



Rhythm Bones Player

A Newsletter of the Rhythm Bones Society

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Executive Director's Column

With the Delta mud barely off my shoes (or Bruno's sandals) and the Blues firmly in my mind, I'm back in the rainy, bug infested world of New England. But the memories of Bones Fest XXIII live long in my consciousness! What an incredible time in the heart of the Delta!

Randy Seppala did an exceptional job organizing the event, and bringing us some of the most incredible musicians, some of whom we have indoctrinated into the rhythm bones world, (that's you Libby Rae Watson)! The Shack Up Inn provided the great atmosphere, and the rhythm bones players delivered, from Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Florida,

Washington, DC, Iowa, Connecticut, New Jersey, West Virginia, Tennessee, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Michigan, New York, and of course Mississippi! I really can't say enough about being in the place the Blues began, and meeting some great and extremely friendly people!

Our performance at the Ground Zero Blues Club was one of our best as the musicians: the Organgrinders, Reverend Robert, Libby Rae Watson did their best to make us sound better, and we did!

Thanks again to Randy who did a spectacular
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Highlights From Bones Fest XXIII

Thanks to all the rhythm bones players who attended Bones Fest XXIII in early May in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Home of the Blues. We had about 35 registered attendees which can be considered a decent number. I did not hear any negative feedback from attendees or from venue providers, so all went well in that respect.

It was music, music, music, right from the beginning on Thursday evening at the hospitality session at the Shack Up Inn Chapel featuring Rev. Robert Reynolds, Libby Rae Watson, Vgo, Bill Vits, Looper, Da Bones Man and all dem rhythm bones players. It is always great to renew old friendships and also to meet new friends. The in house bar furnished needed refreshments and Sasha Montry catering provided some very tasty Hors D'oeuvres for the evening as well as keeping us happy and well fed through the weekend. Much thanks and appreciation to Sasha, and if we ever do another Bones Fest in Clarksdale – she's hired!

Friday morning we got started with another Blues jam at 9:30. At 10:00 Steve Brown presented a great beginner's workshop which drew almost all attendees attention on the back porch. Followed at 11:00 by an enlightening historic presentation by Vgo on Bones and Blues that I understand will become a permanent Rhythm Bones Society video.

Lunch is always a highlight.

At 1:00 Bill Vits, who never fails to inform and entertain did his "Bones Playing with Drums" workshop. More great jamming for the rest of the

afternoon.

At 5:00 Bobby Cook brought his "Live Crawfish Boil" rig in and provided a great Southern feast at a reasonable price available to rhythm bones players and all other Shackers.

The son of the Delta, the one and only "Mississippi Marshall" with his sometimes swampy Blues, added the perfect sound for the boil and more rhythm bones playing opportunities.

Friday evening we move into downtown Clarksdale to Hambone Art and Music Gallery featuring the Hopeless Case Bar for some more

(Continued on Page 3)



Bones Fest XXIII host, Randy Seppala. BFXIII group photograph on Page 8

Editorial

Bones Fest XXIII is over and this issue presents highlights from maybe our first targeted Fest, namely the 'Blues Fest.' For the thirty five attendees, host, Randy Seppala, lined up 15 Blues musicians to make this a most fun and memorable Fest. His highlights begin on Page 1.

When the Fest was first announced, there was no graphic or t-shirt yet, so we used a Robert Johnson stamp. Johnson was said to have met the devil at the Crossroad (about 2 miles north of the Shack Up Inn that was our BFXXIII headquarters) where he traded his soul to be the world's greatest guitar player. There is a documentary about him and Blues on YouTube (search for "Robert Johnson", documentary).

There was another major rhythm bones event the same weekend as BFXXIII, namely the All Ireland Bones Championship in Abbeyfeale, Ireland, celebrating the 25th anniversary of that event. The organizers invited RBS to participate and possibly hold a Regional Bones Fest the same weekend. Our Fest host, Randy Seppala, tried to find another weekend for BFXXIII, but Clarksdale had a busy Blues music calendar and he could not change the date.

Three of our members did make the trip, Barry Patton, James Yoshizawa, and Graham Hargrove, and they came in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd in the bones competition. On Page 6, Steve Brown who has won the completion twice and been a judge gives us a history of the event, and this is followed by short summaries from each of the winners. You can read more about Barry by searching for a Page 1 story in the online newsletters.

Jim Lohmann passed away this year. He made high technology rhythm bones. His obituary is on the opposite page.

Letters to the Editor

GREAT NEWS LETTER. Tom's piece "The Story..." was especially moving for me. *Parker Waite*

I just wanted to update you on Barry Patton. He is leaving May 3 for Ireland and will be playing in the World Cham-

pionship Bones Competition! We are very excited and are looking forward to bringing home the honor for the USA. We will keep you posted with photos and updates! *Rene Patton* [See Page 7]

Minutes of the Board Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Executive Director, Steve Brown, at 2:14 PM at an upstairs room at the Shack Up Inn in Clarksdale, MS, and all members were present except Kenny Wolin. The Secretary and Treasurer's reports were presented and motion made and approved to accept them as printed in the newsletter. The Treasurer's Report and all supporting documentation will be sent to the Executive Director.

Steve Brown called the meeting to order as the Nominating Committee, and all current members were nominated to serve in year 2020.

The location for Bones Fest XXIV was discussed. A telephone call was placed to Kenny Wolin to see if he and Teri would be interested in hosting the Fest on their 10th anniversary. This is a possibility. The Board discussed the significant Bones Fest XXV, and will approach the Cowetts to see if they would like to do it having hosted Bones Fest I, II and VI.

BFXXIII host, Randy Seppala, made signature BFXXIII rhythm bones for sale to attendees, and a motion was made and approved to spend \$30 for a pair for the informal RBS Library.

With assistance from Scott Miller, the late Clif Erwin's daughter gave RBS his remaining cache of finished and unfinished rhythm bones. The Board decided to commemorate Clif by giving them away to attendees with a drawing. [See more in the next issue.]

We approved \$150 to get a big discount for attendees entering Ground Zero Blues Club.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:48 PM. Respectively submitted, Steve Wixson, Secretary.

Minutes of the General Membership Meeting

The meeting was called to order by Executive Director, Steve Brown, at 4:35 in the Chapel of the Shack Up Inn. The minutes of the last meeting as printed in the newsletter were approved. The Treasurer, Steve Wixson, gave a brief report noting we had \$7,134 in the bank

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The Rhythm Bones Players welcomes letters to the Editor and article on any aspect of bones playing. All material submitted for consideration is subject to editing and condensation.

Rhythm Bones Central web site: rhythmbones.org

as of the end of 2018.

The report of the Nominating Committee was presented with Steve Brown, Executive Director, Bit Vits, Assistant Director, Steve Wixson, Secretary/Treasurer, and Board Members, Skeff Flynn, Sharon Mescher, Dennis Riedesel and Kenny Wolin. The floor was open for nominations and there being none a motion was made and approved to elect the nominees by acclamation.

We thanked Randy for hosting BFXXII, and noted he dedicated it to the late Yiridy Machar. A request was made for a volunteer to host BFXXIV.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58. Respectively submitted, Steve Wixson, Secretary.

Bones Calendar

Bones Fest XXIV. Need a Host. Are you ready to volunteer?

NTCMA Bones Contest. October 3-6, 2019, Fremont, NE. Bones Contest will likely be on Sunday.

(Director Column continued from Page 1) job producing the Fest, to the Shack Up Inn for providing us the perfect environment for playing rhythm bones, to the community of Clarksdale who welcomed us with open arms, and to each and every attendee who made the event special!

Big news from Abbeyfeale in West Limerick and the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship! For the first time in the 25 year history of the contest, two handed bone players have taken all three top places in the Senior Division! Congratulations to Rhythm Bones Society members Barry Patton from Kansas, who placed first, James Yoshizawa from California placed second, and Graham Hargrove of Stratford, Ontario, Canada placed third. Great job to all of them!

A tentative site has been proposed for next year's Bones Fest XXIV, although we're not ready for a specific announcement, here's a hint, Who's wedding actually took place at a Bones Fest? Update next issue. *Steve Brown*

(Highlights continued from Page 1) great music and rhythm bones playing. The Hopeless Case Trio (Rev. Robert, Stan Street & Da Bones Man) kick it off followed by Clarksdale's own Lucious Spiller. The fabulous Organgrinders with Bill Vits on skins are next, and adding Jim Lande and Stan Street on saxophones equals one incredible Blues jam to top off the night.

Saturday morning starts with another awesome breakfast by Sasha, then more Blues music. At 9:30 the Beginner's Workshop continues with Da Bones Man leading the workshop so Steve Brown can start organizing the "Big Show" coming up in the evening.

It's starting to rain now.

At 11:00 Skeffington Flynn presents another great workshop "Rhythm Bones Playing Techniques." After lunch we are treated by a performance by the Organgrinders, my favorite Blues band.

It is now pouring rain, a real Mississippi deluge. More jams and preparation for the evening concert.

The Board meets at 3:00 with a General Membership meeting at 4:30, which closes the day's activities at Shack Up Inn Chapel, certainly the perfect venue for a Bones Fest, or any other like event

for that matter. Shack Up owner Bill is happy and impressed with our festival and our organization and invites us to do it again anytime.

Ground Zero is packed as many Fest attendees dine on the truly Southern cuisine, and curious town's people and tourists crowd in to see what rhythm bones playing is all about?

Shortly after 7:00 begins a fantastic show of "Bones and Blues," but also features the many genres and styles that are applicable to rhythm bones playing. Great job everybody, we opened a lot of eyes and answered a question I've been asked for the last year or more, "What is bones playing anyhow?"

Following the traditional conga line finale, or should I say "Walking Blues" line around Ground Zero, the Organgrinders took over the stage until 12:00, cordially joined by many other musicians to top off an incredible night of music.

Tameal, the night manager of Ground Zero, was all smiles, the club did well, and her concerns about an obscure tradition called rhythm bones playing were dispelled. I'm sure she would be open to hosting us again if it should ever happen. Thanks to Ground Zero for the true Southern hospitality and authentic environment.

Sunday morning, Sasha, our food mother, had breakfast boxes ready for travelers or to eat there and some say good bye as this is officially the end of Bones Fest XXIII.

Most of us however still haven't had enough and head to Bluesberry Café where Blues breakfast happens on Saturday and Sunday from 8:00 to 12:00 and we have the stage from 10:00 to 12:00? More music with Rev. Robert, Libby Rae, Vgo, Ellen and Ginny, Steve Brown, Skeff and more.

I have to call Bones Fest XXIII a success and well worth the effort. Two big highlights for me was seeing a couple of new bones players get it, get with it, and experience the joy of rhythm bones playing. Kate Barfield's animated bones playing and dancing around at every venue was great to see. And my dear friend and sometimes musical partner, Libby Rae Watson, who I have been working on rhythm bones playing with for over a year, "got it" after attending Steve



Libby Rae Watson "got it"

Brown's Beginner's Workshop. This is what it is all about as far as this rhythm bones player is concerned. Thanks again to all attendees and others involved.

Best always, *Randy "Da Bones Man" Seppala*

Jim Lohmann Obituary

James "Jim" B. Lohmann, was born August 9, 1953, and passed away May 30, 2019.

Jim started Lohmann Woodcarving Company 40 years ago, and specialized in custom architectural and ornamental woodworking. Included among his countless jobs was the restoration of a secretary desk made for the White House, and dozens of decorative pipe screens for organs throughout the world.

I met Jim in 2002 when he got involved in pavilion building project for our community and we made a large wood sign for the building. We started making bones in 2003.

Jim worked for 15 years on perfecting the making of wood rhythm bones on a CNC machine (computerized router). He was always coming up with new jigs and methods for milling bones and pretty much had it perfected where very little sanding was required.

We were partners in the "Dem Bones" enterprise which ceased rhythm bones production in 2017.

Jim attended Bones Fest IX with his daughter, Olivia, who played rhythm bones quite well. Rest in peace dear friend. *Randy "Da Bones Man" Seppala*



Shack Up Inn in the historic Hopson Plantation with sharecropper shacks converted to rooms. See Page 8.



Great breakfasts and lunches on site



Steve Brown's Beginners Workshop showing a few of the attendees



Vgo's Blues History Workshop with Hank Tenenbaum assisting



Bill Vits' Bones and Drum Workshop



The fabulous crayfish dinner



Hambone with Stan Street, Randy & Rev Robert



Hambone Gallery with Lucious Spiller



Libby Rae Watson, 2016 MS Blues Musician



Jamming with Mississippi Marshall



Randy Seppala's Beginner's Workshop



Jamming with Rev Robert and Looper



Skeff Flynn's Rhythm Bones Playing Techniques

The photographs below except for the lower right corner are from the Ground Zero Blues Club.
 Photographs by Mary Lee Sweet and Steve Wixson



Morgan Freeman's Gound Zero Blues Club. We had 2 hours of stage time



Organ Grinders with Jim Lande on sax and Kate Barfield on rhythm bones



Mary Lee and Frank Sweet



Stan Von Hagen



Sharon Mescher



Spike Bones



Ron Bruschi



Blue Hammond



Jim Runner



Dennis Riedesel



Pass-off with Steve Brown, Bruno Giles, Skeff Flynn, & Bill Vits



End of the Grand Finale where all rhythm bones players marched around the customers at Ground Zero Blues Club. Steve Wixson on stage with Looper.



Sunday breakfast at the Bluesberry Cafe with Steve Brown on tin whistle, Jenny Sartain and Ellen Stern on banjo, Vgo and Libby Rae Watson on guitar.

Abbeyfeale's Fleadh by the Feale Celebrates 25 years

In 1993 the market town of Abbeyfeale, Limerick, located roughly on the border with county Kerry, was offered to host the Limerick Fleadh Ceol (feast of music) which would lead the top finishes to the Munster Fleadh, and eventually to Fleadh Ceol Na Erriennan, where they could compete for the title of All Ireland Champion. The Fleadh, a success, was hosted in Abbeyfeale the following year.

This lead organizers in 1995 to start their own Festival based in Abbeyfeale, and named, *Fleadh by the Feale*. A number of events including competitions for children, master classes, street busking, and concerts were planned, but Dan Murphy, one of the main organizers, felt there was something lacking, something that could distinguish Fleadh by the Feale from the many events that were springing up around Ireland.

Dan, himself a musician and pub owner had brought many musicians to town to play at his pub, The Failte Bar, and was well known in town. Many the session was held at his pub and one particular attendee was Patrick Sport Murphy, a well known rhythm bone player from Ballaugh in Abbeyfeale, who many thought was the best rhythm bones player in Ireland. So it was that the Abbeyfeale Fleadh Committee agreed to host what they called the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship as a part of the *Fleadh by the Feale*.

Initially they contacted the ruling body in Ireland of Fleadh Ceol's, Comhaltas Ceoltori Erriennan to hire a judge, but it became clear that the judge was not too keen on rhythm bone playing in general. The following year they began searching for the most competent of Judges, ones that were well known percussion players, and had some expertise in playing rhythm bones. Those early years saw Seamus O'Kane, Mel Mercier, and Tommy Hayes as judges, all recognized experts in their field.

Too, the early years were primarily a local event, dominated by Patrick Sport Murphy (see online newsletter, Volume 2, No.3), a local family named Kelliher,

and Paddy Donovan, from neighboring Adare. The dominance of 'Sport' was so complete, that after a number of titles in a row, a rule not allowing the champion to compete the following year was instituted. The contest generated a lot of interest locally, and a high degree of participation amongst the bone players in the area, of which there were many. Gradually the swell of competitors began to decrease, and the previous years champion was allowed to compete once more.

In the early 2000's word began to spread amongst bone players in Ireland and other countries that the contest existed, and interest in competing began to swell. So it was that 2003 saw the largest number of competitors, 16, and the largest number of counties of Ireland represented (6), and for the first time international competitors from 5 countries. Also for the first time a competitor from outside Ireland came in first place, displacing Sport Murphy for the first time.

Since that time the contest has seen various changes. Sport Murphy retired from competition. His protégé David Murphy went on to win 5 titles, including the Sport Murphy Cup in 2013. There have been lean years with fewer competitors, and regular interest from outside of Ireland, and from the various counties. Junior Davey of County Sligo has won two championship titles.

The Fleadh organizing committee intends to make every effort to continue the All Ireland Bone Playing Championship into the future and to continue to encourage both native Irish players, and international players to come and compete. The festival funding sources have unfortunately decreased in recent years, and one hopes that additional funding sources will eventually be located and allow the Fleadh and the contest it's self to continue. It truly is perhaps the most competitive rhythm bone playing contest in the world with the highest standard of playing. So if your ready to give it a try contact the Fleadh committee through the web site fleadhbythefeale.com and give it a go! The music is excellent, and the people are welcoming and friendly. And even if you don't win, you'll have the time of your life!

Over the years, the *Rhythm Bones Player* newsletter has included many stories about the All Ireland Bones Com-

petition including personal stories and the names of winners. Search our online newsletters using "Abbeyfeale".

In 2019, the 25th Fleadh, all three top finishers were from outside of Ireland, Barry Paton from Kansas took first place, James Yoshizawa from California took second, and Graham Hargrove from Canada took third, a far cry from when the Championship was primarily a local event. It should also be noted that this was the first time that two handed bones players took all three places. What follows is the personal stories from these three winners who are all members of the Rhythm Bones Society. *Steve Brown*

Barry Patton

[Editor's Note. Fans of bluegrass and traditional music have long known of Barry 'Bones' Patton's skill in playing rhythm bones. For more information go to the story about him in our online newsletter, Volume 9, No.1, and search for him on YouTube.]

This was my first trip to Ireland as well as my first competition. I was excited to be a part of such an event.

Competitors drew numbers to determine the performance order. Each contestant had to play one jig, one reel and one song of their choice from a selection of polkas, marches, jigs or other genres. We were judged based on performance style, how well we kept a beat, rhythm and other factors.

After they start the first jig, you relax and start thinking, I've heard these songs before.

The contest was on the last day of the festival, although there was plenty of rhythm bones playing in the days leading up.

The festival days were declared a bank holiday for the town. People came from all over to jam in the pubs and drink Guinness. At times, there were five or six rhythm bones competition contestants in one pub, taking turns on their instruments.

By the time you're ready to compete, you know almost everyone you're playing with. I made many new friends including Graham Hargrove and James Yoshizawa, both of whom play 'two fisted' and exceptionally well.

The whole experience was amazing! Ireland is a country where rhythm bones are considered to be a very prestigious



2019 Fleadh by the Feale from the left, Barry Patton, Graham Hargrove and James Yoshizawa

instrument and to be able to play them well is considered quite an accomplishment.

I feel blessed to have won, although the judge could have chosen anyone and it would have been fine. I learned to play at the age of 13 from Cecil Hiatt, who wanted someone to carry on the rhythm bones playing tradition. (see online newsletter, Volume 5, No. 3, Page 5)

It brought a tear to my eye, when the judge said I carried a rhythm better than any rhythm bones player he's seen. That felt really good.

As the winner, I received a cash prize of 300 Irish pounds (about \$427 in U.S. dollars) and a foot-tall Waterford crystal vase. I am also the first recipient of a perpetual plaque that will go to the winner every year, with my name the first to be engraved on it. *Barry Patton*

James Yoshizawa

[Editor's Note. For more about James, go to his website, jamesyoshizawa.com/bio, and search for him on Youtube.]

When I arrived in Abbeyfeale, I was warmly greeted by Martin O'Donoghue, one of the *Fleadh by the Feale* coordinators. Martin then introduced me to bones legend Dave Murphy at a local pub where I also met many of the musicians I would be playing with throughout my stay in Abbeyfeale. The pubs were buzzing with the energy from the sessions that went on all night, every night during the fleadh. I remember finally getting to meet fellow competitor Graham Hargrove — who I had only known from online interactions — in person at my first session in Abbeyfeale where we sat, side-by-side, trading musical ideas on rhythm bones and bodhran.

One of the highlights of my trip was when Dave Murphy organized a session just a few hours before the All-Ireland Bones Competition and invited all of the rhythm bones competitors to join.

Graham, Dave, Barry Patton, some of the local competitors and I all traded off on rhythm bones for hours in a small, packed pub. It can be rare to find more than one serious rhythm bones player in any given town, so to have some of the best from around the world all playing in the same session, sharing ideas and cheering each other on, was a uniquely beautiful experience.

The competition was held on the final night of the Fleadh on an outdoor stage in the town square. Everyone played beautifully. Afterwards, we returned to the same pub and continued playing until 2am.

There was no egos or competitive rivalries in the competition — just comradely, support for one another, and a shared joy for making music on this unique, little instrument.

Bravo to *Fleadh by the Feale* for keeping the tradition of this competition alive! *James Yoshizawa*, 2nd Place All-Ireland Bones Competition, Los Angeles, CA

Graham Hargrove

[Editor's Note. Graham tell us a bit about himself below and check him out on Youtube.]

My name is Graham Hargrove, I've spent a lifetime playing music, but am new-ish to rhythm bones. I've been playing them for a little over 7 years. I live near Stratford, Ontario, Canada and make my living as a freelance percussionist. Until recently I hadn't met other rhythm bones players; I have stolen from the best of them through the wonders of youtube. Amazing time in which to learn! As it turns out, the language of rhythm bones has worked its way into almost every gig I do: chamber music, theatre pit orchestras, World music ensembles, Celtic, folk, pop...it has this way of being appropriate across every era and style of music.

I made my first pilgrimage to Abbeyfeale in 2017 for the All Ireland Bones Competition. The legendary David Murphy was the first rhythm bones player I met there (or anywhere! I live in the boonies). I spent many great hours over the next couple of days trading sets in blistering fast pub sessions with him. Amazing times! David has the most elegant right hand in bones playing, and he is really a cornerstone of the West Limerick style. Cathy Jordan of Der-

vish was the judge of the competition that year, and I was delighted to come second. Great fun to bring the double handed style to the Irish, thanks Steve Brown for beginning that tradition many years earlier!

This year I was able to duck out of my day job for a week (playing percussion with the Stratford Festival production of *Little Shop of Horrors* this season! Fun gig...) and get back to the *Fleadh by the Feale*, which is a grand weekend in Abbeyfeale of music and revelries that culminates in the All Ireland Senior Bones Competition. Already lots of old friends to see in Abbeyfeale, so it was great to be back. Pat Quille, who is an organizer of the Fleadh, had generously arranged the overseas bones competitors to stay as guests at a lovely B and B a mile or so up the road from the town, so the morning after I arrived I was having breakfast with Barry 'Bones' Patton and James Yoshizawa. I was already a fan of their work from youtube, so it was terrific to meet them both and we subsequently spent many great hours trading sets in pubs, along with David Murphy and some of the other fantastic local bones players. James and I played some bodhran when not on the bones — terrific jamming all in all.

So by Monday night we were all great friends. The competition itself is a pretty small affair — 15 competitors in total I think this year, some local and some from other counties in Ireland. One competitor from Italy and one from England, in addition to my American friends and myself. Some of the young Irish players are great — the one handed style is intricate and beautiful. And all of us two handers from overseas had our own take on accompanying Irish music, which must have gone over all right! The competition judged by the legendary bodhran and rhythm bones player Johnny "Ringo" McDonagh. Grand fun and we all played a couple more pub sessions that night to celebrate and hang out with new friends.

It was a great weekend to be in Abbeyfeale, and I will look forward to returning in future. Though next on the list is the Bones Fest in DC next year if I can make it down! Looking forward to meeting my American bones friends and sharing some music. *Graham Hargrove*



Bones Fest XXIII Group Photograph in the main section of the Shack Up Inn. From the left below, Jenny Sartain, Frank Sweet, Jennifer Brown, Steve Brown (on chair), Jeremy Brown, Ellen Stern, Dennis Riedesel, Jim Landy, Bruno Giles, Skeff Flynn, Libby Rae Watson, host Randy Seppala, Pat LaBree, Vgo Terry, Mary Lee Sweet, Steve Wixson and Hank Tenenbaum. On stage, Jim Runner, Erik Bynum, Sharon Mescher, Ron and Marie Bruschi, Heidi Hess-Bynum, Hallie Joy, Donald Joy, Sam Foster (friend of Von Hagens), Jean and Stan Von Hagen, Spike Bones, Jill and Ted Ramsaur. Not shown are Kate Barfield, Blue Hammond and Bill Vits.

Rhythm Bones Society

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Address Correction Requested