

THE WEWA NEWS™

“The Good News Newspaper”

WINTER EDITION-January 2026-1-01 <<

A FREE NEWSPAPER Take One! The Wewa News Newspaper



SOUTHERN STYLES CELEBRATES 5 YEARS

by Tom Wynn Jr.

Southern Styles Salon is celebrating a milestone in 2026—five years of bringing beauty and style to the community! The salon officially opened on February 15, 2021, which coincidentally fell on Presidents' Day.

Southern Styles operates in a historic building rented from Tanja Oliver (formerly Cox), a location with over 80 years of history. During renovations, owner Josh Sandlin, with the help of family and friends, uncovered evidence of the building's past life as a salon. "When we were taking off baseboards, there were tons of bobby pins and hair still behind them from Eddie Belle Lister's salon years ago," Emilee Strange said. "We knew we were doing the right thing bringing that atmosphere back."

Josh and Emilee have been working in the beauty industry for almost 13 years. Emilee shared that she and co-owner Shannon met in beauty school and worked together in St. Joe for seven years before deciding to bring their talents closer to home. "I

wanted to be around my one-year-old more," Emilee said, "and Shannon, who lived in Wewahitchka at the time, was ready for a change too. Calling Tanja and renting the building was the start of this dream."

(Story Continues on Page 2)



NEW GULF COAST ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE FACILITY STRENGTHENS WEWAHITCHKA'S FUTURE by Tom Wynn Jr.

A long-needed update is underway on Highway 22 in Wewahitchka, where Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative is constructing a new facility to better serve its members and the community. During construction, the Cooperative continues daily operations from a temporary office located across the street, allowing services to remain uninterrupted.

Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative has been an essential part of the fabric of Wewahitchka for many years. The Co-Op has provided reliable electric service, stable local jobs, and dependable support for homes, businesses, and public needs throughout the region. Over time, the older building required extensive upgrades that were no longer practical to address. **(Story continues on Page 2)**

(Co-op Story from Page 1 cont.) The new facility represents a fresh start. Built to modern standards, the structure is designed to withstand hurricanes (and severe weather, an important consideration for Florida's Gulf Coast. Updated construction methods and improved systems will allow the Cooperative to remain operational during storms and recover more quickly after major weather events.

This project also reflects the continued growth of the Cooperative's operations. Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative has expanded its work scope, including contracts connected with Tyndall Air Force Base. These efforts are expected to bring additional jobs and economic activity into the City of Wewahitchka, supporting both residents and local businesses.

While construction continues, the temporary office on Highway 22 remains open to serve members with routine customer needs. This setup ensures continuity of service while the Cooperative prepares for long-term improvements.

The new Gulf Coast Electric Cooperative building is more than a construction project. It is an investment in community resilience, public safety, and economic growth, reinforcing the Cooperative's long-standing commitment to Wewahitchka and the surrounding areas, in the Panhandle area. TW

(Continue Southern Styles' salon from page 1) has become a staple in Wewahitchka, combining professional skill with a deep respect for the building's history. "It's an amazing opportunity to bring a piece of history back to life as a hair salon," Emilee said.

The owners are grateful to their clients for supporting the salon over the years. "Our clients deserve a huge thank you," Emilee said. "Without them, this dream wouldn't have been possible."

Southern Styles continues to provide top-notch styling in a welcoming atmosphere, carrying forward a legacy that has been part of the community for decades. TW

JOHN 3:16



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History of the Dead Lakes Bridge

by Tom Wynn Jr.



Fishing off the Chipola River where it meets the Dead Lakes, circa 1968. Early recreational use near the bridge illustrates life along the waterway before modern development.

One of the most important landmarks linking the communities of **Wewahitchka** and **Iola** is the **Dead Lakes Bridge**—sometimes affectionately called “**The Dam Road**.” This crossing over the Chipola River and the Dead Lakes has stood for generations as both a practical roadway and a symbol of local heritage.

The modern **Dead Lakes Bridge** was constructed in **1959**, providing a permanent, reliable link for vehicles traveling between Wewahitchka and Iola. Before this bridge, crossings relied on older wood structures or shallow fords affected by seasonal flooding.

Originally, a **railroad track** ran alongside the bridge, reflecting the importance of this crossing for both transport and commerce in earlier decades.

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Check out our new website: myWEWA.org

Created for you by my son, Aaron Wynn



**Early Days and the Modern 1959 Bridge
The Dam and Community Controversy**

Boaters on the Dead Lakes near the Chipola River, 1968. Illustrates the recreational and economic use of the waterway adjacent to the bridge. View of the Dead Lakes and cypress stumps near the bridge, showing the natural landscape and waterway before modern traffic routes were established.

In 1962, a **metal sheet dam** was installed under the bridge on the Wewahitchka side to raise lake levels for fishing and recreation. While functional, the dam became a matter of local debate. After about **20 years**, it was removed to restore the river’s natural flow.

Today, the Dead Lakes Bridge continues to carry County Road traffic, linking Wewahitchka and Iola. Standing on the bridge, one can see the waterways that shaped our area’s past—the broad floodplain of the Dead Lakes, Cypress forests, and remnants of old rail pilings.

More than a roadway, the bridge is a **living piece of local history**, connecting residents with the waterways and communities that defined Gulf County over generations. **TW**

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**COME
VISIT US AT
THE WEWA
LIBRARY**
Joyelle Linton

Happy New Year from the Wewahitchka Public Library! The new year is the perfect time to get back into reading! Join our adult reading challenge to read 24 books in 2026. That is only two books per month. If you have a child 5 or under that is not yet in kindergarten, sign them up for our Bee A Reader 1,000 Books Before Kindergarten program. Coming soon: a new reading program for school aged children. All programs receive incentives along the way. For more information on any of these reading challenges, please stop by the Wewa library during normal business hours.

Did you know the Wewahitchka Library offers sewing classes? Our wonderful volunteer, Janet Johnson, offers one-on-one classes. Lessons will cover basic sewing machine use and care while creating a small project of your choosing. In addition, each month we will offer a group class for all ages to make a certain project. In January the class will be to create a pillowcase. It will be held on Friday, January 23 and Thursday, January 29 from 3:30-5:00 CT. Registration Required. Please call the library at (850) 639-2419 for additional information. JL

**Why Wewahitchka Offers Cheaper Living
and a Better Quality of Life Than Many
Florida Cities by Tom Wynn Jr.**

As the cost of living continues to rise across Florida, many families, retirees, and working people are finding it harder to afford life in larger cities. High housing costs, heavy traffic, crime, and constant stress have pushed many to look elsewhere. For those willing to slow down and live smarter, **Wewahitchka—known to locals as “Wewa”**—offers a better way of life at a much lower cost.

Lower Cost of Living-One of Wewahitchka's greatest strengths is affordability. Home prices and rental costs are far lower than in major Florida cities such as Tampa, Orlando, Miami, or even many coastal towns. Property taxes are more reasonable, insurance rates are often lower, and utility costs are manageable.

This allows families to live without constant financial pressure and gives retirees a chance to stretch fixed incomes. In Wewa, people can still afford a home, a yard, and a simple, honest way of life.

Less Traffic, Less Stress-In big cities, traffic has become part of everyday life. Long commutes waste time, fuel, and patience. In Wewahitchka, most places are only minutes away.

Less time driving means more time for family, rest, fishing, gardening, church, or community events. Life feels calmer when the road does not control your day.

Strong Community Values-Wewahitchka is a town where people still look out for one another. Neighbors know neighbors. When someone is sick, struggling, or hit by a storm, people step up and help.

This sense of community creates trust, safety, and belonging—things that cannot be bought or replaced. It is one of the main reasons many people choose to stay or return to Wewa.

Access to Nature and Outdoor Living-Surrounded by rivers, lakes, and forests, Wewahitchka offers natural beauty that many cities cannot match. The Chipola River, Dead Lakes, Lake Alice, and Lake Julia provide opportunities for fishing, boating, walking, and quiet

reflection. These activities cost little or nothing, yet they greatly improve physical and mental health. In Wewa, nature is not a weekend trip—it is part of everyday life.

Lower Crime and a Safer Way of Life-Safety is a major part of quality living, and Wewahitchka excels in this area. Wewa's crime rate is approximately 63 to ComforterFH@gmail.com

www.ComforterFuneralHome.com 65 percent lower than the Florida state average, making it a safer place to live than many other communities across the state.

This level of safety does not happen by accident. **Thanks to our County Sheriff and his dedicated employees**, Wewahitchka remains a place where people feel comfortable walking, running, working, and going about their daily lives. Their commitment to service and protection plays a key role in keeping the community peaceful and secure.

Families feel safer raising children here, and seniors enjoy peace of mind that adds greatly to their quality of life.

A Place Where Life Still Makes Sense-Wewahitchka may not have skyscrapers, luxury malls, or constant entertainment, but it offers something far more valuable: balance. Life here moves at a human pace. People work hard, rest well, worship freely, and enjoy the simple blessings often lost in bigger cities.

As Florida continues to grow and living costs climb higher, Wewahitchka stands as a reminder that a good life does not have to be expensive or complicated. Affordable living, natural beauty, strong community ties, and a safe environment make Wewa not only cheaper than many Florida cities—but better in the ways that truly matter. For those looking for a place to live, not just exist, **Wewahitchka remains one of Florida's best-kept secrets.** TW

IF you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to find you guilty?
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A Historical Journey Through Local Newspapers

by Tom Wynn Jr.

Newspapers have always been an important part of life in Wewahitchka and northern Gulf County. They keep people informed, celebrate local achievements, and record the story of our towns. From the earliest papers in the 1800s to today's *The Wewa News* and *The Star*, newspapers have helped shape our community.

The story begins in the 1880s with **The Calhoun Times**, one of the first newspapers in Wewahitchka. Coming out once a month for just one dollar a year, it helped early residents stay up-to-date on town events. Around the same time, the **Calhoun News** also shared local happenings, though much of its history has been lost over time.

A big change came in 1925 when **Gulf County** was created on June 6, and Wewahitchka became the first

county seat. That same year, **The Gulf County Breeze** started publishing under **C. H. Hanlon**, who had moved from Georgia to Wewahitchka. Hanlon was the grandfather of **D. Gene Hanlon**, who would later serve as a **commissioner and mayor of Wewahitchka for about 10 years**. The paper reported on local government, community events, and everyday life, helping residents feel connected to their new county. Over the years, the Breeze changed hands several times. A **retired naval officer, Ed Bandough**, purchased it for a period. Later, the **Brown Family** and **Judge David Taunton** oversaw its operations. Today, **kindly Jamie Lester** owns the Breeze, although it is no longer publishing.

In 1937, **The Star** began in Port St. Joe, with **W. S. Smith** as its first publisher. From the beginning, the paper focused on schools, sports, local events, and news across Gulf County. Soon after, the **Ramsey family** owned and operated *The Star* for **over 50 years**, becoming a local institution in reporting county news. Over the years, ownership changed, but the paper remained a weekly source of information for the community. In late 2025, *The Star* returned to local ownership when it was purchased by **David Adlerstein**, a longtime reporter and editor who has spent many years covering the county.

For many years, Wewahitchka itself was without a newspaper. That changed in **1995**, when retired Senior Chief **Tom Wynn Jr.** of the U.S. Coast Guard decided to start one. He created a small **satire paper**, printed on a single sheet, poking fun at local events in a playful way. The paper was an immediate success, and residents loved it. By **November 1996**, the first archived issue, **Volume 2, Number 1**, had been published.

A few years after the passing of **Ed Bandough**, and with the encouragement of **Mrs. Handout** and several local **business owners**, *The Wewa News* evolved into a **full community newspaper**. It became a local source of news for **Wewahitchka and the north end of Gulf County**, sharing good news, local history, national pride, and stories about people and the area.

From **1996 to 2025**, *The Wewa News* was published **once a month**, keeping the community informed and connected. In **2025**, due to traveling and health issues, it switched to a **periodical format**,

continuing its mission of celebrating the positive stories and achievements of northern Gulf County.

Local newspapers have always been more than words on paper. They **connect neighbors, celebrate accomplishments, and preserve history**. From the first monthly papers of the 1800s to today's community-focused publications, newspapers in Wewahitchka and Gulf County tell the story of our towns, one page at a time. They remind us who we are, where we've come from, and the pride we share in our community.

“Tupelo Radio Group” COME JOIN US!

In case you didn't know: “**The Tupelo Radio Group**” is making a GMRS Radio network, where the repeaters are to be located has yet to be determined. Every Sunday at 4 PM, we have a radio check to make sure our radios are working and charged up in case of need. We are looking

for some ham operators in the Wewa area to join us. If anyone is interested in joining the group, please Contact: **Mr. Dudley Balmer** at **317-379-1644**. (Radioddity email address: www.radioddity.com)

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Psalm 33:12

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Veterans Strengthen Wewahitchka and Gulf County's Economy

by AECS Tom Wynn Jr., USCG (Ret.)

Veterans contribute more than just service—they bring jobs, businesses, spending, and leadership that help Wewahitchka, Gulf County, and surrounding areas thrive.

Veteran-Owned Businesses

Across the state, veteran-owned businesses generate billions of dollars each year. National data shows veteran business receipts total about **\$922 billion**, with each veteran-owned business averaging over **\$3 million in revenue** and **about 11 employees**. These firms support payrolls, local jobs, and small businesses throughout Florida. In our region, veteran entrepreneurs reinvest in the community. Veteran-owned shops, restaurants, and service businesses hire local workers and buy from other suppliers, creating a ripple effect that strengthens Gulf County's economy.

Jobs, Housing, and Local Spending

Veterans bring leadership and skills that help local employers succeed. Many hire others, while many more invest in homes, renovations, and local services. Using VA home loans, veterans purchase or improve houses, which helps realtors, construction companies, and supply stores. A few years ago, I found that **over \$18 million annually** came into Gulf County's economy from U.S. veterans alone. Since then, even more veterans have returned home to retire and rest from world travel, war zones, and secret assignments. They spend their money locally—in Gulf County, Bay County, and Calhoun County—supporting shops, restaurants, and services. Every purchase strengthens the local economy.

Federal Dollars in the Economy

Veterans also bring federal benefit dollars into the area. More than **\$20 billion annually** flows into Florida through disability compensation, GI Bill education, pensions, and medical care. These funds help households spend locally on goods and services, boosting jobs and small businesses.

Civic Engagement and Community Leadership

Veterans are highly active citizens. Nationally, **70–75% of veterans vote**, compared to about 60% of the general population. In Florida, veteran voter turnout often exceeds 80% in some counties, shaping policies, school boards, and community programs that benefit Wewahitchka and Gulf County.

Beyond dollars and votes, veterans strengthen the community through leadership, volunteering, starting groups, and mentoring others. Their service-driven work improves quality of life and attracts more families and businesses to the region.

Local Impact Summary It's clear that veterans play a vital role in Gulf County's economy. Through business ownership, spending, housing investment, civic engagement, and leadership, veterans support jobs, commerce, and community growth every year. Be of good cheer—we love Florida and the Panhandle! **TW**

- **\$18+ million** – Estimated veteran spending annually in Gulf County
- **\$922 billion** – U.S. veteran business receipts
- **\$20 billion+** – Federal veteran benefits entering Florida annually
- **70–80%** – Veteran voter turnout nationally and in Florida
- **11 employees** – Average per veteran-owned business

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DOMINO AUTO PAINT & BODY
Serving Wewahitchka with Skill, History, and Community Pride by Tom Wynn

A Lifetime of Restoration

For decades, **Domino Auto Paint & Body** has been a cornerstone of Wewahitchka's community. Domino, a lifelong resident, has restored automobiles and antique motorcycles with skill and passion since his teenage years.

Preserving the Craft

Alongside his friend **Rudy Madrid**, Domino has preserved the art of auto restoration, transforming vehicles worth thousands of dollars into rolling works of art.

Mentor and Employer

Beyond his craft, Domino is a **mentor and employer**, teaching the trade to his sons and local men, ensuring

that his knowledge benefits the community for generations.

Collector and Community Enthusiast

A collector of auto memorabilia and local artwork, Domino combines his love for vehicles with a deep appreciation for Wewahitchka's history.

Local Historian

He has also become a **local historian**, especially for the Stonemill area. He owns the land where the old mill once stood, originally built by **Mr. Stone and Annie Virginia Wynn Stone**, who harvested nearby trees before moving to New Eden and later founding Port St. Joe and its papermill, now a shipyard.

A Legacy of Heritage

Through his restoration work and dedication to preserving local history, Domino has become a **guardian of Wewahitchka's heritage**, enriching the community with both craftsmanship and knowledge of the past. TW

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--BOOK REVIEW--

"THE WAY I REMEMBER IT" written by Mr. H. Higdon Swatts, who is a local historian. He has written two books thus far about our local history, and the people of Gulf County area who influenced his life. Mr. Higdon is a lover of the local history and the land of this area of Florida. His book is filled with stories of our people, and our relatives of the past. Some are short while others are historical, yet so funny! They are just knee-slapping funny and joyful! to read. It is a real blessing to our past and those that lived it. A great book to read. TW

CULT CHARACTERISTICS: TEN SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

by Brother Tom Wynn Jr.

Sometimes we join groups or organizations without realizing how much influence they may have over our thinking or actions. Scripture teaches us to be wise and discerning. Here are ten characteristics often found in controlling groups. Consider these carefully for yourself and your family:

1. **Absolute Authority** – Leaders demand total control and discourage questioning.
“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith,

paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.” (1 Timothy 4:1)

Exclusive Truth – The group claims it alone has the full truth.

“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

2. **(Matthew 24:5)**
3. **Isolation** – Members are encouraged to cut off relationships with family and friends.
“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” (1 Corinthians 15:33)
4. **Fear and Intimidation** – Fear of punishment or shame is used to maintain obedience.
“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)
5. **Demand for Loyalty** – Loyalty to the leader is expected above personal judgment.
“Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account.” (Hebrews 13:17) — submission is always under God’s authority.
6. **Control Over Daily Life** – Leaders may dictate work, dress, diet, or social interactions.
“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” (Galatians 5:1)
7. **Manipulation Through Guilt or Shame** – Members feel guilty for questioning or leaving.
“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 8:1)
8. **Information Control** – Outside news or opinions are discouraged or labeled dangerous.
“Test all things; hold fast what is good.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)
9. **Us vs. Them Thinking** – The group is taught that only it is safe or righteous.
“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” (1 Corinthians 15:33)
10. **Excessive Commitment** – Members dedicate disproportionate time, money, or effort.
“No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)

Take this list seriously. Consider your own choices, the influence on your family, and the groups you trust.

Scripture encourages discernment, personal responsibility, and reliance on God above all human leaders. Awareness is the first step toward spiritual freedom and peace. **TW**



Photo of the Old Buckhorn School, about 5 miles north of Wewa. Kids from all other areas, including those that had to cross the river to come to school every day. Buckhorn is a ghost town today. School building still exists. It was moved down to Port St. Joe. **TW**

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POWER OUTAGES AND STORMS

by AECS Tom Wynn Jr., USCG (Ret.)

When it comes to survival, knowledge can save lives. **As a USCG Aircrew member**, I had to learn ways to create drinking water at sea, in Antarctica, and in the woods — in case of a crash. Knowing how to find and purify water isn't just a skill; it can mean the difference between life and death.

Power outages and storms are common on the Gulf Coast. Having **clean water and dependable lighting** keeps families safe, calm, and able to care for neighbors. Wewa has a long tradition of looking after our city family, seniors, widows, and even strangers in need. Preparedness is survival **and** community care.

Clean Water: Air, Rain, and Sun

Air Condensation Method: Use a smooth surface (metal, plastic, glass) angled so droplets drip into a clean container. Filter through a clean cloth and pour into a clear bottle. Place in direct sunlight ~6 hours, then cool before drinking.

Rainwater Collection: Catch rain in a clean bucket or barrel. Filter through a cloth, pour into a clear bottle, place in sunlight for a few hours, then cool before drinking.

DIY Bottle Water & Sun Tea: Clean bottles with a few drops of bleach, rinse, drip dry. Filter water, fill bottles, sun-pasteurize, then cool. **Bonus:** Boil for Southern-style sweet tea; tannic acid helps reduce microbes naturally — good for your soul.

Quick Nature Tips: Dew can be wrung from grass into a container; wicking with a rope or cloth moves water from damp soil; solar stills can capture condensation in a cup under clear plastic.

Emergency Lighting: Stay Safe in the Dark

Battery-Powered Flashlights: Keep several LED flashlights in key areas; rotate batteries every 6–12 months.

Headlamps & Clip-On Lights: Hands-free, ideal for cooking, moving safely, or helping seniors.

Lanterns: Battery or USB lanterns provide 360° light.

Solar-Powered Lights — My Favorite: Charge during the day, reliable at night without batteries. Great for rooms, yards, walkways, and even charging phones. Perfect for Wewa's sunny climate — simple, dependable, reusable.

Candle Alternatives & DIY Bottle Lamps: LED candles are safe. For DIY lamps, fill a clear bottle with water and place a headlamp or flashlight underneath — the water diffuses light for a small room.

Community Preparedness — Wewa Way

- Help **seniors and widows** with battery lights, water, and packaged snacks.
- Teach neighbors how to collect water and use emergency lights.
- **Love your neighbor as yourself** — caring for others is Wewa tradition and Biblical duty.

Quick Tip: Combine water and lighting kits in a "storm box." Early mornings/evenings are best for condensation; sunny days for solar pasteurization and solar lights. Prepared families help entire blocks stay safe.

Safety: Filter/boil water, use clean containers, avoid polluted areas, place lights safely.

1 Timothy 2:3-4

A Gift from God

Honey isn't just food—it's a blessing. Scripture says: "*My son, eat honey, for it is good, and the drippings of the honeycomb are sweet to your taste*" (Proverbs 24:13). God gave mankind this golden gift for health, strength, and joy.

So next time you want something sweet, remember honey is more than food—it's fuel for your body, your brain, and your soul. **TW**

We humbly ask you to **call our SPONSORS and thank them** — they help to make this free newspaper possible.

SPONSORS, *Praise the Lord for you!* You are a true blessing to me, to Wewa, and to our readership across the world. Your support is felt and deeply appreciated.

The newspaper is planned as a seasonal periodical, published approximately four times a year: **Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall**. Due to travel, family time, or health matters, we may occasionally surprise you with a **Special Edition**—just because we can! **TW**

— Upcoming Events and Other: Mark Your Calendars

The Local Bee Association meets 6 pm at Glad Tidings Assembly of God Church, 138 E. Orange Ave. in Wewa, meeting room in the far Eastside of the Church on the first Tuesday of each month at 6 pm.

The Friends of the Wewa Library meet at the Wewa Library on the 2nd Thursday of each month, at 10:00 AM. Come early and "Meet & Greet" with us in the conference room.

Wewahitchka Historical Society meets every month on the

Third Thursday at 6 pm at the Presbyterian Church in Hwy 71.

City Hall Meetings: The city meetings are held on the last Thursday of each month, at 6 PM CT, unless posted otherwise. Contact the City Hall for possible changes due to weather or holidays.



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THE WEWA NEWS

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