

HIGH LINE CANAL CONSERVANCY

PROGRESS REPORT | DECEMBER 2020

Dear Partners and Friends of the Canal,

As almost every other aspect of everyday human life and interaction shut down to promote social distancing and reduce infection rates from the pandemic, the High Line Canal remained open as a tremendous gift to so many. With your support, we have made significant progress toward implementing our bold plans to protect and enhance the Canal in ways that will ensure its healing nature is available to all, for generations to come. On behalf of our staff and Board of Directors, thank you for your partnership in supporting our region's beloved Canal.

This year brought unforeseen challenges; however, we've been able to make strides in implementing The Plan for the High Line Canal with your support. This year, the Conservancy:

- Led a summer full of COVID-safe stewardship opportunities
- · Launched a brand-new community event, Walk FOR the Canal
- · Advanced the Canal's transition to stormwater management
- · Established a structure for improved regional collaboration and management
- · Installed the first of many High Line Canal signs

With much work ahead to realize the community vision, thank you for your continued partnership and support.

Sincerely,

Hamiet Orellenden hottai

Harriet Crittenden LaMair Executive Director

The mission of the Conservancy is to preserve, protect and enhance the 71-mile-long High Line Canal, in partnership with the public.



Cover photo credit: Evan Anderman

CANAL IMPROVEMENTS + PLANNING

CANAL COLLABORATIVE

The newly formed Canal Collaborative encompasses the former High Line Canal Working Group. The Canal Collaborative formally brings together all of the regional partners, including Denver Water, local governments, stormwater managers and the High Line Canal Conservancy, to do more for the Canal together than any one entity can do alone. This collaborative management structure will ensure this treasured resource is preserved, protected and enhanced as a regional legacy for future generations.

For years, the Canal has served as a part of Denver Water's utility infrastructure, but times have changed, and the Canal no longer sustainably serves the purposes for which Denver Water historically used the Canal. With completion and endorsement of The Plan for the High Line Canal (The Plan), the Canal has a new life as a recreational and ecological resource for the community.

This new life demands a new management structure that will support the Canal's role as a 71-mile linear park and emerging function as a stormwater management system. Formed after a year-long series of facilitated discussions, this innovative collaborative management structure has been endorsed by all of the local governments and partners. The Canal Collaborative will be formally launched in 2021 and will be administered by the Conservancy.

The Canal Collaborative will include three levels of engagement including a forum of elected officials, a leadership team of highlevel staff and a series of technical advisory committees.

CANAL COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS

- > Arapahoe County
- > Aurora
- Cherry Hills Village >
- The City and County of Denver
- Denver Water
- Douglas County
- Greenwood Village >
- Highlands Ranch Metro District
- High Line Canal Conservancy
- > Littleton
- > Mile High Flood District
- > Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority
- > South Suburban Park and Recreation District

a structured partnership, and in 2020, after many years of deliberation, we have agreed upon an innovative governance model for the High Line Canal: The Canal Collaborative. With the Conservancy managing the Canal Collaborative we will be able to enhancements and improved maintenance that will sustain the Canal into the future." - Harriet Crittenden LaMair, High Line Canal

































STORMWATER TRANSFORMATION

The Stormwater Transition and Enhancement Program (STEP) has been awarded grant funding for the third year in a row.

The Conservancy, with the support and expertise of its partners, Denver Water and Mile High Flood District, is working with local jurisdictions to improve regional stormwater quality and conveyance as well as public health, resulting in a cleaner, healthier and more vibrant Canal corridor that will promote multiple quality-of-life benefits.

STEP was recently awarded a third year of funding in the amount of \$125,625. Support for STEP was provided in part by a grant from the Pisces Foundation, which seeks ways to accelerate to a world where people and nature thrive together. The JPB Foundation has also generously supported the project through the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities, an administrative partner in issuing and managing this grant. This next year of work STEP will focus on:

- > Identifying new opportunities for stormwater projects
- Completing the U.S. EPA's Augmented Alternatives Analysis
- Developing a Canal-wide programmatic agreement to streamline regulatory compliance
- Finalizing a centralized operations and maintenance plan for stormwater sites
- > Engaging with key stakeholders and community members to promote the Canal's transformation
- Conducting a soil and vegetation assessment to better understand how the Canal's ecology responds to stormwater
- Convening a multi-disciplinary stakeholder team on smart-water approaches for the Canal

For more, visit highlinecanal.org/STEP.

CANAL TREE CANOPY CARE PROJECT

Since the Tree Canopy Care Project began in 2018, arborists have tended to over 740 trees Canal-wide. The scope of work includes trees marked, scheduled and identified per the 2016 Tree Inventory, which meet the criteria for high priority, as well as for unplanned and storm-related emergency needs. This year, unplanned tree work was more significant as crews helped to prepare the Canal's landscape for three new stormwater projects.

In 2021, the Conservancy is excited to initiate three tree planting projects, adding 150 new trees in Denver, 50 in Centennial and 50 in Littleton.

The Tree Canopy Care Project is possible because of joint funding from Denver Water and jurisdictional partners, as well as private fundraising through the Conservancy. The tree planting projects planned for 2021 are funded by Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO), the City of Centennial, our generous Walk FOR the Canal donors and a local foundation.

> **Project Status for 2020:** 33 Trims | 12 Habitat | 118 Removals **Overall Total:** 745 Trees Cared For Since 2018







NEIGHBORHOOD CANAL IMPROVEMENTS (NCI)

The Plan identifies sections of the Canal, typically under-utilized areas or areas of the trail that lack sufficient user amenities, where improvements are needed to increase use and enjoyment of the trail. These areas are identified for Neighborhood Canal Improvement (NCI) projects, which may include enhancements such as gathering places with seating, shade structures that promote community connections, nature play areas and fitness stations that encourage healthy living. These projects are intended to be community-informed and relevant to the nearby neighborhoods through deep community engagement in order to create local neighborhood enhancements that are designed and developed in partnership with residents. In the Laredo Highline neighborhood of Aurora, the first NCI project is already underway and an additional NCI project in Littleton will begin in 2021.

LAREDO HIGHLINE NCI

Initiated early in 2020 thanks to funding from The Colorado Health Foundation, the Laredo Highline NCI project will include signage, natural elements, activity markings and further amenities in the future. In an effort to adapt improvements due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Conservancy has allocated a significant portion of this funding to a new pedestrian bridge at E. 8th Ave. The City of Aurora received matching funds from Arapahoe County Open Space to partner on implementation of this critical access improvement. To date, the Conservancy has engaged two Canal Ambassadors in addition to four youth ambassadors to help engage with the local neighborhood and create community-informed improvements.

- > Location: High Line Canal between E. 6th Ave. and E. Colfax Ave., Aurora
- Status: Community engagement and design in progress
- Funding: The Colorado Health Foundation and Arapahoe County Open Spaces

LITTLETON NCI

The Littleton NCI project, anticipated to commence in early 2021, will include the formalization of a new trailhead, replacement of the Elati St. pedestrian bridge, activation components and user amenities such as signage, benches and landscape enhancement along the Canal adjacent to Horseshoe Park.

- Location: High Line Canal along Horseshoe Park, Littleton
- Status: Anticipated design and engagement to start early 2021



CANAL PROGRAMS + INITIATIVES

WALK FOR THE CANAL 2020

As the COVID-19 health crisis began to unfold, we at the Conservancy, along with many other nonprofits and businesses across the world, found ourselves reflecting on how our work could move forward in a meaningful way. Early on, it became clear that the Canal was a place of retreat for many Coloradans seeking connection with nature while close to home. Once it became necessary for the Conservancy to switch gears, our creative wheels started turning. We created Walk FOR the Canal, a community celebration to bring awareness to the value of our trails, parks and open spaces, while raising funds to keep our work moving forward.

Through Walk FOR the Canal, the incredible fundraising efforts of the nearly 400 participants helped us surpass our goal of \$171,000. Thank you for helping make our first-ever Walk FOR the Canal one for the books. We've heard hundreds of stories of family and friends connecting, and the community moving together during this challenging time. It was inspiring to see participants finding comfort in the outdoors in support of the Canal.



ENGAGEMENT

The Conservancy continues to raise awareness for the Canal and the current planning effort through partnerships, events, on-Canal tabling, community events and presentations. Though adapted for safety during the pandemic, the Conservancy was able to participate in or host:

- 37 Conservancy Events
- > 15 Presentations
- > 7 Youth Engagement Events
- 22 on-Canal tabling events



STEWARDSHIP

The Conservancy successfully completed its stewardship program season while complying with state and jurisdictional guidelines related to COVID-19. This year's stewardship programs included:

- Volunteer Leader Program
- > Care for the Canal: Community Cleanups
- > Care for the Canal: Brush Removals
- > Care for the Canal: Independent Cleanups

These stewardship programs focused on elevating the health and maintenance of the Canal to community standards as demonstrated below.

Volunteer Leader Program

The Conservancy officially launched the Volunteer Leader Program this year. The Volunteer Leader Program harnesses the commitment of Canal community members, enabling and inspiring them to work together to raise awareness of the Canal, enhance the Canal's ecological health and elevate the level of care for the Canal. The program aims to continue to inspire community members to take action within their community and become stewards of the Canal by providing training and workshops to cultivate Volunteer Leaders and Canal Ambassadors.

The Conservancy would be happy to share the story of the Canal's transition with your community group or association. Visit highlinecanal.org/presentation-requests to request a presentation. A total of 16 Volunteer Leaders assisted with this year's stewardship and outreach programs which included:

- Weekly stewardship events: Leading volunteers at stewardship events such as cleanups and brush removals
- Stormwater Project Monitoring: Monitoring the Canal at stormwater project sites in Littleton and Greenwood Village
- > **On Canal Signage:** Assisting with sign placement at various locations along the Canal
- Weekly on-Canal tabling events: Assisting with outreach events to raise awareness for the Canal and the Conservancy
- > **Events:** Assisting with community and Conservancy events

Care for the Canal: Community Cleanups

The Conservancy's Care for the Canal: Community Cleanups had its most impactful season to date. From June to August, the Conservancy led weekly cleanups at various locations along the Canal. The 2020 season concluded with:

- > 16 cleanups
- > 5,668 lbs. of trash removed from the Canal
- > 18 miles of the Canal cared for
- > 164 total volunteers
- > 492 volunteer hours

We look forward to growing the Care for the Canal program in 2021 through corporate cleanups, volunteer site captains and independent cleanups.

Care for the Canal: Independent Cleanups

The Independent Cleanup program continues to grow allowing for more areas of the Canal to be cared for and providing community members with resources to be environmental stewards. As of October 23, 2020, this new program:

- Registered 30 groups consisting of 114 adult and 32 youth participants
- Engaged community members, organizations such as boy scout troops, Boys Team Charity, South Metro Fire District and corporations
- > Removed 1,465 lbs. of trash from the Canal
- > Cared for an estimated 31 miles of the Canal

The program is a year-round program, allowing community members the flexibility to care for the Canal on their own schedule.

Interested in participating on your own time? Visit <u>highlinecanal.org/IndependentCleanups</u>.

Care for the Canal: Brush Removal

In partnership with the City of Greenwood Village and Littleton, the Conservancy led five brush removals this summer. The brush removals focused on clearing large collections of brush and debris to enhance the Canal's ecological function, keep stormwater flowing and reduce the risk of fire.

We look forward to continuing this program in partnership with the Canal's jurisdictional partners as the Canal transitions to green stormwater infrastructure.

- 75 total volunteers
- > 225 volunteer hours
- > 3.2 miles of the Canal cared for
- > Hundreds of pounds of brush removed





EDUCATION AND RECREATION

Walk the Canal

The Conservancy led themed walks along the Canal to raise awareness for Walk FOR the Canal between August and October. Themes were centered around history, wildlife, botanics, stormwater and more.

- > 40 total walkers
- > 10 walks
- > 40 miles covered in total

Youth Education

The original youth education programs scheduled with Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK), which included family walks and in-school programming, were adapted due to COVID-19. The Conservancy hosted one stewardship cleanup in Green Valley Ranch with ELK, participated in online educational presentations with ELK students and engaged ELK in promoting the Youth Walk FOR the Canal.

- > Walk FOR the Canal: 143 registered youth participants
- > Stewardship Programs: 62 youth participants
- > ELK Programs:
 - > In school program: 90 youth
 - > Walks: 95 youth and 29 adults (pre covid)
 - > Virtual presentations: 44 youth
 - > Bike Ride: 15 youth
 - > Stewardship: 20 youth

Environmental Education

The Conservancy, in partnership with Denver Audubon, hosted various online environmental education workshops focusing on the Canal's biodiversity.



PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Along with the Conservancy's efforts, the work of the Canal Collaborative, Denver Water and the jurisdictions continues to advance some very important projects.

CANAL-WIDE PROJECTS

Signage and Wayfinding

The Conservancy has funded brand new sandstone mile markers that will replace the existing mile markers along the Canal. In addition, the Conservancy is working with all of the jurisdictions along the Canal to implement the first ever Canalwide sign package. More than 160 wayfinding signs will be installed on the Canal as a part of this first phase of signage, in addition to three interpretive signs.



MULTI-JURISDICTIONAL PROJECTS

Orchard Road Crossing Enhancement

The cities of Centennial and Greenwood Village have come together to improve the safety of the western Canal crossing at E. Orchard Rd (west of University Blvd). The two cities have secured funding from Arapahoe County Open Spaces to implement an innovative crossing improvement called a bump out or curb extension. This improvement will extend the curb to shorten crossing distances for Canal users, improve the visibility of pedestrians and cyclists at the crossing and slow the speed of cars. This improvement will serve as a model for improving the safety of other challenging at-grade crossings along the Canal.

 Location: High Line Canal and E. Orchard Road, west of University Blvd

- > Status: Project funded, currently in design
- Funding: Greenwood Village (\$37,500), the City of Centennial (\$37,500) and Arapahoe County Open Spaces (\$75,000) are funding the project

Parker and Mississippi Underpass

The City and County of Denver has partnered with Arapahoe County to construct an underpass at the busy intersection of Parker Road and Mississippi Avenue just south of Fairmount Cemetery. Construction began in November and will take up to a year. The Canal trail will be closed from Parker Road to the southern edge of Fairmount Cemetery during construction and a detour route will be in place that sends trail users east on Mississippi Avenue and north on Valentia Street.

- > Location: E. Mississippi Ave. and S. Parker Road
- > Status: Construction began November 2020, anticipated completion September 2021
- Funding: \$3.2M FASTER Funds, \$1.75M from the City and County of Denver, and \$1.75M from Arapahoe County

Colorado and Hampden Underpasses

The long-awaited underpass project at Colorado and Hampden kicked off in May and both the tunnel under Colorado Blvd and the tunnel under Hampden have been installed. A small detour is in place that sends trail users around Magna Carta Park. The project will take a full year as work continues on a quarter mile of new trail to connect the two underpasses along the edge of Wellshire golf course and ramps are constructed to bring users in and out of the underpasses. The project is expected to be completed in May of 2021.

- > Location: S. Colorado Blvd. and E. Hampden Ave.
- Status: Construction began May 2020, anticipated completion May 2021
- Cost: \$5.4M, with \$4.32M coming from Federal Sources and \$1.08M coming from the City and County of Denver, Cherry Hills Village and Arapahoe County

ARAPAHOE COUNTY ENHANCEMENTS

Long's Pine Grove

This brand new 2.8-acre park along the Canal in the Four Square Mile neighborhood of Unincorporated



Arapahoe County was completed in July. The park preserves sweeping mountain views and stands of mature pine trees while adding a picnic pavilion, nature play area, turf lawn and parking lot providing access to the Canal.

- > Location: E. Florida Ave and the High Line Canal
- > Status: Completed July 2020
- Funding: The project was funded by Arapahoe > County Open Spaces

AURORA ENHANCEMENTS



The City of Aurora has completed construction of over a mile of trail from north of I-70 to the border with Denver in the Green Valley Ranch neighborhood. Signage has been installed along this reach of trail marking the first installation of the new High Line Canal sign package. This is the first phase of a two-part project to close the largest trail gap remaining along the Canal. Beginning in late 2021, Aurora will construct another mile and a half of trail connecting under I-70 all the way to Colfax.

PHASE 1

COMPLETE

- > Location: High Line Canal from Colfax north to Green Valley Ranch in Denver
- Status: Phase 1 construction is complete, and signs have been installed. Phase 2 to begin construction in 2021
- Funding Partners: Conservation Trust Fund, Adams > County Open Space Grant and Adams County Open Space Tax Shareback



LITTLETON ENHANCEMENTS

Littleton Project

The City of Littleton has taken on its first stormwater project in the



High Line Canal. A small parcel along the Canal was developed into three home sites and the City partnered with the land developer to allow a new flow of stormwater into the Canal at Windermere St.. This water will move through the Canal until it flows back into the natural waterway at Lee Gulch. This project was supported by the Conservancy as it will advance the Canal's transition to green stormwater infrastructure and add a new source of water to keep the Canal vibrant. As a part of

this project, the City of Littleton has taken over maintenance and management of the Canal from Windermere St. to Lee Gulch. SSPRD will continue to maintain the trail in this section.

- > Location: 1 mile of the Canal from Windermere St. to Lee Gulch
- > Status: Completed summer 2020
- Funding: The land developer installed the new outfall and Littleton has taken over maintenance and management of the Canal for this one-mile stretch

DOUGLAS COUNTY ENHANCEMENTS

Santa Fe Underpass

CDOT and Douglas County are widening and reconstructing a stretch of Santa Fe Dr. and will be installing an underpass to move High Line Canal users safely under this busy roadway. The project has been delayed and is anticipated to go out for bid in November with construction starting as early as March of 2021.

- > Location: S. Santa Fe Dr. and the High Line Canal
- Status: Construction anticipated to begin in Spring 2021
- > Funding: Estimated at \$3.5 million

GREENWOOD VILLAGE ENHANCEMENTS

Belleview Trailhead

The City of Greenwood Village is developing a new trailhead on Belleview Avenue adjacent to the Marjorie Perry Nature Preserve to improve access to the Canal. The trailhead will have space for 20 cars and the project will include installation of a 500-foot gravel trail connecting users to the Canal along Belleview.

- > Location: High Line Canal and Belleview Avenue
- > Status: Planned for 2021
- > Funding: Greenwood Village



DENVER ENHANCEMENTS

Holly and Iliff Crossing Enhancements

The City and County of Denver is improving the safety of the crossing where the Canal meets Holly and Iliff in the Goldsmith Neighborhood. The City and County of Denver is replacing the vehicular bridge over the Canal and is taking this opportunity to add a crosswalk, signage and median refuge, significantly improving safety for Canal users. This project should be completed in December of 2020.

- > Location: S. Holly St. and E. Iliff Ave
- Status: Construction underway with completion anticipated in December 2020
- > Funding: Denver DOTI



Eisenhower Park Stormwater Project

The Denver Department of Transportation (DOTI) and Infrastructure has received final approval for the proposed stormwater project in the Canal from Hampden Ave to I-25, including along Eisenhower Park. The project will include three water quality berms in the Canal to manage the flow of water, four forebays to clean water before it reaches the Canal and two water quality vaults to remove trash and sediment. The project is expected to begin construction in January 2021.

- Location: 1.5 miles of the Canal from Hampden Ave to I-25, including Eisenhower Park
- Status: Funded, design completed, construction start expected in January 2021
- > Funding: Denver DOTI

MEDIA/PRESS

RECENT MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Centennial Citizen: "Life goes on at deKoevend Park, High Line Canal," October 21, 2020
- CBS4 Denver: "Nuggets Mascot Hits High Line Canal Trail For Outdoor Challenge," September 10, 2020
- CBS4 Denver: "Explore, Raise Money For High Line Canal, One Of Denver Metro Area's Great Natural Resources," August 30, 2020

Other significant media highlights from 2020 include:

- CBS4 Denver: "Help Improve The High Line Canal During Walk For The Canal Fundraiser," August 2, 2020
- > 5280 Magazine: "7 Denver Metro Area Hikes to Tackle While Practicing Social Distancing," April 21, 2020
- Westword: "Here's the Rest of the Best: Our Readers' Picks!" March 28, 2020
- Littleton Independent: "Look outdoors for boredom cure," March 3, 2020
- Denver Water's Water News: "Enjoying the High Line Canal Corridor," March 2, 2020

Thank you to each jurisdiction and elected official for the various articles and mentions in your newsletters.

Looking for content in your newsletter? Email us at <u>hello@highlinecanal.org</u>.

Social media

The Conservancy continues to see steady growth in both audience and engagement across all social media platforms. Analytics to date:

- > Facebook followers: 2,178
- > Instagram followers: 1,916
- > Twitter followers: 914

FUNDRAISING/DEVELOPMENT

HIGH LINE HERO MEMBERSHIP

The High Line Heroes membership base continues to grow. There are over 1,200 High Line Heroes from across the region. There's no better time to join or renew as a



member (or give it as a gift for the holidays!).

Visit joinhighlinecanal.org.



CONSERVANCY STAFF

Harriet Crittenden LaMair

– Executive Director

Suzanna Fry Jones – Director of Marketing and Community Outreach

Lindsay Moery – Director of Development

Josh Phillips - Director of Planning and Implementation

Connie Brown, part-time – Community Relations and Development Coordinator

Chip Brunk, part-time – Finance Manager

Cathy McCague, part-time – STEP Program Manager

Elle Ritt

– Development Associate

Hayley Ward – Marketing and Communications Associate

Breana Winters

- Operations and Programs Associate

LEADERSHIP TEAM

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Tom Waymire President, High Line Canal Preservation Association

Suzanne White Community Leader Kendra Black Ex Officio, City & County of Denver Council Nancy Sharpe Ex Officio, Arapahoe County Commissioner Harriet Crittenden LaMair Ex Officio, Ex. Dir. HLCC



Conservancy staff and Board are so honored and grateful to have had Jock Bickert as part of our "merry little band" (as Jock would say).

COUNCIL OF ADVISORS

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CANAL COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

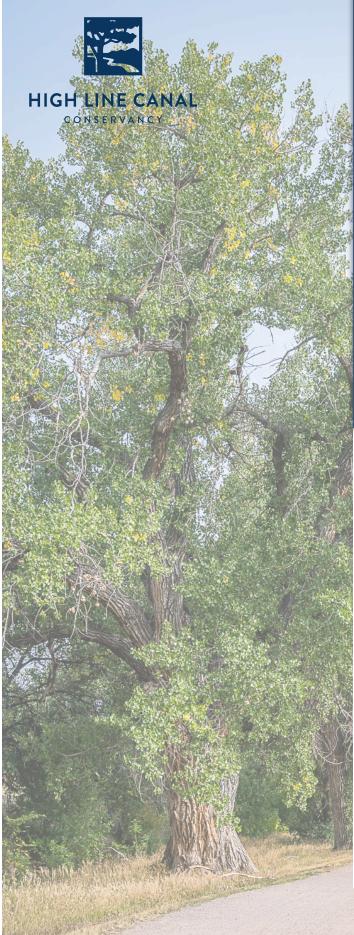
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HIGH LINE CANAL WORKING GROUP

Thanks to these valuable regional elected officials and staff partners for their past service on the High Line Canal Working Group over many years. Their guidance, dedication and support is what makes all of this work possible.

ARAPAHOE COUNTY Nancy Sharpe* Nancy Jackson* Shannon Carter AURORA Angela Lawson* Johnny Watson* Tracy Young CENTENNIAL Kathy Turley* Steven Greer CHERRY HILLS VILLAGE Russell Stewart* Dan Sheldon* Jay Goldie DENVER Kendra Black* Scott Gilmore DENVER WATER Brandon Ransom Jeannine Shaw DOUGLAS COUNTY Lora Thomas* Steve Koster Randy Burkhardt

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Upcoming Happenings

Colorado Gives Day

The annual statewide giving day occurs on Tuesday, December 8 this year. Stand with the trees and donate to the High Line Canal tree canopy at <u>coloradogives.org</u>.

Conservancy Open House

First Thursday of every month at 4 pm via Zoom. Join us online to ask about any Canal-related questions you have.

Stay informed

- f <u>@High Line Canal Conservancy</u>
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PARTNERS

