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Disaster Ministries**  
is a program of the  
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**Children's  
Disaster Services**  
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Church of the Brethren

# Brethren Disaster Ministries **BRIDGES**

*Rebuilding Homes • Nurturing Children • Responding Globally*

## Children's Disaster Services Deploys to Pacific Islands

Children's Disaster Services (CDS) associate director Carolyn Neher began her new position by managing two major deployments of CDS volunteers. On her third day, Red Cross requested CDS to send a team of volunteers to the US Western Pacific territory of Guam in response to Typhoon Mawar, the strongest storm to hit the islands in more than 20 years. Two months later, the Red Cross requested CDS volunteers to serve in Hawaii following the devastating fire in Lahaina on the island of Maui.

Due to the distance to the deployment sites and other logistical factors, the CDS volunteer teams that deployed in partnership with Red Cross to these two sites served for three weeks each, rather than the typical two weeks. They arrived at their sites with CDS' unique "Kit of Comfort" (KOC) suitcases containing carefully selected toys which promote child-led imaginative play to encourage the children to express themselves, thereby starting the process of healing following the trauma of a disaster and its aftermath.

A CDS team of six volunteers deployed on June 8, 2023, to Guam to care for children affected by Typhoon Mawar, which caused flooding, damage to homes and buildings, and loss of electricity over much of the island. Three shelters were opened, with an initial overnight population of more than 750.

The CDS volunteers worked in two different shelters and adapted to the high temperatures and humidity to bring a calm

presence to the children and their families. With the help of some of the older children, they worked creatively to communicate with the younger children who spoke only the local language of Chamorro and had not yet learned to read or write. During their three-week deployment the team had 563 child contacts.

One volunteer experienced a lovely, mostly nonverbal, connection and interaction with a child who was making his frog puppet mime sounds. When the volunteer said "ribbit" the child made the frog respond with a loud low "BARK". They bantered back and forth, laughing as they barked and ribbited for a few minutes. It turned out that in Guam the frogs are large and the sound they make is that of a "BARK." That was such a joyful moment for both the CDS volunteer and the child.

The second major deployment for CDS was to Maui, Hawaii, where wildfires,



*CDS volunteers in Guam played with and encouraged children of all ages.*  
Photo by Toni Custer



Play in CDS care centers is imaginative and child-led. Photo by Ashleigh Himes

boosted by significant straight-line winds, quickly spread on Aug. 8, 2023, to engulf a large part of the town of Lahaina, consuming hundreds of homes in a matter of minutes. With nearly 100 casualties, this was the deadliest wildfire in the US since 1918 and the deadliest wildfire or natural disaster recorded in Hawaii since statehood. The trauma of surviving the experience, as well as that of losing family members, friends, property, and sacred cultural places and artifacts, was very real.

Within days of the fire, the Red Cross requested CDS to send volunteers to Maui, with two teams of four volunteers arriving on Aug. 14. A third team of five continued the response on Sept. 5. The volunteers set up CDS care centers at two Lahaina hotels to serve families at Family Assistance Centers, where those affected by the fires sought help to start moving toward recovery. Throughout their six weeks on Maui, CDS

volunteers cared for 493 children.

Healing begins for children when they can express themselves through play. CDS volunteers are there to be witnesses and to encourage the process, as illustrated in the following stories from Hawaii.

CDS volunteer Kelly Kibirige experienced a young boy about six years old working through his trauma by playing with Legos to build a church. He would build some, then repeat the following in the same order over and over: “The fire took my house. We ran to the church. The fire took the church. We ran to another church. Could not find Dad. We ran to the ocean. Dad was there.” The volunteers learned from the boy’s father that the child was already in therapy to work through his traumatic experience.

Another volunteer, Alia MacStay, shared the following:

In Lahaina, I met a four-year-old boy whose play was chaotic and destructive. He knocked down not only anything he built himself, but everything he could get to that the other children were working on, from play dough to blocks to puzzles to tubs full of beads. One day he talked a little about the fire, saying his house had burned down. He clearly wanted to say more but was blocked. His lips were pressed tightly together and I could see that he was trying to speak, but after many tries nothing came. Then one day he went to the white board, where he drew

the storm that fed the Lahaina fires, erasing it and crying out, “Go away storm!” I joined his play, helping to erase his storms every time he drew them and joining him in crying out, “Go away storm!”. After most of a day of this play, he began to talk about the fire and the thing he had been blocking on, which was the deaths in the fire of two people that he knew. The next day he drew only a few storms, then played much more calmly over the rest of our stay, playing with his beloved play dough for hours on end.

Please pray for the continued healing of the children and families affected by these disasters and others that continue to arise.

For additional information about CDS, contact Carolyn Neher at [cneher@brethren.org](mailto:cneher@brethren.org).



Hawaii: Tactile activities, such as playing with shaving cream, bring joy to children in CDS care centers. Photo by Anne Esperanzate

## BVS Volunteers Find Their Niche with BDM

*“If you want an experience like you have never had before, if you are wanting to try something out of your comfort zone, if you want to feel truly alive again, you will be blessed with this opportunity [as a BVS volunteer]. BVS is an experience I will always treasure, and I would recommend it to both the young and the more mature alike.”*

—Martie Hummer, BVS volunteer working with BDM, 2022/23

Brethren Disaster Ministries is proud to be a project location for Brethren Volunteer Service (BVS), another ministry of the Church of the Brethren.

In the last several years the availability for BVS volunteers to serve with BDM’s Rebuilding Program has expanded to include various roles. BVSers serving with BDM are provided with both housing and meals.

The most recent BVSer to work with BDM was Benjamin Hoffmann, a German/American young adult who had already completed a full

one-year term with BVS at another location. In October 2023 Benjamin served with BDM for several weeks using his extensive gifts and knowledge of photography to capture quality images at the Brethren Service Center, on both rebuilding sites, and at a CDS Training Workshop. He also participated in construction activities at both rebuilding sites. His



Benjamin Hoffmann, Eastern Kentucky Photo courtesy of Benjamin



photographs will be important resources to help BDM tell the story of members of the Church of the Brethren following the call to serve disaster survivors around the world.

Martie Hummer completed her one-year BVS term in the summer of 2023, living and serving on the Waverly, Tenn., and Dawson Springs, Ky., BDM rebuilding projects. Circumstances had prevented Martie from participating in BVS earlier in her life but she kept her dream alive and became an older adult BVS volunteer. She was primarily a household leader but also served on the job sites. Martie worked alongside the household disaster project leaders who prepared meals, cleaned, and



took care of behind-the-scenes tasks in support of the volunteers and project site. Her strong work ethic was

*Martie Hummer (l), Dawson Springs, Ky.*

*Photo courtesy of BDM*

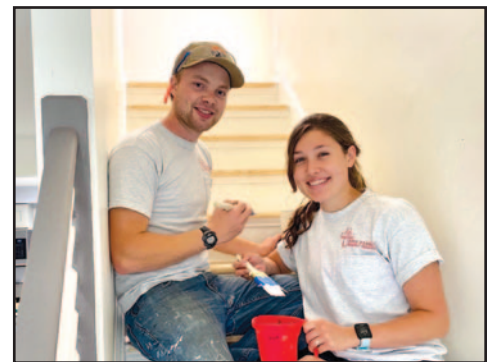
a huge asset as she sought to serve in any way possible while also connecting and building relationships with volunteers, leaders, and partners.

Another BDM role available to BVSers is to support and lead on the construction sites, as Evan Ulrich did from August 2020-July 2021. Evan was part of the construction leadership teams that prepared, equipped, and led weekly volunteers doing the construction work on homes being built or rebuilt. He also helped with inventory management and maintenance of the tools and vehicles. Many who worked with Evan may be interested to know that he is only a few weeks away from completing his MS degree in environmental engineering at the University of Vermont and is applying for jobs in the environmental/geotechnical field in central Vermont. He and his wife Grace are looking forward to returning to volunteer with BDM once he is finished with school.

BVS volunteers and other long-term volunteers can also serve on a BDM rebuilding project by leading the office management, including tracking

finances, communicating with incoming groups, and supporting connections and logistics with local partners. This position also supports household management.

Do you know someone who might want to serve as a BVS volunteer on a BDM project? They should be at least 21 years old and be willing to move around the country depending on their assignment. More information on these long-term volunteer possibilities can be found at [www.brethren.org/bvs/projects/420](http://www.brethren.org/bvs/projects/420) or by contacting Jenn Dorsch-Messler ([jdorsch-messler@brethren.org](mailto:jdorsch-messler@brethren.org) or 410-635-8737).



*Evan (l) and Grace Ulrich, Dayton, Ohio*

*Photo courtesy of BDM*

## Louisiana Hurricane Ida Response

In August 2023, a group of seven volunteers from the Church of the Brethren South/Central Indiana district and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kansas spent one week participating in a local disaster response in Pointe-au-Chien, La. The team, led by BDM disaster project leaders Cliff Kindy and Floyd Pearson, worked alongside members of the Pointe-au-Chien Indian Tribe and other volunteers (Baptist, Mennonite, and Presbyterian). Most of the houses in this bayou community were damaged or destroyed during Hurricane Ida in 2021 but residents either did not receive federal funding after the storm or were delayed in receiving it until after appeals were made. The Louisiana-based Lowlander Center is supporting the community in its recovery, including through grants

from other denominations and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs). They requested assistance to build resilient homes on pilings, up to a FORTIFIED building standard, to protect against future storms. BDM facilitated this opportunity to serve through communications with the Lowlander Center and will continue to explore possible ways to support this low attention recovery in the future as they carry on looking for funds and volunteers.

*This new house being built in Pointe-au-Chien, La., is set on pilings for protection against future storms.*

*Photo by Bill Fultz*



*Volunteers frame a new house on raised pilings for a member of the Pointe-au-Chien community in Louisiana who lost his house during Hurricane Ida in 2021.*

*Photo by Bill Fultz*



# Rebuilding Updates

## Dawson Springs, Ky., 2021 Tornado Response

BDM volunteers are still actively serving new homeowners in Dawson Springs, Ky., as the two-year anniversary of the tornadoes that destroyed 75 percent of the buildings and homes approaches on December 10. BDM recently extended its partnership with Habitat for Humanity of the Pennyryle Region into 2024. Volunteers on the schedule for Project 1 through June 29, 2024, will be on this site, staying in Madisonville and working on at least six new homes in Dawson Springs.

## Eastern Kentucky Summer 2022 Flood Response

BDM flood recovery work in Breathitt County, Ky., which began in April 2023 with a short-term response, continued this fall (Sept. 10-Nov. 18) with volunteers serving on the BDM Eastern Kentucky rebuilding project, in an area where few other build partners are still working. This return extended the partnership with the Eastern Kentucky Disaster Response Ministry of the Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church which identified qualified homeowners. Housing was located at the Campton United Methodist Church.

## 2024 Weekly Schedule

There are still openings for weekly volunteers on our BDM calendar for 2024. The schedule currently supports one full-time site for the calendar year as well as a short-term second site in the fall. BDM is in the process of investigating and discerning where the locations of these sites will be after June. Additional short-term responses for groups in April and other times in the year will also be



BDM volunteers serving in Eastern Kentucky fellowshipped with homeowner Lisa (center front) and her family as they painted and replaced subflooring on her house. Photo courtesy BDM

identified. The current schedule, including weeks that are still open for volunteers, can be found at [www.brethren.org/bdm/rebuild/schedules](http://www.brethren.org/bdm/rebuild/schedules).

If you are interested in hosting a local rebuilding response in your area or serving on a BDM rebuilding site, please reach out to your district disaster coordinator or Kim Gingerich ([kgingerich@brethren.org](mailto:kgingerich@brethren.org) or 410-635-8730) for information and assistance.

## New BDM Hybrid Trucks

BDM recently purchased two new trucks (one red and one charcoal) to be used on the rebuilding sites for transportation of volunteers and materials. Both trucks are 2021 Ford F-250 Hybrids with extended cabs, caps for the bed, and low mileage. One truck replaced a BDM van which was totaled after being hit by a truck in the parking lot at the Brethren Service



One of the new F-250 hybrid trucks on the Eastern Kentucky rebuilding site, October 2023.

Photo courtesy BDM

Center. It was replaced by a truck due to the nationwide lack of inventory for the vans that BDM typically purchases. The second truck is replacing a 2005 truck with high mileage that needed extensive repairs beyond the value of the vehicle. The purchase of the hybrid models will help support fuel economy and project expenses, and is a move to a more environmentally friendly option.

thank you!

## Auctions Support BDM and Survivors

The third of the major disaster relief annual auctions supporting BDM, the Brethren Disaster Relief Auction (BDRA), was held in September. It was a wonderful day of fellowship, food, and fundraising! BDM is grateful to all the volunteers who make these auctions possible and all the attendees who make them successful.

## Save the dates for the 2024 auctions:

**May 4:** Mid-Atlantic District Disaster Response Auction

**May 17-18:** Shenandoah District Disaster Ministries Auction & Sale

**September 27-28:** Brethren Disaster Relief Auction



# CDS Updates

## CDS Deployments

In addition to deployments in Guam and Hawaii (see page 1), two CDS volunteer teams recently cared for children in separate MARCs (Multi Agency Resource Centers) in August. One team served for a day in Edina, Mo., after an EF2 tornado tore through that small town. The other team set up a care center for one day in Pittsburgh, Pa., following a house explosion in the nearby suburb of Plum which killed six people and destroyed three homes.

In late October, as this Bridges was going to press, a team of five CDS Critical Response Childcare (CRC) volunteers were deployed through the Red Cross to Lewiston, Maine, to care for children and families affected by a mass shooting there.

## Be Prepared for a CDS Deployment

*How long has it been since you trained as a CDS caregiver?*

If you have not been to a training in the last five years, please consider taking a training again, especially if you have not been deployed recently. It is a good way to refresh your memory and learn about new developments. See below for training information.

*Is your CDS certification up to date?*

Your Criminal Background Check needs to be renewed every five years. Check your CDS badge for the expiration date. If it is coming up or has passed, please contact CDS to start the renewal process.

*Do you have a Red Cross Volunteer Connection number?*

It is important to have your Volunteer Connection number prior to a CDS deployment involving the Red Cross to help the logistical process go more smoothly. If you need one, please contact CDS soon to learn how to get one.

## CDS Training Workshops 2023/24

CDS held volunteer training workshops in October 2023 in Bridgewater, Va., and Kalamazoo,

Mich. Trainings are scheduled in 2024 for Ankeny, Iowa (April 12-13) and Freeport, Ill. (May 3-4). Additional trainings are being planned. More information will be available soon. If you are interested in sponsoring a training in your area, please contact CDS at [cgs@brethren.org](mailto:cds@brethren.org).



Participants in the CDS volunteer training workshop held at Bridgewater (Va.) Church of the Brethren learn how to care for children affected by disasters.

Photo by Benjamin Hoffman

## Finding Family

by Tina Burkholder, CDS volunteer

A quiet little girl checked into our Children's Disaster Services (CDS) play center in Maui, Hawaii. She had survived the fire that devastated the town of Lahaina in August 2023. Her parents were in the Family Assistance Center applying for help. She was unsure of which play station she wanted to join. Other children were playing with cars or play dough, or were involved in painting or a rousing game of UNO, but none of that seemed to interest her. I gently asked if she would like to play cooking with me. This was a very popular play station with several children already busy washing dishes and preparing meals. She touched my hand and said, "I want to play family." Over our three-week deployment, this play station was where I met the culture of Hawaii.

Child's play often reveals more than their delight in using their imagination. When you watch and listen to their kitchen conversations, you do find a "family". In our Maui CDS play kitchen, the children washed dishes slowly, seeming to enjoy letting the water flow in and out of the containers and wiping all sides and handles of pans. Boys flipped play pancakes in skillets with accuracy and pride. Girls wanted their meals served with a full set of utensils. They expected you to eat slowly and talk in detail about spices. They mentioned that their father was a chef or their grandma made banana pancakes. When the crowd of children "cooked", there was harmony and



Imagination turns a box into a stove where "cooking" can bring a sense of comfort and familiarity and a recollection of times when children felt safe and cared for.

Photo by Susan 'Boon' Murray

encouragement about preparing a fine combination of play foods. Often there was a quiet melodic song being hummed which sounded like a traditional lullaby with an islander melody.

The CDS play center allows children to pause and express themselves with other children using toys and games. Sometimes they will talk about their trauma, but mostly they play. The volunteers intentionally watch and listen while the children are engrossed in their pretend world.

CDS volunteers are not professional trauma counselors but we do receive training in how trauma affects children and how to be present with a traumatized child. We have an abundance of love and compassion to share, and always, in my experience, we are humbled to learn from the children.

# Global Updates

## Haiti

The Eglises des Freres d' Haiti (Church of the Brethren in Haiti, Haitian CoB) continues to share God's good news and to minister to struggling people in Haiti even as civil society has mostly collapsed and survival is a daily challenge. Haiti's multiple crises, natural disasters, and lawlessness, mentioned in previous Bridges articles, continues.

A new Emergency Disaster Fund (EDF) grant of \$60,200 is supporting the Haitian CoB effort to minister in their communities. The grant provides 55 pounds of rice, 10 pounds of dried black beans, and a half gallon of cooking oil to 1,000 vulnerable and undernourished families spread across the 30 communities with Haitian CoB congregations and preaching points. This distribution, while only representing about a week of basic food for a family of six to eight people, serves to provide encouragement and demonstrates solidarity with the impacted families and the church.

This response is also supported by canned chicken provided by the joint canning project of the Mid-Atlantic and Southern Pennsylvania districts. The two-pound cans of chicken (135 cases/3,238 cans) were shipped with EDF funds from the Miami Haitian Church of the Brethren on small carriers enabling them to be imported



*Eglise des Freres au Congo relief coordinator Dieudonné Faradja Crispin with children from the IDP (internally displaced person) camp near Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

*Photo courtesy of Eglise des Freres au Congo*

into Haiti with fewer difficulties related to logistics and corruption.

On Oct. 3, 2023, with the situation in Haiti spiraling into even more chaos, the United Nations Security Council approved the deployment to Haiti of a multinational force led by Kenya, the details of which are still being worked out. The force is intended to help stabilize the country and combat gang violence which has resulted in hundreds being killed, abducted, and injured. Haiti has about 10,000 police officers but they face logistical challenges and lack training and equipment. There are also reports that many police officers have ties to the gangs. Most of the Haitian CoB leadership are against having foreign

or UN troops in the country, having learned through previous experience that these groups often serve the priorities of other countries or corrupt leaders, rather than being there to help the Haitian people.

In spite of these challenges, the programs of the Haitian CoB continue,

including water projects and agricultural and medical programs. The joint BDM/Haitian CoB response to the August 2021 earthquake has nearly completed the building of 26 new homes in the Saut Mathurine community. With many families in the area continuing to request assistance, an extension of the program is under consideration.

## DR Congo

Through multiple EDF grants, the Eglise des Freres au Congo (Church of the Brethren in the Democratic Republic of Congo/DR Congo) and BDM have jointly supported families in North Kivu Province (Eastern DR Congo) who are displaced by the ongoing conflict between the national army and M23, a well-armed rebel group. Over a million people have been forced from their homes. This effort continues a long history of responding to needs in DR Congo resulting from conflict and disasters.

While serving people in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps around the town of Goma, Dieudonné Faradja Crispin, who has coordinated the relief responses of the Congolese church, learned that the displaced children have not been able to attend school due to a lack of supplies and appropriate clothing. He noted that "children in [the] camps, in situations of great material insecurity, are in a state of extreme distress."

These concerns, along with a request



*This completed home in Saut Mathurine, Haiti, is one of 26 being built for survivors of the August 2021 earthquake.*

*Photo by Ilexene Alphonse*





*These children, who are internally displaced near Goma, DR Congo, were delighted to receive their new backpacks full of school supplies, distributed by Eglise des Freres au Congo through an EDF grant.*

*Courtesy of Eglise des Freres au Congo*

from the leadership of the IDP camps for help to enable their children to attend free public schools, led to the expansion of the Congolese Church response. The new program, supported through a recent EDF grant of \$20,000, is providing 500 children from the most at risk IDP families, as well as some vulnerable children in the Church of the Brethren in Goma, with school uniforms, shoes, school bags, notebooks, pens, rulers, and protractors.

Brethren Disaster Ministries staff often prioritize programming for children as they are frequently left out of response planning, even though they are particularly impacted by the stress and trauma of war. Helping children return to school is one of the most effective ways to help them manage their stress.

## Russia/Ukraine War

The L'Arche organization received an EDF grant in May 2022 to respond to the needs of Ukrainians with intellectual disabilities displaced within Ukraine and in neighboring countries because of the war with Russia that started in February of that year. A second EDF grant of \$25,000 to L'Arche in August 2023 continues support for those who are displaced in Ukraine and Poland. These funds are targeted to assist with basic needs, medical care, disabilities support, psychosocial care, and the staffing of these programs.

The full BDM response to the war includes four partners. A total of

relief for families who fled their homes because of the war. Brethren donors have earmarked more than \$330,000 for Ukraine relief programs as of September 2023, of which all has been sent as part of this response, in addition to undesignated disaster funds.

## Nigeria

The recognition of the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Church of the Brethren Mission in Nigeria continued during the US Church of the Brethren 2023 Annual Conference. This followed 11 zonal celebrations in different areas of Nigeria and a national celebration, held at the Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, the Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) headquarters in

**“With the beginning of the war, I had a feeling that a great darkness was approaching. But fate showed that there is room for light, goodness and joy in our world.”**

**Mother of a child with a disability:  
Taking refuge in L'Arche**

From L'Arche International “Special Report: Crisis in Ukraine”; October 2022; [www.larche.org](http://www.larche.org)

\$415,000 in EDF grants have supported the ongoing emergency

Kwarhi, where a US Brethren delegation joined a crowd of 8,000-9,000 participants.

Alongside these celebrations, and for several more years to come, the Nigeria Crisis Response (NCR) continues the mission of supporting and equipping Nigerian families displaced by ongoing violence, kidnapping, and terrorist activities. More recently, these efforts have been challenged by crippling inflation as high as 25 percent which, among other difficulties, limits giving to the church and raises the costs of relief supplies. The NCR continues to provide seeds, fertilizer, emergency food, livelihood programs, new water wells, and more for displaced families, including those living in six camps. EYN is committed to supporting the displaced families while also rebuilding churches, building new churches in areas where displaced members have settled, and supporting pastors and church leadership.



*Members of the Dille community receive food and household relief items from EYN (Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) through the Nigeria Crisis Fund. Dille, in Southern Borno State, continues to face attacks by Boko Haram, preventing farmers from tending to their fields.*

*Photo courtesy of EYN*



# BRIDGES

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## The Many Ways to Serve with Brethren Disaster Ministries

*by Wanda King, volunteer, Children's Disaster Services and BDM Rebuilding Program*

Growing up, my parents, Clara and Ivan Patterson, raised us to give of our time, talent, and money; to help and serve others; and most of all to keep our faith.

In 2002, I got involved with Children's Disaster Services (CDS). I have served on 12 deployments, most recently in Maui, Hawaii, and am both a project manager and a Critical Response Childcare volunteer. I love serving the children and putting smiles on their faces.

My father always talked about Brethren Disaster Ministries (BDM) and supported them, even sending some of the plumbers from Korrekt Plumbing Heating & Air, the family company, to work at BDM Rebuilding Program project sites. At the age of 90 he went on his first rebuilding trip. If he could do this at that age, I realized I could do it at my age.

After losing our house to a tornado on Memorial Day 2019, we were blessed

with family, friends, and strangers who helped us clean up. I knew I needed to pay it forward. My husband, grandson, and I signed up to go on a BDM rebuilding trip in July 2023 to Dawson Springs, Ky., with the Southern Ohio & Kentucky district. Wow! What a trip and experience we had.

We enjoyed our time and were so blessed to be there. We are all looking forward to another trip next year. My grandson is even

planning to invite a friend to learn more about BDM and serving others.

I encourage everyone, if able, to become a CDS volunteer or to do at least one BDM trip and be blessed, as we were, to serve. Thank you to BDM for these opportunities.

*Albert and Wanda King  
with grandson Caleb at the  
BDM volunteer housing site in  
Dawson Springs, Ky., July 2023.*

*Photo courtesy BDM*



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