor of love” as Amanda calls it.

“We love Exeter and we are just so happy to take an old place and make it beautiful,” Amanda said.

By the time they got the keys to the place they had their work cut out for them. As she puts it, almost everything of true value was gone such as the chandeliers and other more expensive items. Of course that was okay because that gave her a clean canvas to work with. Amanda admits that she’s always wanted a small sandwich shop or coffee spot or something of the sort, but knows that is not in the plans for Merryman Station right now.

“I originally wanted to do a little café or gelato place,” she said. “There’s still time that maybe one day someone will rent out the little shed next door and make it a little eatery.”

It has been one step at a time for the couple who has three kids and their own construction business to tend to. However, that didn’t stop them from throwing themselves into the place. With Darren’s design and a little help from designer Derrick Brinkman out of Tulare, they managed to put their vision into practice.

“We have touched every single inch of this place,” Amanda said. “The inside felt like it had a lot of wood so the brick was a nice addition…we also wanted to stay true to the building and I felt like we really did that.”

In fact the hand rails outside leading up to the front window wall were actual rails from the railroad tracks that ran right in front of the building. As well, by just peering over the side of the front deck, Darren had actually uncovered the original rails still laid down. Amanda said that they had always been there but were covered up by previous owners for design purposes. But now that they have the building they want it to exude its history making it an even more enticing place for events.

Amanda said that this time of year is the busiest, and as a hands-on owner she has no shortage of work to do. She joked that the place is practically booked and her voicemail is never not full. But events are not the only thing Merryman Station does now. Fulfilling another wish of hers, Amanda has embraced the boutique at the front of the store.

They filled their quaint marketplace with unique gifts from all over the state and welcomes any local artists that would like to showcase or sell their designs. And the place is filled wall to wall with plenty of interesting souvenirs and handmade trinkets.

So this holiday season while taking a trip up to the Sequoias or perhaps looking for the best place for your holiday get together, call Merryman Station at (559) 804-4000.

“We have touched every single inch of this place. The inside felt like it had a lot of wood so the brick was a nice addition…we also wanted to stay true to the building and I felt like we really did that.”

AMANDA THOMAS
CO-OWNER, MERRYMAN STATION
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A round the holidays, giving is just as important as getting. And for parents with a few kids, they have plenty to give and get when it comes to clothes. The old hand-me-downs are sometimes too handed down by the time they get to the third kid. Other times, the clothes that fit a kid one year are completely too small the next. Worse yet, the amount of money parents have spent on new wardrobes has gone through the roof. So what do parents do with all the clothes they have left over? More importantly, how do they buy clothes for a couple of kids that grow out of them faster than parents can save up for the next set?

Well, one shop in Visalia gives parents the opportunity to donate, sell and buy clothes affordably.

Twice Upon a Time is a place that takes gently used clothes for kids, teenagers and young adults, and they will even pay customers for them. District manager Shannon Radabaugh (featured in this photo) works there with her husband and her own three kids. She says they’ll cut customers a check right then and there for the clothes that are in good shape and can be recycled (resold).

“We’re trying to help everyone without having to pay full retail,” Radabaugh said. “You don’t have to do yard sales and we are all about convenience for our busy parents.”

Radabaugh said that customers can also trade in their clothes for store credit plus 25%. The added 25% has been a great deal for her repeat customers who shop there often. And there isn’t much of a reason for customers not to come back. Radabaugh said that Twice Upon a Time offers name brand clothes at anywhere between 40% and 80% below full retail costs. She added as well that there is no shortage of business this time of the year.

Parents are not necessarily trying to find a gift for their kids when they shop at Twice Upon a Time for the holidays, sometimes it is just to find something warm to wear without having to pay an arm and a leg.

“We definitely get busier during [November and December] when it is cold and for the holidays,” Radabaugh said.
While business has been great since the store opened up five years ago, it is not always about the dollars and cents. What Twice Upon a Time also accepts are donations. Radabaugh said that sometimes people don't want the money or the store credit, they just want to make sure that their clothes go towards helping others. As a result, Twice Upon a Time offers the clothes that do not pass their review process, but are perfectly wearable, to the Bethlehem Center and churches in the area. In fact, Radabaugh said that the Bethlehem Center comes by at least once a week to pick up clothes for families who need them most.

“We just noticed that we were getting a ton of donations, and we were just bombarded with a ton of stuff. So we reached out to the Bethlehem Center and they were thrilled,” Radabaugh said about their relationship with them.

That is just one example of how Twice Upon a Time takes peoples’ generous donations and helps the community. Radabaugh added that they put together packages for parents whose kids need warm clothes for the winter.

“We’ve done donations for a single mom or a family and anything we can donate we try to put a package together for the sizes of the kids. Especially when it’s getting colder out,” Radabaugh said.

Other things Twice Upon a Time does is make sure that Visalia knows they are there to support the community. Radabaugh says that they offer $10 gift cards to kids who earn Service and Outstanding Achievement Recognition (SOAR) awards every month in the Visalia Unified School District. That way, it is more than just being recognized, kids actually get a chance to buy a couple things at the store as well. Some kids actually work for the store through the Tulare County Office of Education. Students will come in and work a few hours a week, and then they get paid through the County.

“They reached out to us about it, and it has been wonderful having them here,” Radabaugh said.

What has been best for Twice Upon a Time though, is that the idea has taken hold. Having been with the company since the beginning, Radabaugh said that there has been a serious learning curve. A Visalia native and veteran, when she returned home with her two children, and with one on the way, she couldn’t believe that there wasn’t already a store like hers in town. Before long she was painting the walls of the 8,000-square foot space at the 3252 S. Mooney Blvd. location. She remembers having her own kids run around and thinking that the place was going to be for parents like her and kids like them.

“I was kind of very shocked, they have stores like this all over the east coast… I thought it would be wonderful to have something like that and could spend with the family at the same time,” Radabaugh said.

Five years later she is intimately involved in the operations of the store and is ready to expand to another location, she just doesn’t know where yet. But what she does know is that if the generosity of the community continues, she will never run out of merchandise for her customers.
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**Pear and Cranberry Cobbler with Citrus Custard**

**Ingredients**

**Filling:**
- 2 lbs. firm Bartlett pears, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch wedges
- 1 2/3 cups fresh cranberries
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 strips orange zest
- 1/4 cup brandy
- 1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter

**Biscuit topping:**
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt (rounded)
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp. sugar

**Special Equipment:**
- 2-quart baking dish (1 1/2- to 2-inch deep);
- 2-inch round cookie cutter

**Instructions**

Preheat oven to 425°F with rack in lower third. Butter baking dish.

Stir together pears, cranberries, sugar, orange zest, brandy and allspice in a large bowl. Transfer filling to baking dish and dot with butter.

Cover dish tightly with foil and bake 20 minutes.

Remove foil and continue to bake until cranberries burst and pears are just tender, 15 to 20 minutes more.

While filling is cooking, make biscuits: Stir together flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl, then add 1/4 cup plus 3 tablespoons cream and stir just until a dough forms. Gather dough into a ball and transfer to a lightly floured surface (dough will feel dense and heavy; don’t worry.)

Gently knead dough 6 times, then pat out into an 8-inch round.

Cut out as many rounds as possible with lightly floured cutter, transferring to a sheet of wax paper. Gather scraps and pat out once more, then cut out more rounds (you will have about 16).

Carefully but quickly, top hot fruit with biscuits, arranging in 1 layer. Brush biscuits with remaining tablespoon cream and sprinkle with sugar.

Continue to bake cobbler until biscuits are puffed and golden, 15 to 20 minutes. Cool 15 minutes before serving.

- SOURCE: Epicurious
One of the great joys of the holiday season is the food that accompanies nearly every jolly get together. And there is no better pairing of food and winter festivity than pears… or at least there shouldn’t be.

The fact is that the pear’s unique shape, taste and texture should place it on a pedestal among holiday foods because for centuries it was among the most important fruits for winter cooking and eating.

Traditionally, this time of year, late fall and early winter, has been problematic for societies. Before modern day agricultural practices and technology, it was difficult to store food for winter for human, and more importantly, livestock consumption. Most fruit would spoil in the winter or was unable to grow in late fall for winter harvest.

Unlike most fruit, pears are picked unripe and then allowed to ripen off the tree. Their versatility and shelf life made pears a valuable commodity along ancient trade routes. The Greek philosopher Homer called pears a “gift of the gods.” Valued for their marvelous flavor and medicinal favor, pears coupled palpitations with palatability for an aphrodisiacal property worthy of being consecrated to Aphrodite and Venus, the goddesses of love for both Greeks and Romans.

The smooth contours of the fruit served as a muse for Renaissance masters looking to portray nature and health in still-lifes that have lived on for centuries. The pear’s importance to this season reached its pinnacle in the 18th Century’s “The Twelve Days of Christmas,” where it was tops among true love tidings and repeated twelve times in the most enduring Christmas carol.

Unfortunately the pear remains somewhat misunderstood. It is as delicious as its cousin the apple, but is often overshadowed by nearly every fruit. For all of its flavor, pear blossoms are at best unpleasant and more commonly pungent. In medicine, doctors often categorize body types into apple or pear shape, with pear, meaning curvy hips as opposed to large bellies, considered to be the healthier of the two. Yet the shape is also considered unshapely, often being used as a euphemism for overweight. In many parts of the world a pear is a symbol for love, somewhat resembling the shape of a human heart, but it is also a symbol of loss as it resembles a tear drop.

But don’t weep for the pear. It has a unique ability to keep itself in your heart for the holidays. Even today, pears are among the least perishable fruits on Earth and are available to the world nearly year-round. China produces three-quarters of the world’s pear supply while the U.S. represents less than a percent. California is just the third leading state in pear production behind Washington and Oregon.

Pears don’t even register as a fraction of a percent of the planted acreage in Tulare County, but there is no denying the significance of this fruit during the holiday season. So when you are deciding what to bring to your holiday party or family gathering, remember that nothing pairs with the holidays quite like pears.
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Historically speaking, there probably weren’t any cats frolicking in the straw on the floor of the manger in Bethlehem, but from a literary perspective, there may not be a better animal to capture a child’s curious nature than a cat. Smaller than most farm animals yet familiar to most children, cats have a child-like contradiction of insecurity and confidence. Cats are always eager to be near the monumental moments of life but at a distance from which they feel safe from unanticipated motions and emotions.

A new children’s book, *The Stable Cat’s Christmas*, tells the story of the nativity from the point of view of “one small, plain, sand-colored cat.” The cat is curious about the child they call a king but who is born into a barn instead of being delivered into luxury.

While the other animals in the stable each talk about the gift they will provide to the child, the cat struggles to find its own gift that would be worthy of a king.

Author Christina S. Vrba expertly lays out the cat’s tale in a way that helps the story climb to its cute conclusion unburdened by fluff that would detract from the story or distract young readers. This is only Vrba’s second book after making her debut on children’s bookshelves with *Good Night Connecticut* in 2009. That book is part of the bestselling Good Night Our World series, which includes hundreds of titles exploring locations throughout North America using child-friendly themes. The books provide an illustrated tour of a given area’s iconic features, such as Long Island Sound, Gillette Castle and the Mark Twain House and Museum, in the case of Connecticut, where Vrba lives with her husband, son and a menagerie of pets.

Gail Yerrill’s illustrations provide an excellent peek into the nativity from the point of view of the small, seemingly insignificant cat. A cat owner herself, Yerrill captures the metaphor of the child-like cat as it views the monumental moment through a lens of innocence and curiosity. This is the 22nd children’s book Yerrill has illustrated and her seventh children’s book about Christmas. Yerrill has had a long love affair with drawing that includes a degree in 2D design to prove it. Her soft illustrations have graced the pages of children’s books for Parragon, Macmillan, Little Tiger Press, Alligator books and an animated story for the BBC. She loves animal characters and draws inspiration from her children, pets and the rural village of Bedfordshire, England where she lives.

The book is a wonderful reminder that discovering our capacity to love our fellow man and beast is the only gift we could ever give that would be worthy of God’s grace.

*The Stable Cat’s Christmas* is available at Book Garden, one of Tulare County’s last remaining bookstores, for $16.99. To purchase the book, visit the store at 189 E Pine St., or call ahead at 559-592-2538.
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Charm

A

T LEAST A FEW mural marvelers, giant sequoia seekers and agri-tourists have commented that they wished there was a way to bottle up Exeter’s small town charm and take it home with them. Soon, they’ll be able to, thanks to one of the town’s newest businesses.

E Street Market opened in downtown Exeter on Aug. 19 on the premise of providing fresh, locally sourced produce, specialty canned goods and handmade items. And while the store has lived up to its promise for fruits, vegetables, herbs and handmade gifts, it has been unable to sell one of the most popular food and beverage gifts — wine.

The Central Valley, including Tulare County, plays a major role in the state’s overall wine production. About one-third of white wine grapes and a quarter of red wine grapes are grown in the Central Valley, so customers at E Street Market have been asking for the missing beverage from this miniature, indoor farmers market.

“People come in every day wondering when we will begin selling wine,” said Jennifer Davis, one of three local women who opened the store and the owner of Monet’s wine bistro just down the sidewalk. “People are really looking forward to this and so are we.”

Earlier this month, E Street Market received its first shipment of wine to sell by the glass, as part of its tastings and cheese pairings, and by the bottle. It also included a bottle of the first E Street Market bottle of wine, the first to include an Exeter-based label.

“This will make a great gift for the holidays for people who want to take a piece of Exeter home with them, or send a piece of home to those who have moved away,” said Robyn Stearns, co-owner of the store and the former mayor of Exeter.

The printing of this article was too soon to narrow down the types of wines that will be carried beneath the E Street label, but Stephanie Guy, who makes up the third member of this entrepreneurial trio, said the goal is to have both a red and a white wine offering of the Exeter wine.

“We are really excited to offer the first Exeter wine,” said Guy, a local bookkeeper with an eye for design and window dressing. “I think it’s something locals and tourists will want to take home with them.”

E Street Market will also carry other labels including Rombauer of Helena, Red Truck of Sonoma, Bearitage of Lodi, and Bell Wine of Napa, all of which are made in California and in keeping with the store’s theme of exclusively offering local-, Central Valley- and California-produced items.

Stearns said the wine will be paired with gourmet cheeses from Vintage Cheese in Traver, Calif. near the Tulare-Fresno County border. Vintage Cheese specializes in artisan cow, sheep and goat cheeses aged to create old-fashioned farmstead cheese made only with California milk. Their unique cheeses are aged between three months and 18 months into 32 different flavors. Wine tastings will be available during E Street Market’s normal business hours from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday.

All of the wines, including the E Street Market label, will be available to package together with other favorites from the store for holiday gift baskets. On the shelf is Pur Honey from Lindsay, Calif.; cashews from the Naked Nut in Visalia, Calif.; fennel pollen spices from Rebb Firman in Lemon Cove, Calif.; cider from Cider House in Springville, Calif.; jerky from Plano Jerky in Porterville, Calif.; flavored vinegars from Chaparral Gardens in Atascadero, whose owners are from Porterville; and gourmet cured meats from Olli Salumeria in Oceanside, Calif.

E Street Market is located at 124 S. E St. in Exeter. For more information, call the market at 559-592-0635. For more information on holding a ribbon cutting, call the Exeter Chamber at 559-592-2919.
The good thing about babies during the holiday season is that they don’t demand some of the most expensive items in the store. Instead, they are perfectly happy with a warm blanket and a nice hug. But that doesn’t mean that parents aren’t going to go shopping for the cutest outfit they can find for the family’s Christmas pictures or something of the sort. And when they go out looking for the perfect Christmas outfit, they don’t have to look far.

Sure, some parents can peruse around the corporate chains like Walmart, Target or Ross, but if they want something unique, they need to go local. In Tulare County, all they have to do is take a quick drive down the 65 to Porterville to Oh Baby Couture. Owned by the former owner of Envie in Visalia Janice Wilson, Oh Baby Couture is open on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 252 N. Main Street.

Wilson said that the store front isn’t really necessary for her business. Instead it is just a great place to get some work done. And, because she sells most everything wholesale, there is plenty of work to do, but she doesn’t shy away from it. After all, she recognizes that people are having babies all the time, and parents are always trying to find the best clothes for their little one. She said, as well, that her most unique signature is the flowers that she artfully em-
bellishes onto fabrics, a huge hit with parents.

“It’s like a canvass and my background is in art,” Wilson said. “The thing about my clothes is that they aren’t your typical baby stuff. You can’t get them just anywhere.”

Locally, the only place people can buy her clothes is either online, in her store or in Fresno, Redondo Beach, Modesto or Chico. Then, there is also Dallas and Las Vegas where some stores have chosen to pick up her line.

Wilson said that it is a nice feeling to have someone wearing the clothes she makes because of all the work she puts into their design. In fact, she’ll be tagged on Instagram from one of the stores that sells her clothes when someone buys or is photographed wearing a part of her line.

“I love babies and I love seeing babies in some of the clothes that I’ve made,” Wilson said.

It is her love of children that actually started the business for her. She used to make clothes for her grandchildren before she started to do it commercially. Now, three years after selling Envie, she is right in the thick of making her business work. Also, she is taking her design one step further by inviting people to her headband-making classes.

In her store, Wilson managed to carve out a small space filled with flowers, ribbons and tools. She noticed that the new moms coming into the store were looking for headbands more than anything else. With her new space, Wilson can let customers customize their own headbands with her there to guide them along. She noted that one new mom came into the store recently looking for headbands for her twins. Wilson suspected the headbands may have been strategically used to allow others to tell the infants apart. Wilson said, as well, that customizing them is also a way for moms to mix and match colors that would go along with some of the bloomers that Wilson sells in the store.

Christmas pictures have been a main way of seeing how one family grows over time. And while any old thing might do for adults and teens, parents only have a little while before their newborn has grown out of those cute dresses, booties and headbands. Perhaps if moms are looking for something unique, they need to shop at some place unique and local, like Oh Baby Couture.
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Toys"R"us® released its 2017 Holiday Hot Toy List, the company’s annual go-to holiday shopping resource for parents and gift-givers – straight from the toy experts.

Comprised of 40 items categorized by age from Baby’s First Christmas to Big Kids, the Toys"R"Us team spent the last year narrowing down thousands of new toy introductions and selecting the items sure to be at the top of all wish lists this holiday season.

Shoppers can see the full list at Toysrus.com/HotToys and follow the conversation on social media using #TRUHotToyList. Click to Tweet: Note to Santa: The @ToysRUs #TRUHotToyList is here! Visit www.Toysrus.com/HotToys to check out the must-have toys of 2017!

“It’s serious business creating a list of must-haves that helps parents and gift-givers stay ahead of their kids’ requests,” said Richard Barry, Executive Vice President, Global Chief Merchandising Officer, Toys"R"Us, Inc. “Our mission is to ensure parents feel confident in their toy buying decisions – whether they choose to check off their kids’ wish lists now or right before Christmas.”

You can also find all of these toys right here in Tulare County at Toys"R"Us, located at 2800 South Mooney Blvd. in Visalia.

**BABY’S FIRST CHRISTMAS**

**3-IN-1 SPORTS ZONE from Little Tikes®**
Little ones can triple the play with this 3-in-1 Sports Zone that grows through the baby and toddler years. Featuring 3 modes of play – bowling, soccer and basketball – tiny tots can learn all while moving and having fun. The basketball feature includes an adjustable height hoop that grows with baby and encourages counting while shooting. Little ones can then build gross motor skills during soccer and learn shapes, colors and cause and effect while bowling. When playtime is over, parents can simply fold the sports center in half and store away. 3 “AA” batteries required (not included). Ages 9 to 36 months.

**MINNIE MOUSE GARDEN FUN ACTIVITY GYM™ from Kids II Far East Limited**
Tiny tots can join Minnie in her perfectly pink Garden Fun Activity Gym™ featuring a plush flower mobile with a baby safe mirror that goes from lay and play to tummy time. With more than 20 minutes of musical fun, baby can kick and play for auditory and visual stimulation. Parents can encourage baby’s fine motor skills with 4 detachable take-along toys, including the plush flower mobile, bead chaser, crinkle fabric toy and butterfly teether. A grow-with-me Minnie Mouse bead chaser is perfect for tummy time and sit up co-play. The contoured prop pillow also provides support for baby during tummy time. 2 “AA” batteries required (not included). Ages 0 to 12 months.
**13 MONTHS TO 2 YEARS**

**Laugh & Learn® First Words Smart Puppy**
*from Fisher-Price®*

Utilizing light-up shape buttons, colors and 8 starter blocks, this interactive Puppy helps teach baby new words. The Smart Stages block reader repeats a word when baby swipes or places a block, unlocking different levels of learning. Little ones can press Puppy’s nose for light and music, and send blocks down the chute for hours of playtime fun. 4 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 9 to 36 months.

**Laugh & Learn® Song & Story Learning Chair™**
*from Fisher-Price®*

This infant activity chair encourages baby to read, sing, dance and more offering 3 activities on an attached side table that looks just like mom and dad’s desk at home. A 5-page story book takes baby through a day in the life of Puppy and the seat plays songs and sounds to keep little ones entertained, letting their imaginations run wild. 2 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 12 to 36 months.

**2 TO 5 YEARS**

**Baby Alive Sweet Tears Baby Doll**
*from Hasbro™*

Little ones can play caregiver with the Baby Alive Sweet Tears Baby Doll nurturing their doll from tears back to happy smiles and giggles. When this baby doll frowns or cries, kids can see she’s a bit under the weather. They can then use the reusable tissue to wipe her nose and tears, and give her a check-up with the included stethoscope and thermometer. Baby Alive Sweet Tears Baby is available in 3 ethnicities. With more than 35 sounds and phrases, Baby Alive Sweet Tears Baby comes with a removable outfit, reusable tissue, juice box, stethoscope, thermometer, bandage and hair brush. 3 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 3 years and up.

**Baby So Sweet 16-Inch Nursery Doll**
*from Toys“R”Us®*

Baby So Sweet’s collection of baby dolls is designed for little ones who love nurturing pretend play just like mom and dad. This 16-inch soft-bodied baby doll has a weighted bottom and finely sculpted facial features, giving it the look and feel of a real baby. The Baby So Sweet collection includes 3 dolls with assorted fashions and accessories, each crafted with premium fabrics, elegant trimmed collars and sweet embroidered embellishments. No batteries required. Ages 3 years and up.

**Barbie® Pink Passport™ Cruise Ship**
*from Mattel®*

Little ones will love to sail the seas with this Barbie® Pink Passport™ Cruise Ship playset that transforms into a pool, dining room, outdoor patio, bedroom and more – the island hopping and play possibilities are endless. The front of the ship pulls out to become a pool with two pink slides, while the ship's side folds down to double as the interior dining room. The top of the ship flips up and transforms into a bedroom with two bunks, as a yellow swing for 2 is joined by a colorful umbrella on the outdoor patio. The ship comes complete with movable furnishings sure to inspire storytelling. No batteries required. Ages 3 and up.
**COCO INTERACTIVE GUITAR** from Mattel®

Budding musicians can recreate music from Disney Pixar’s, Coco, with this interactive guitar that allows kids to learn and practice, “Remember Me,” a popular song from the film through fully functioning strings, working lights and true-to-movie details. This guitar is topped by a skull that chomps when the first chord button is pressed and also comes with sheet music so kids can practice the day away. 3 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 3 years and up.

**BEN 10 DELUXE OMNITRIX** from Playmates Toys

Fans of Cartoon Network’s animated series, Ben 10, will love the Deluxe Omnitrix as it is inspired by the show to be a replica of the watch that allows Ben Tennyson to transform into his 10 aliens. Including lights, sounds and awesome mechanical action, kids will have hours of fun transforming into any one of Ben’s 10 aliens through the power of the Deluxe Omnitrix. This watch is packed with over 100 alien phrases and motion activated sound effects. 2 “AAA” batteries required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

**DISNEY MICKEY MOUSE CLUBHOUSE – ROADSTER RACERS GARAGE** from Fisher-Price®

Preschoolers can enjoy the adventures of Disney Junior’s Mickey and the Roadster Racers with this all-in-one service station including 3 levels of fun to help prep Mickey Mouse for any big race. Little ones can speed over to the diagnostics station for some quick fixes with the tool cart and gas pump, or race to level two to make Mickey’s vehicle magically extend into racer mode. Aspiring mechanics can then make major modifications to the engine, exhaust pipe and spoiler on Mickey’s Ramblin’ Rover on level three, and finally race down the ramp to the finish line. No batteries required. Ages 3 years and up.

**DOC MCSTUFFINS ALL-IN-ONE NURSERY** from Just Play™

Preschoolers can learn to nurture and care right alongside Chief Resident Doc McStuffins with the All-in-One Nursery, an adorable role-play center full of exciting features and accessories to explore. Little docs in training can use her portable electronic patient laptop, featuring a light-up screen, sounds and lullaby music to diagnose patients right at home. The light and sound stethoscope is perfect for listening to baby’s heartbeat, and when it’s time for a check-up, measure baby’s height and weight on the scale. After the checkup is complete, baby can be bandaged from the sticker dispenser. After a long day, kids can spin the baby mobile and rock the cradle – the best prescription for sweet dreams. 3 “AG-13” or 3 “AAA” batteries required (not included). Ages 3 years and up.

**FURREAL ROARIN’ IVORY, THE PLAYFUL TIGER** from Hasbro

Kids can bring home an adorable baby tiger to love, play and care for as their own. Make a noise or give a loud jungle roar and ROARIN’ IVORY will roar back in response. ROARIN’ IVORY features 100-plus sound and motion combinations with sensors on her forehead, back, and muzzle allowing her to respond to touch in fun ways. Littles ones can nuzzle her cheek and she’ll respond with expressive eyes, sounds and tail movements. 4 “C” batteries required (not included). Ages 4 years and up.
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**Hot Wheels® Super Ultimate Garage** from Mattel®
The all new Hot Wheels® Super Ultimate Garage takes car play to higher levels, standing over 3-feet tall with room for more than 140 cars and an awesome motorized elevator that can transport up to 23 cars at a time – it is the single biggest garage yet. Kids can explore the city, but keep a close eye out for the gorilla that can go to the top of the tower and will try to swipe cars out of the elevator. 4 “D” batteries required (not included). Ages 5 years and up.

**Glimmies™ Glimtern** from Just Play™
The Glimmies™ Glimtern is a beautiful lantern-shaped house that makes the perfect home for the light up star creatures who live inside. Kids can place Glimmie in her Glimtern and she will magically light up, then hang the Glimtern from the ceiling to create a fairy light. Glimmies hide their light during the day, but when the lights go out, these magical friends will shine bright in the dark. Little ones can bring them wherever they go and even cup them in their hands to see their Glimmie light up. Sent by the moon to keep peace and harmony in nature, Glimmies are magical friends with their own personalities. This playset is compatible with all Glimmies dolls. Requires 3 “AG-13” batteries (included). Ages 3 years and up.

**Imaginext® DC Super Friends™ Batbot Xtreme** from Fisher-Price®
Standing over 2 feet tall, this action-packed toy makes kids feel like Batman from the wings, down to projectile launchers and motorcycle. While in battle mode, aspiring super heroes can speak into the voice changer for awesome sound transformations, and control Batbot using 3 power pads on the shoulders and legs. 3 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 3 to 8 years.

**Luke Skywalker’s Landspeeder** from Radio Flyer
Luke Skywalker’s Landspeeder™ is modeled after the sand-pocked and sun-faded X-34 craft from Star Wars: A New Hope™. With seats for 2 riders, an interactive dashboard with lights and real movie sounds, and a 5 mph driving speed, this speeder provides a truly galactic driving experience. Maximum weight limit is 130 lbs. 12-volt rechargeable battery and charger required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

**Imaginarium Power Rails™ Gold Mountain Train Set** from Toys”R”Us®
All aboard! New from Imaginarium is Power Rails™, the remote control train world with the first plastic track system designed to be compatible with standard wooden tracks. These RC train sets have engines that offer both manual play for younger children and motorized remote control action for bigger kids. The RC engine packs provide extra remote controls with color coordinated engines so up to 4 friends can play together on the rails (sold separately). The full Power Rails line includes 3 RC train sets, a Super Crane and 3 accessory packs. 7 “AAA” batteries required (not included). Ages 3 years and up.
Pikmi Pops™ Surprise! Jumbo Plush

*from Moose Toys™*

Pikmi Pops™ are collectible mini plush living inside a lollipop, waiting to be discovered. Each character has its own unique pattern, personality and dessert-inspired scent. Pikmi Pops look and smell like candy, and are sweet and caring on the inside, too. Each lollipop comes with a personal message from a Pikmi Pop character giving kids a compliment, an encouragement and a little bit of love. No batteries required. Ages 5 years and up.

Minnie’s Walk and Play Puppy

*from Just Play™*

It’s true puppy love for Minnie Mouse as she trains and walks her sweet pooh, Snowpuff. The Minnie’s Walk and Play Puppy Plush features 2 modes of play. Little ones can first use the clicker to teach Snowpuff to bark, spin, and dance, then, take a dog-walking adventure together. Minnie sings and talks to her furry friend while Snowpuff makes happy doggy sounds. 3 “AAA” and 3 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 3 years and up.

Oonies™ Mega Starter Pack

*from Moose Toys™*

Oonies™ are inflatable mini balloons that magically stick together, allowing crafty kids to create an ooniverse of characters, games, challenges and activities. The Oonies™ Mega Starter Pack has everything needed to make even more Oonies, pellets, deco bits and connectors. Super easy and super fun, kids can inflate the Oonies pellets in the inflation chamber, stick them together and then decorate. This starter pack comes complete with 90 pellets and 90 connectors, allowing kids to create up to 50 Oonie designs. No batteries required. Ages 4 years and up.

PAW Patrol Sea Patroller™

*from Spin Master™*

Tiny tots can sail to the rescue with the newest PAW Patrol team vehicle – the Sea Patroller™. With an amazing sea-to-land transformation, the Sea Patroller is prepared for wherever the rescue leads. It’s equipped with a boat-load of features including lights and sounds, a working crane, a life-saver launcher and storage for basic vehicles. The Sea Patroller comes with an exclusive Ryder figure and his ATV, an exploration cage and a baby octopus. 3 “LR44” button cell batteries required (included). Ages 3 years and up.

Of Dragons, Fairies, and Wizards™ Magical Fairy Wand Fairy Princess Fern

*from Copia LLC*

This magical fairy wand opens the doors to a world of dragons, fairies and wizards, putting magic at kids’ fingertips. Little sorcerers can interact with Fern, the pink fairy who lives inside of the wand, and learn over 16 magic spells, including spells unique to Fern, with the swish and flick of the wrist. Kids can enjoy limitless spellbound possibilities with an illustrated spell book, and meet magical creatures such as unicorns and pixies along the way. 1 Lithium rechargeable battery required (included). Ages 4 years and up.
**Power Rangers Ninja Steel Lion Fire Fortress Zord** from Bandai™

This 3-in-1 Megazord and playset offers 3 play modes – Megazord, Ultra Megazord and Fortress – and features more than 20 authentic sound effects. Standing over 20-inches high in Megazord mode, kids can gear up for battle with twin firing cannons, a helipad, cockpit and jail to hold captured villains. 2 "LR44" batteries required (included). Ages 4 years and up.

**PJ Masks Nighttime Adventures Spiral Die-Cast** from Just Play™

Fans of the Disney Junior animated show can go into the night to save the day – in an epic race to defeat the evil schemes of the Nighttime Villains. The PJ Masks Nighttime Adventures Spiral Die-Cast playset is compatible with all PJ Masks die-cast cars, each spinning character accessory is interchangeable, so it is easy to customize the obstacles. Kids can collect the Cat-Car, Owl Glider and Romeo’s Lab for more racing adventures. This playset includes a 3-tiered spiral track with Headquarters tower, 1 die-cast Gekko Mobile, 1 die-cast Night Ninja bus, 4 parking spaces and 6 inter-changeable spinning character obstacles. Requires 2 ‘AA’ batteries (included). Ages 3 years and up.

**Rusty Rivets Rivet Lab™** from Spin Master™

If little ones can dream it, they can build it with this Rusty Rivets Rivet Lab™ playset that allows them to create Rusty’s Headquarters. This playset transforms just like Rusty’s Rivet Lab Headquarters on the hit Nick- elodeon show, features real lights and even closes for easy transport and storage. The Rivet Lab comes with an exclusive Rusty figure and a vehicle lift, an elevator and workshop full of accessories for all of Rusty’s invent- ing needs. 3 “LR44” batteries required (included). Ages 3 years and up.

**Shimmer and Shine™ Magical Light-Up Genie Palace** from Fisher-Price®

Based on the hit animated TV show, the Shimmer and Shine™ Magical Light-Up Genie Palace features over 3 levels of play for little ones to explore and more than 100 phrases and sounds that activate when tiny tots make a wish and clap their hands. Preschoolers can help their favorite genies get ready for the day at the vanity or have a genie-rific tea party at the table. No batteries required. Ages 3 years and up.

**Soggy Doggy™** from Spin Master™

Soggy Doggy™ is the showering, shaking, wet doggy game that provides plenty of suspense-filled, splashy splashy fun for the whole family. Players can move around the board and take turns bathing the adorable puppy. They need to be careful though, if he shakes himself dry, a player gets a little wet and has to head back to start. The first one to race around the board to the doggy basket wins. 3 "AA" batteries required (not included). Ages 4 years and up.
5 TO 7 YEARS

**Cool Maker™ JoJo Siwa™ Bow Maker**
*from Spin Master™*
Part of 14-year-old singer, dancer, performer and social media influencer JoJo Siwa’s all-new collection of toys and crafts, this adorably creative Bow Maker set lets little fashionistas make bows the JoJo way. Inspired by JoJo’s positive messages and love of rainbows and emojis, the Bow Maker provides enough accessories for kids to create 4 unique, brightly colored bows. By simply following the instructions, they can fashion bows JoJo herself would be proud to wear. Once finished, they can add unique JoJo Siwa charms for that finishing touch. No batteries required. Ages 6 years and up.

**Hatchimals Surprise™**
*from Spin Master™*
Since the global launch of Hatchimals™ in 2016, HatchiFans have been captivated and enchanted by these magical creatures that deliver a true hatching experience to kids. The newest Hatchimals hold a surprise inside – twins! Little ones can rub the egg until it hatches and watch the twins pop out from the egg and immediately interact with one another. Puppadee is available only at toys“R”Us. Ages 5 years and up.

**Greedy Granny™**
*from Goliath Games*
Shh – one wrong move will wake Granny. As Granny snoozes, players have to spin the wheel to see what sweet they have to swipe from her plate. But beware, if Granny wakes up, her teeth go flying. Be the first player to collect 1 of each of her treats to win the game, which is available only at Toys“R”Us. No batteries required. Ages 4 years and up.

**Hatchimals Colleggtibles™ 12-Pack Egg Carton**
*from Spin Master™*
Delightful surprises await HatchiFans with this Hatchimals Colleggtibles™ 12-Pack Egg Carton. Ideal for on-the-go play, this re-useable carrying case is filled with 10 in-egg Colleggtibles, 1 out-of-egg Colleggtible and 1 of 2 exclusive Flamingeese. Kids can open up the glittery carton and find nests molded into the bottom of each egg compartment. The hatching is easy – children can hold each egg in their palm, rub the purple heart until it turns pink, then press down to crack the shell and hatch a new friend. The carton is also stackable and serves as a cool display case that keeps entire Colleggtibles collections together. No batteries required. Ages 5 years and up.

**Fingerlings™**
*from WowWee™*
This unique little pet fits perfectly on kids’ fingers and will go everywhere – just like a real pet. Each Fingerlings™ responds to noise, motion and touch. Kids can pet their head to put them to sleep, blow a kiss or make a loud noise and watch them get excited. Gigi the Unicorn is the perfect companion and is available only at Toys“R”Us. 4 “LR44” batteries required (included). Ages 5 years and up.
**Nintendo Switch™ with Gray Joy-Con™** from Nintendo

Nintendo Switch™ gives users the freedom to have fun wherever and whenever they want. This versatile system connects to a TV at home and can instantly transform into an on-the-go handheld using its 6.2-inch high-definition screen. Nintendo Switch comes with two Joy-Con that can each act as a standalone controller with built in motion-sensing technology and new HD Rumble. This bundle includes the Nintendo Switch console, Nintendo Switch dock in black, with contrasting left and right Joy-Con controllers – one blue, one red. Also available with Neon Red and Neon Blue Joy-Con. No batteries required. Ages 6 years and up.

**Nickelodeon Slime™ Deluxe Slimy Creations** from Cra-Z-Art

Kids can join the slime making craze with this Nickelodeon Slime™ Deluxe Slimy Creations kit by experimenting with holographic glitter, confetti, plastic beads and googly eyes. No matter the slime design, everything is included for an awesome, and safe, slimy experience. No batteries required. Ages 6 years and up.

**Project Mc2™ Smart Pixel Purse** from MGA Entertainment®

Project Mc2™ is a team of super-smart and seriously cool girls who use their love of science and spy skills on missions for the secret organization, NOV8 (that’s “innovate”!). As seen in the Emmy nominated Netflix original series, this Smart Pixel Purse is the ultimate fashion must-have for the NOV8 agents’ next mission. This on-the-go accessory allows fans to show off their tech genius and comes pre-programmed with over 10 animations for easy out-of-the-box play. Kids can also customize the multi-color LED display with their own designs or phrases using the free iOS and Android app (smart device not included). 4 “AA” batteries required (included). Ages 6 years and up.

**Shopkins™ Happy Places™ Grand Mansion** from Moose Toys™

The Lil’ Shoppies can now live a life of luxury with this 7-room Happy Places™ Grand Mansion playset. Precious Lil’ Shoppie Chandelia calls this mansion home and lights up the room as soon as she walks in. With plenty of space to decorate and display little ones’ Petkins collections, the set comes with 14 exclusive Petkins, fluffy rugs and cozy cushions. No batteries required. Ages 5 years and up.

**Super Nintendo Entertainment System™: Super NES Classic Edition** from Nintendo

From the first ride on Yoshi to the final heart-pounding escape from Planet Zebes, the Super Nintendo Entertainment System™ is pure 16-bit retro gaming perfection. Now a new, miniaturized version is here, pre-loaded with 21 of the all-time greatest games, like Super Mario Kart™ and the first-ever release of Star Fox™ 2. Gamers can just plug it in and play. The system comes bundled with an HDMI cable, a USB charging cable, two Super NES Classic Controllers™, and 21 games, installed and ready-to-play. The system is also compatible with the Classic Controller™ and Classic Controller Pro™ accessories. No batteries required. Ages 6 years and up.
COZMO® COLLECTOR’S EDITION from Anki®
New this holiday season, Cozmo® Collector’s Edition comes in a sleek Liquid Metal finish to complement his sometimes-mischievous personality, and is jam-packed with all the same functionalities as the original Cozmo that kids have come to know and love. Leveraging the processing power of smart devices (iOS, Android and Kindle Fire), Cozmo can express a wide-range of emotions, and he’ll learn to know his owner’s name and face. And with the free companion app, Cozmo owners can access multiple features, including fun games and interactions. This gifted little robot with one-of-a-kind personality also ships with his own toys – 3 interactive Power Cubes. Cozmo is proof that the biggest brains (and personalities) come in the smallest packages. Outlet charger required (included). Ages 8 years and up.

HOT WHEELS® AI STARTER SET MARIO KART EDITION TRACK SET from Mattel®
Showcasing signature Hot Wheels® Ai innovation, this special edition starter set centers around the authentic sounds, voices and hazards from Nintendo’s Mario Kart™ video game series. This starter set includes Mario and Yoshi characters with themed gaming controllers, along with 26 Mario Kart themed pieces that kids can build into an iconic mushroom-shaped track set. The track also allows for an additional 20 plus configurations and the Luigi Body Car and Cartridge Kit are exclusive to Toys"R"Us. 3 “AA” batteries and 3 “AAA” batteries required (included). Ages 8 years and up.

BOOMERANG™ from Power Wheels®
This vehicle is a young racer’s dream, allowing kids to tilt and spin into awesome, fully controlled drifts. Kids will love how this rad, all-wheel drive ride-on powers over different terrains and races at a max speed of 5 mph in the forward direction. Maximum weight limit is 100 lbs. 12-volt battery and charger required (included). Ages 5 to 10 years.

R2-D2™ APP-ENABLED DROID™ from Sphero
This is the droid fans are looking for to recreate iconic scenes from the Star Wars™ saga. The specialized tech in R2-D2™ is unlike any other Astromech Droid, making it as authentic as the trusty Artoo fans have come to know and love. This droid is equipped with fully functional LED lights in the front and rear and an integrated speaker, which means the “beeps” and “boops” come right from R2-D2 itself. With Bluetooth technology, fans can control this droid with a smart device, watch Artoo interact with other Star Wars app-enabled Droids by Sphero, and view Star Wars films with reactions from R2-D2. 1 USB charging cord required (included). Ages 8 years and up.

SUPER MARIO ODYSSEY™ from Nintendo
Explore incredible places far from the Mushroom Kingdom as fans join Mario and his new ally Cappy on a massive, globe-trotting 3D adventure in Super Mario Odyssey™ for Nintendo Switch™. Use amazing new abilities—like the power to capture and control objects, animals, and enemies—to collect Power Moons, power up the Odyssey airship and save Princess Peach from Bowser’s wedding plans. Ages 10 years and up.
Merry Christmas!

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