

A woman with light brown hair styled in an updo is the central figure. She is wearing a white, lace-trimmed wedding dress with thin spaghetti straps and a long, flowing train. A large, ornate earring with colorful gemstones is visible on her left ear. A silver butterfly is perched on her right shoulder. She holds a large, light-colored parasol with a wooden frame. The background is softly blurred, showing a brick wall and a white pillar.

# WEDDING 2022 *Planner*

THE DOMINION  
**Post**



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

ON THE COVER: Hailey Geiger wears a La Perla gown with draped shoulder beaded fringe sleeve treatment. Her painted paper parasol and butterfly crystal earrings add to the look. The embroidered and lightly beaded gown is available at Coni & Franc. Photo taken at WVU Alumni Center.

# Coni & Franc does weddings with love

BY EVA MAYS  
Newsroom@DominionPost.com

Connie and Frank Merandi, co-owners of Coni & Franc in downtown Morgantown, were brought together decades ago by two weddings.

And through their store, they have been supplying beautiful garments for weddings and other special events ever since.

Although the couple attended WVU at the same time and knew many of the same people, they didn't meet until after college, when Connie was working in a clothing store called Designer for You.

Connie remembers when Frank brought in a photo album from his sister's wedding to show the store's designer, who had worked on the bride's ensemble. The designer wasn't in, so Connie "graciously sat down with him and looked through the album and told him how beautiful the bride was, and that I would relay it all to the designer."

A few weeks later, Connie was slated to attend a family wedding.

"Frank knew I would be there, so he asked his aunt, who was a guest, if he could be her plus-one," Connie recalled.

Frank asked Connie to dance at the wedding, and then she invited him to a family

Christmas celebration.  
"We started dating after that," Connie said.

Frank and Connie had an inkling that they had good business chemistry together, as well as romantic. In 1982, they had an opportunity to buy a clothing store on upper High Street that, at the time, was geared towards juniors and separates. But they soon decided to take the store in a different direction.

"My mother sat down at the beauty shop and she listened to all these mothers complaining that there wasn't a prom dress to be had in Morgantown," Connie said. "There were a few places, but there wasn't a variety. So she came home and she said, 'you should go to New York and buy a whole bunch of prom dresses.' So the next week, Frank and I got on a plane and brought in evening gowns from all of the collections that we loved and we knew that so many people traveled outside of Morgantown to get."

Within a year of the store's opening, Connie and Frank were married.

"We figured that if we could handle businesses and family and everything else that we would have a successful marriage," Con-

SEE CONI, P-7

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Hailey Geiger creates a beautiful picture in the reflection of the glass in this La Perla lace gown. Gorgeous pastel floral earrings make a statement. Gown and accessories available at Coni & Franc. Photo taken at the WVU Alumni Center.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post

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Sydney Eddy in a Moonlight Bridal mermaid-style wedding gown, available at Lavish Boutique. Photo taken at Highgate Carriage House.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post

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## CONI

FROM PAGE P-2

nie said. “And of course, we were in love. Frank has great conversation, he has great style. The customers all love to get his opinion on what they are putting together. He also is a fabulous cook and he plays the piano. We complement each other very well. We have three beautiful children and a grandchild. We’re very lucky.”

Coni & Franc soon grew larger than just the two of them, with Connie’s mother, aunt and sisters all pitching in to make the business a success. Several years after the store opened, Connie and Frank were able to purchase the storefront at 422 High Street, where Coni & Franc is currently located.

“It’s a beautiful space,” Connie said. “It was built over 100 years ago, and it was meant to be a clothing store.”

Though they gutted and renovated the space in recent years, many of the original fixtures remain. The business began with prom and evening gowns but is now best known for beautiful, timeless bridal fashions that families will look back on

with fondness.

Consultation appointments can be made by phone 304-296-9466 or through the website at <https://www.coniandfranc.net/book-online>, but Connie noted, “I always anticipate enough staff to handle walk-ins. We don’t turn anybody away.”

The store is open from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Saturdays, and is closed on Sundays.

During a consultation, Coni & Franc staff ask a lot of questions about the event in order to be efficient when assisting patrons. They provide dresses that are flattering to many different body shapes and sizes.

“We hope to help make our clients’ visions come true,” Connie said. “I want to make sure that when they see those pictures, they will think, ‘I look so good.’”

Connie and Frank are involved in the Morgantown community and are appreciative of all the support they have received in return over the years.

“We are grateful to people who are willing to shop local,” Connie said. “That is how small businesses stay in business.”

## Highgate: ‘Unlike any place around’

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

From horse stables to a retirement home to nearly being torn down, Highgate Carriage House has a history that now includes a historical venue to host weddings and other events.

“Highgate is unlike any place around,” said Tyler Kovar, wedding and event coordinator at Highgate. “We offer our guests a way to step back in time and forget the outside world. We may be located in downtown Fairmont, but you would never know it inside our gates. When you step on our grounds, you can have a special event space or that fairy tale wedding you’ve always wanted.”

Highgate, at 830 Walnut Ave., Fairmont, is now owned by Cheri Satterfield.

Kovar provided some background on the facility.

“Highgate Carriage House began as a heated horse stable,” he said. “It was built in 1909 for coal baron James E. Watson. Downstairs was home to the horses and upstairs were rooms for the servants.”

In the 1920s, the estate was owned by St. Joseph Diocese in Wheeling. It was sold in the 50s to the Ross family and the main house became Ross Funeral Home with the carriage house being used as a retirement home.

Two brothers decided to split the prop-

erties in the 80s, Kovar said. The brother who had the carriage house was going to sell it to a fast-food chain that had plans to tear it down, but a group — Friends of Highgate — was able to save it.

Satterfield has owned the carriage house since 2014.

Over the years, renovations have been done inside, but the grounds have been maintained with some gardens added as well as an event tent to accommodate larger weddings and events.

“The outside of Highgate really takes you back in time,” Kovar said. “To maintain that look and add the beautiful gardens makes the experience of Highgate a very unique one. We have a beautiful stone wall and staircase on the grounds that has been here since it was built. Couples walk outside and gasp at how beautiful it is. It is important to keep all the elements of the original grounds because nowhere around here has anything like that.”

Highgate can accommodate 150 people inside and the outdoor tent 300. It does not offer on-site catering or require people to use specific vendors. Kovar said they do have a resource list of local vendors they’ve worked with and shares that with anyone asking.

To learn more about or rent Highgate Carriage House, email [events@highgate-carriagehouse.com](mailto:events@highgate-carriagehouse.com) or find it on Facebook or Instagram.

## Lavish Boutique offers personal touch

BY EVA MAYS

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

Lavish Prom & Bridal Boutique has been offering formalwear to the north-central West Virginia region since 2009.

It was originally located in the Morgantown Mall under the ownership of Charlotte Michael. In 2014, Michael decided to seek another owner for the business she had built.

At that time, Helen Squires was a long-time manager at a local restaurant. One day, Michael, a frequent patron of the restaurant, asked Squires if she was interested in taking over ownership of Lavish Boutique.

“Owning a formalwear store was never in my plan,” Squires said recently. “Although, who doesn’t love to get dressed up?” she added.

“But it just happened. It was a moment thing. I felt it. I want it. And I am in it. I literally agreed to it the next day.”

To gain valuable hands-on experience, Squires worked with Michael in the store during the busy 2014 prom season. Then, in May of that year, Squires became the sole owner.

“Looking back, I’m very impressed,” Squires said with a hint of wonder. “I never realized I was that fearless.”

In 2019, Squires made the decision to move the business to a new location — 525 Suncrest Towne Centre Drive, which had enough space to expand Lavish’s bridalwear selections.

“The upgrade was a really big deal. It is a prime location to attract customers,” Squires said.

But, shortly after the move was completed, the world began to change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It was very, very difficult. We weren’t on our own feet yet,” Squires remembered. Early in the pandemic, weddings were postponed and proms were canceled, which made owning a formalwear boutique a bleak prospect. However, The New York Times reported that 2.5 million weddings are expected to take place in the United States in 2022, a substantial increase over the 1.3 million in 2020 and 1.93 million in 2021.

Squires has seen an uptick in business this year, particularly in weddings.

“People haven’t forgotten how to celebrate their journey with their loved one,” she said. “We can never compare it to before the pandemic because we are living in a new world. So we can only compare it to 2020 and 2021,” she said. “So long as each year is a bit better than



William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Leigha Jordan-Smith in couture style by Tarik Ediz, available at Lavish Boutique.

last year, then that’s what we are shooting for.”

In addition to bridalwear, Lavish is an authorized retailer of high-end prom and evening gown labels and also carries semi-formal garments for any special occasion.

Shoppers must make an appointment by calling 304-241-1863. Times are available 2-7 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and 11 a.m.-7 p.m. Friday and Saturday. The shop is closed on Sundays and Mondays.

Lavish does not provide alterations on-site but can make recommendations of talented local seamstresses.

Squires takes care to provide a safe and hygienic environment for her patrons, by cleaning surfaces between appointments and applying fabric sanitizer to garments, and practicing social distancing.

“We definitely want to provide the best environment for everyone,” Squires said.

The Lavish Boutique staff finds a lot of joy in helping patrons find the perfect dress.

“Seeing that smile on the bride when she finds her dream dress — it means everything to participate in that journey,” Squires said.

Originally from Hong Kong, Squires has been in Morgantown for 22 years and considers it home.

“I have grown with Morgantown in the past 22 years,” she said. “I am a true local in town. I graduated from WVU. Thus, it is connected by heart for what I am doing in business in Morgantown.”

# Check Ptak's in Uniontown for wedding suit, tuxedo rentals

Newsroom@Dominion Post.com

Ptak's in Downtown Uniontown, Pa., has the largest tuxedo/suit display showroom in the tri-state area.

The store features famous makers such as Michael Kors, Ike Behar, Perry Ellis, Allure Men and Kenneth Cole. These are available in slim fit, too.

Right now, the most popular items are navy and cobalt blue suits and tuxedos. Shades of gray are also popular.

At the time of a fitting, the groom-to-be can try on a tuxedo or suit of his choice — both for style and size.

The store keeps sizes from a boy's 3 to a men's 74 in stock, with 25,000 tuxedos and suits available. This vast inventory enables the store to make any last-minute corrections.

For bridal parties outside the Uniontown area, Ptak's provides out-of-town measurement forms so groomsmen who can be fitted anywhere.

At Ptak's, tuxedos and suits are the main business, not a sideline. Ptak's was established in 1924 under the same family ownership that continues to pride itself on its product and service.

Ptak's also offers the lowest price guarantee, promising to beat any price a customer finds elsewhere.

Tuxedos and suits are available for final try-on and pick up as early as two days prior to the wedding or event.

Ptak's also has the vest and tie colors to match any bridesmaid's dress, regardless of where it was purchased. Single items are available for rental, such as shirts, vests, ties, pants and shoes.

There's also a men's clothing department stocked with suits, ties, shirts and shoes.

Some grooms may qualify for a free new suit.



William Wotring/The Dominion Post photos

Ptak's in Uniontown, Pa., offers a wide variety of styles.



## WVU Erickson Alumni Center offers 'exceptional service,' 'memorable experiences'

Newsroom@DominionPost.com

The WVU Erickson Alumni Center is a one-of-a-kind, 48,000-square-foot facility in the Evansdale area of Morgantown.

Though it's connected to West Virginia University, it is also open to the community.

"The Erickson Alumni Center offers exceptional service to help clients create memorable experiences," said Todd Gauer, general manager of the center. "Our facility's unique charm and flex-

ibility allow us to meet the needs of virtually any meeting or event.

"Our expert staff handle every detail in the planning and execution of an event we host. The facility has state-of-the-art technology equipment with support staff to ensure all audio-visual needs are met. And our catering menu prepared by our executive chef allows guests to choose from a variety of casual and fine dining options. We also offer ample free on-site parking for event guests."

The facility — used for university and corporate meetings and events, weddings and receptions, milestone events, reunions, luncheons and more — is adaptable and can host multiple meetings and events simultaneously.

Gauer said these events can be formal or informal, depending on the clients' needs.

The current Erickson Alumni Center is at 1 Alumni Drive. This is the third site for the center. The first was Puriton House on the downtown campus. Then, in the mid-

1980s, a new center was built near the Creative Arts Center. That location now houses the WVU Museum Education Center.

In 2008, the current Erickson Alumni Center opened its doors.

"The site was chosen as a gateway to Evansdale campus, and the design was employed to bring elements of the downtown campus to Evansdale," Gauer said.

"The facility was constructed after the park was completed. Whenever possible,

Madison Hess wears a golden gown of bugle and caviar beaded net overlay. Beneath she wears a hot-pant romper for comfort and uniqueness. Gown and romper available at Coni & Franc.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post



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Kyndra Stewart wears a Mary Bridal ballgown with long sleeves, available at Lavish Boutique. Photo taken at Highgate Carriage House.

William Wotring/  
The Dominion Post



William Wotring/The Dominion Post


Tarik Ediz designed this crinkled natural silk gown with beaded shoulder bows that dip down into a plunging V bodice, banded waist with a layered full crinkled silk skirt and column clinging silk knit underlining, available at Coni & Franc.



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Kyndle Stewart (from left), Kyndra Stewart, Breanna Pekula, Sydney Eddy, Leigha Jordan-Smith and Olivia Zinn model a variety of gowns available at Lavish Boutique.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post



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Lavish Boutique captions this photo taken at Highgate Carriage House and featuring several gowns available at the shop: #lavishsquad #prom2022.

William Wotring/  
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Olivia Zinn in a Christina Wu lace A-line wedding gown with train and 3/4-length sleeves, available at Lavish Boutique. Photo taken at Highgate Carriage House.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post



Hailey Geiger wears a gown with a strapless bodice of sequin lace with a trumpet style organza flounce by Jasmine Couture. The detachable matching lace and organza sleeves have ribbon bows at the wrist. Hailey also wears crystal and moonstone earrings and complementary hair comb by Mystic 31, along with a cathedral veil. Gown and accessories available at Coni & Franc. Photo taken at WVU Alumni Center.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post



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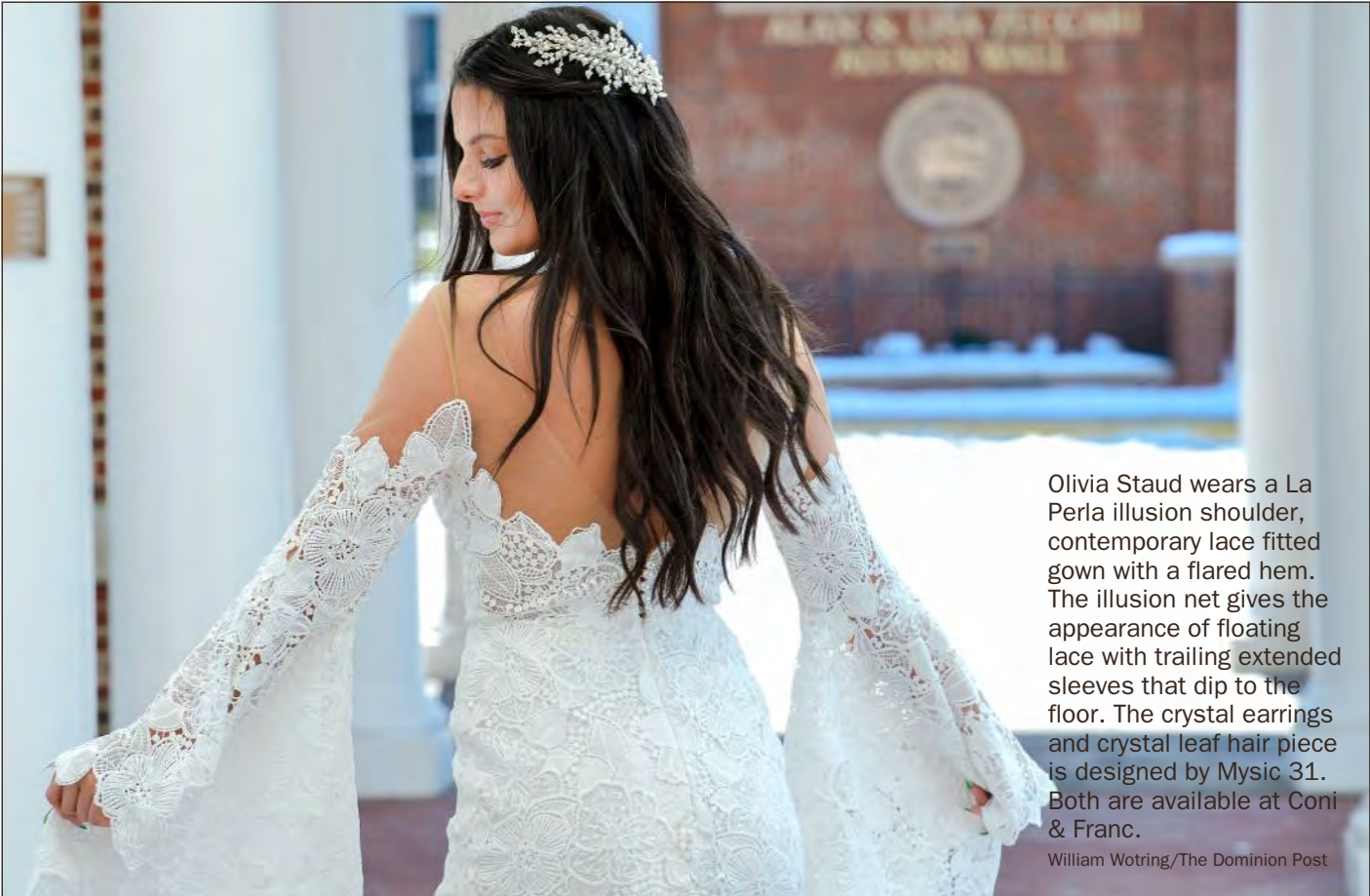
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Olivia Staud wears a La Perla illusion shoulder, contemporary lace fitted gown with a flared hem. The illusion net gives the appearance of floating lace with trailing extended sleeves that dip to the floor. The crystal earrings and crystal leaf hair piece is designed by Mysic 31. Both are available at Coni & Franc.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post

## ALUMNI

FROM PAGE P-8

West Virginia products were used, including flooring from Greenbrier County, stained glass in the tower from Milton and bricks from the Eastern Panhandle. Construction was funded through private contributions and bond debt that was assumed by the [WVU Alumni] Association. The new facility was created to help the WVU Alumni Association grow with an expanding alumni base and to support needs within the Morgantown community for a mid-size event space.”

Named after Charles F. Erickson and the Erickson family, a philanthropist and advocate for higher education, the center is owned by the WVU Alumni Association and operated by staff employed by WVU.

There are 14 rentable spaces within the center and three outside, all ranging in size. Rental information is available by calling 304-293-4731, emailing [eacevents@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:eacevents@mail.wvu.edu) or checking out [erickson-alumnicenter.com](http://erickson-alumnicenter.com).

All catering is handled by the center and can include everything from hors d’oeuvres to plated meals or buffets.

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Watercolor spring floral painted organza makes a lovely bridal gown created by La Perla. Ninna Jenkins Breindel has added the detachable sleeves and she is enjoying the slit that adds walking ease to the ballgown skirt. She holds a patterned beaded hand-bag of turquoise and is wearing turquoise crystal dangle earrings perfect for an outdoor spring wedding. Gown and accessories available at Coni & Franc.

William Wotring/  
The Dominion Post



Kyndle Stewart in a princess-style by Rachel Allan prom gown from Lavish Boutique.

William Wotring/  
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Madison Hess wears a strapless ballgown by L'Amour with detachable pumpkin sleeves. The sheer net and organza corseted bodice has detailed lace and three dimensional flowers as an accent. She is wearing Esttia custom earrings of freshwater pearl, faceted blush crystal and soft golden chains. All available at Coni & Franc.  
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Kyndra Stewart wears a Jovani A-line, lace wedding gown available at Lavish Boutique.  
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Leigha Jordan-Smith wears an Adriana Papell Cinderella-vibe ball gown featuring glitter tulle, available at Lavish Boutique. Photo taken at Highgate Carriage House.

William Wotring/  
The Dominion Post



Hailey wears a crystal on wire 5-inch high tiara and earrings by Symphony. The elegant simple silk crepe deep plunge gown features extended silk chiffon trailing scarves attached at the shoulders and is available at Coni & Franc. Photo taken at the WVU Alumni Center.

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Olivia (above left) is ready for her formal in this hot pink Colors one-shoulder gown of crepe with ostrich feather trim. The marbled handbag of hot pink, green and petal pink with fuchsia crystal earrings really make this a spectacular look. Gown and accessories available at Coni & Franc. Madison (above) is ready for a gala in this multi-colored beige and magenta gown created by MacDuggal, which features long sleeves and draped back in full length. Available at Coni & Franc.



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Leigha Jordan-Smith models a Christina Wu strapless mermaid wedding gown with sweetheart neckline and dramatic ruffle mermaid bottom with train, available at Lavish Boutique.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post

Olivia Staud twirls in a floral embroidered organza A-line gown by Calla Blanche. The bodice features a plunging V-neck and V-back with nude net panels connecting the front and back at the sides. Available at Coni & Franc.

William Wotring/The Dominion Post





William Wotring/The Dominion Post  
Calla Blanche created this allover beaded fitted column gown with rhinestone detail and the waist and double straps, available at Coni & Franc.



Olivia Zinn in a fully beaded fitted gown by Jovani, available at Lavish Boutique.

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Madi Lane of Australia created a collection of sparkling gowns of allover sequin and beaded patterns that are all about clean lines and simple beauty. Madison is wearing a wide scoop neck, fitted column gown with detachable drape back with the comfortable lining. She wears a mink-look, white wrap by Fabulous Furs for a winter wedding. Available at Coni & Franc.

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Sydney Eddy models a Christina Wu strapless, satin ball gown available at Lavish Boutique.

# The Grayson House



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HANNAH HICKS  
-photography-



Hailey's shoulders are wrapped in ostrich feathers in this Jasmine gown of pebble crepe, featuring a fitted bodice and draped skirt with chapel train. Accessories by Divine. All available at Coni & Franc.

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William Wotring/The Dominion Post  
Olivia Zinn in a Martin Thornburg fitted wedding gown  
from Lavish Boutique.

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