

# AFFINITY

Volume VIII, Number I

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## Straight from the *Heart*



### **Time passing, life changing...**

This mantra winds through my mind as I write this first column of our eighth year under a new last name, proof positive of my most fervent dream come true. After assuring countless married couples that prayers do get answered ("not if, but when!"), last year I was blessed to find the fabulous spouse for whom I'd waited all my life. Nowadays, I find I leave the office closer to quitting time, with more than a lonely, empty house awaiting my return at day's end. It has been a challenge learning to share closet space and the TV remote, but what a small price to pay, to finally know the joy of companionship, as so many of our clients have enjoyed over the years.

### **Time passing, life changing...**

This past year brought enormous joy and frightening tragedy to the lives of so many within our adoption community. Record numbers of lucky babies went from the arms of loving mothers to proud new families, while several beloved birthfathers were injured or killed in dreadful accidents and hardworking clients found themselves suddenly subject to corporate downsizing and economic cutbacks. Our agency reunion, Camp Abrazo, became more inclusive, made brighter and better by the first-time participation of agency birthparents (triad members formerly absent from the party), yet many others still await missing holiday mailings, not yet sent by their children's busy parents. Unanticipated legal challenges, from paternity to trademark infringement by an out-of-state outfit, were successfully resolved in the agency's favor, while charitable contributions hit an all-time high.

### **Time passing, life changing...**

Your annual progress reports brought colorful greetings with photos of shining faces, belonging to growing children once adopted through this agency. The agency's online Forum logged nearly one thousand posts in the first 12 months of this cyber-support network's existence, connecting hearts and minds of readers worldwide. Abrazo's staff weathered internal military deployments, cancer issues, family illnesses and losses, growing pains, client crises and ever-increasing overhead costs with a previously-unsurpassed level of camaraderie and teamwork, as we shared in weddings, funerals, laughter and tears.

### **Time passing, life changing...**

Was it really so long ago that we first hung Abrazo's newly-issued license on the first office wall! The memory of each placement since is still so fresh, the dreams and needs of the parents and families of each child so current in our minds and ever-present in our prayers. The agency celebrated its eighth birthday this spring, an anniversary that marks the adoptions of over four hundred children. Abrazo has graduated an amazing 939 would-be parents from our Parents of Tomorrow orientation weekends; has been featured in positive media stories across the globe, and has met the needs of more than two thousand teens and adults seeking to make better choices for brighter futures. Yes, time is passing and life is changing. We are both honored and humbled that we've been blest with the opportunity to accomplish so much within the constraints of both, and we beg your continued support for our ongoing efforts on behalf of so many children yet in need.

*Elizabeth*

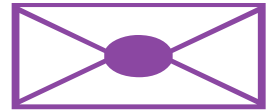
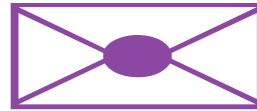
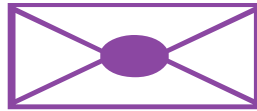
# Nursery News

*Hugs and kisses to the newest members of Abrazo's family!*

Michigan is home to tall trees, great lakes and now, one precious newborn princess called **VITA**... Dallas-area againers found their prayers were answered in the form of one very special baby boy they've proudly named **TYLER**... Brothers **AIDAN** and **CHRISTOPHER** were home for the holidays in North Carolina, thanks to a very courageous and selfless placement plan made for them by their loving birthmom and her family... Newborn **MALLORY** is the real-life result of one lucky Tennessee's couple weekend in Texas, just 12 weeks past orientation... The arrival of baby **ZACHARY** lifted his loving parents from a land of despair and dashed hopes to clouds of joy and blessing... Some think the luck o' the Irish brought baby **SKYLAR** to his new folks, graduates of Abrazo's "Lucky Leprechauns" orientation weekend... The road to El Paso and to newborn angel baby **GAIL** was brief and blessed for her grateful new Texas family, thanks to a last minute detour that made all the difference... A California couple opened their hearts and home to a much-welcome new addition named **JENNIFER**, who was born within hours of her caring birthmother's first call to Abrazo... A failed placement plan earlier this summer ensured that the adoptive family truly meant for new baby **MARY LOCKE** would still be ready when she was... From New Hampshire to New Jersey, newborn **GRACE** will always be surrounded with love, thanks to the lifelong relationship begun between her brave birthmom and grateful new parents... Newborn **RACHEL** and her sweet biomom were the best package one elated Tennessee couple could ever have imagined - the dearest-ever holiday gift!... Baby **KENNETH**, should feel right at home in the Land of Lincoln with a proud big brother, also an Abrazobabe, to teach him the ropes... **DESIDORIO** began life greeted by the four parents who love him most and truly consider each other their new best friends... Years after initially shying away from the open adoption process, the happy new family of newborn **MICHAEL** found that knowing one's roots truly does bless one with wings... Having two gorgeous little girls is twice as nice, according to the proud againers who added newborn **ALEXIS** to their family just before Christmas... Newborn **AUSTIN** is sure to grow up with a certain affinity for barbecue, given that his hardworking birthmom spent all her time, right up to the birth, working for one of Texas' most popular meat pits... Patience paid off for the new parents of **JOHN DAVID**, now safe and sound in his new home in Ohio... Just eight weeks after first hearing the song "Everybody Wins" at orientation, a happy Houston couple is now humming this tune to their newborn son **JARED**... One very special baby boy named **COLE** was welcomed into the world by his birthmom and the couple she'd chosen to be his new mom and dad many months ago... Just-born **DANIEL** is proof positive that good things do come to those who wait... It took a real-live angel to make it happen, but newborn triplets **JAKE**, **GRIFFIN** and **SIERRA** are home, safe and sound in California, having already enjoyed a starring role in an upcoming adoption special being aired on national television later this spring... A single mom from Dallas is singing loving lullabies to her new pride and joy, 3 month old baby **SEAN**... Baby **TALLEY** is proof positive that heartfelt prayers do get answered, from West Texas to North Carolina and everywhere in between... And as we go to press, a Minnesota physician and her boys are joyfully welcoming home their new son and brother, baby **ISAAC**.

*Congratulations, all!*

# Letters



## One family's letter explaining openness to their relatives, on the occasion of their daughter's adoption

(shared with permission)

Dear Family:

It has been a little over a week since we returned from Texas, where the legal finalization of our adoption took place. We are writing to share some of our thoughts and expectations about where we all go from here as Emily's family, knowing that we all love her so and want what's best for her.

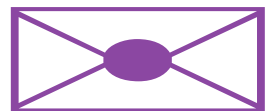
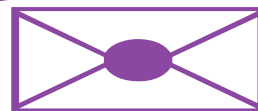
It is our reality—let's say it this way: it is Emily's reality that her birthfamily is part of her life and ours. This is a central part of our open adoption experience that will last for Emily's lifetime. Her birthfamily will always be a part of her life—and of ours—and thus of yours, because you, as her family and ours, are relating to us and to her as she grows.

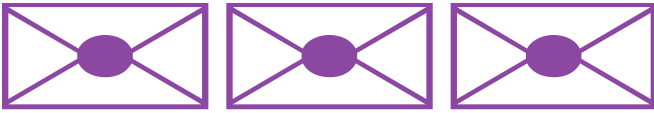
It is our expectation that Emily have consistent, clear messages of respect and appreciation from all of us about her birthfamily, verbally and physically as well. If it had not been for their courageous act of faith and love for Emily, we would not be blessed with the gift of knowing and loving her today. They chose us to raise her, and we chose her birthfamily, too. Emily will never have to wonder if her birthfamily loved her... we will all be able to reinforce that message.

This will be one of Emily's main emotional tasks as she grows... to integrate who she is as a child of her biological family as well as a child of her adoptive family. Neither is any less valuable or important than the other; she has both. That is the beauty of adoption. She has both a biological family (birthmom, birthdad, birthgrandparents, aunts, uncles and 2 beautiful birth sisters) as well as a wonderful adoptive family (Mama, Papa, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.—all of us.) We won't even be calling ourselves her "adoptive family" anymore, as we are now her family forever, period. She doesn't have to be identified as "adopted" like some label she must wear; the word is simply used to describe the manner by which our family came to be. (Emily was adopted... not "is" adopted.) If, as Emily grows, she want to share with others about her adoptive heritage, that will be her choice and privilege to do so... it is her story to tell!

As all children do at times, Emily may ask you a question about her birthfamily that you don't know the answer to, as she grows. If this happens, we would expect that you would listen, then say, "you know, I don't know the answer, but let's ask your Mom and Dad" and let us know. As children also do, Emily may someday tell you something about her adoption or birthfamily or her perception of either. We would expect again that you would listen thoughtfully and then affirm for her the importance of her story, her birthfamily and her family. At no time will we tolerate any comments that are derogatory or judgmental about Emily's family in her presence, as this would only serve to confuse her and make her doubt her growing self-image.

“...her  
birthfamily  
is part of  
her life  
and ours.”





(continued)

We recognize that for some in our family, this concept of open adoption continues to be new and different. For the grand majority, though, we are grateful that you continue to show your support and acceptance, for Emily's sake and ours, in many little ways, not in the least in how you speak of, ask about, and value Emily's birthfamily and heritage. Just so you know, we plan on having continuing, regular phone, letter, and picture and even visit contacts with Emily's birthfamily growing up years. Think about it. There is no competition here—in no way can these contacts even come close to matching what we, as Emily's forever family, are blessed to have with her.

The contacts with her birthfamily will be equally important to Emily, though, in enabling her to know, experience and assimilate the fact that her birthfamily loves her and will always want what's best for her, as they did from the beginning. The contacts will also be reassuring to Emily's birthfamily that the placement decision, hard as it was, was the right decision, and comforting, too, for them to know how she is growing and doing. These are the reasons that we all chose open adoption: it is best for the child, foremost, plus best for the adoptive and birth families. (And contrary to media-hype stories, Emily's birthfamily, as in all well-done open adoptions, does not want to kidnap her away from us, as they want her to have all they could not give her. Think about this... why would a family go through the personal anguish it took to make this selfless, loving decision only to come back and disrupt it later?) ... We feel strongly that God has blessed us with the gift of a child to nurture, not to possess. Emily's family (all of us) are so very important to her. Each of you is important to us, too. We love each of you and value knowing that we all want what's best for Emily—who would've thought that an 8 month old could've touched so many lives already!

Love, Tim & Mary Ann

“...a child to  
nurture, not  
to possess...”

## Looking back: An adoptive family remembers

Dear Friends,

Looking back over the past year, we definitely consider 2001 the best year ever. Each person at Abrazo has helped in making our dreams come true. We love you all like family. We can't express in words how much we thank you for our beautiful little girl. Not only did you make us a family, but you have helped us to become more educated in the area of adoption. When we first considered adoption, we thought we wanted a closed one, but after talking to you, we came to our senses and realized "open adoption is the only way!" As Cecilia grows, we can tell her all about her birthparents. She will grow up knowing exactly where she came from and why. There will be no secrets!!! We love telling our adoption story to others and we always brag about the staff at Abrazo. We hope we see all of you at another orientation in a few years. We love you all!

The Fogos

“We love  
you like  
family.”



“I know I did the right thing..”

### Birthmother shares

I have to start by saying that adoption is the best thing that has happened to me. I was 16 when I found out I was pregnant. I was in a bad group of kids and was getting into a lot of trouble. I knew I didn't want an abortion but I wasn't sure I could raise a child on my own. That's when my mother and I began looking at adoption.

Abrazo really opened our minds about the whole adoption question. When I first went in I thought they would tell me that once I signed the papers I'd never see my daughter again. (You know, the typical horror story of adoption.) But it's nothing like that at all! When Abrazo told me I could pick the parents and could arrange for pictures, visits, phone calls, I knew it was the right choice. My daughter was born the day after my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday.

It's been almost four years since the placement. I've had lots of days and nights when I've just cried for hours, because it hurts so badly, just missing her. But everytime I talk to her on the phone, it's like the hurt just goes away and I know that I did the right thing for her and for myself. Just because I'm not raising my child doesn't mean I'm no longer a mother. In my opinion, birthparents are the best parents! Because they not only give their children everything they'll ever need or want by choosing the families they do—and in doing so, we give our child the chance in life to have every dream and wish come true!

Sincerely, Stella

Thanks from a Birthmom's Grandmother

Hello, hello everyone. Just trying my best to say "thank you" everyone for your kindness and friendship to my granddaughter when she needed a blessing, you were there. And we'll always be grateful to all of you. Most of all thank you for letting this nice family take baby Robert George home. May God continue to bless and keep each of them rich with love and kindness. I know God was in the Plan, otherwise, baby Robert would have been in a place all crowded with misery. I do hope he is still loved, as he was the day he went home with this lovely family. Please say they are still happy. My granddaughter spoke with the Mother after she came home from the hospital. She called and they had a long talk, from where I could hear, she said the Mother said they were enjoying Robert so much. I did not see the baby, I knew I could not help him, nor could my granddaughter. He is blessed. I hope he has a good life. Thank you for the help you gave us. God bless all of you. As always, we are forever grateful for all your help.

Mattie & Landa

“God was in the Plan”

“...the home and family he deserves...”

Dear Abrazo:  
I just wanted to thank all of y'all so much for all your help. Everyone was so nice, caring and helpful, not just during my pregnancy but after, too. Y'all called to make sure I was okay even long after everything was done and that really meant a lot to me. Thanks for everything, but mainly, thanks for just being there and listening. I feel confident that because of y'all, my baby got the home and family he deserves. Thanks again!

Love, Star

Couldn't have done it without you!



# A Tale of Two Mothers



Mother's Day sermon, May 10, 1998 - Asheville, NC

By Jeffrey Matthews Lamb (used with permission)

She was 16 and scared, and she had a secret. The guidance counselor at her high school was the first person in whom she confided. The counselor showed her to the door, since pregnant teens were not permitted in the school with untarnished girls. Her sometime-boyfriend, the father, wasn't much help, (probably scared and uncertain as was she.) No one thought to escort him from the school.

Her father had died when she was 9 years old, so she lived alone with her mom, who had since climbed into a bottle and remained largely unavailable. No family was told, except her mother, so no one could even offer support. Instead, she was whisked away to a maternity home up north, where she would be kept until her child was surrendered for adoption. For nine months, that child grew inside her, as she read stories, sang songs, and spoke often to the presence that would sometimes respond with a kick.

From the beginning, there was no question for those who were in control, but that this was never meant to be her child, and that she must be willing to lose this one to move on with her life. Some said that this was just an end to an immoral act; others believed this to be for the good of society. Social workers seemed understanding, explaining that this was indeed the best solution. The babe, they said, would have love that women out-of-wedlock could never provide, and in return each young mother could forget, move on, have other children some other day. The trouble with that advice was that mothers never forget.

On the day of birth, her pain must have been excruciating. Not even the pain of birth so much as the pain of that coming separation—having known for months that the day of birth meant the day of losing your child. I cannot imagine her agony, or perhaps the cold numbness that masked her emotional pain. But it happened, the child was gone and she returned to a place where no one acknowledged her loss or need to grieve.

In another part of the state, several counties away but only across the river from the young mother's home, patiently waited a couple who had been trying for a very long time to start their own family, despite the frustrations, the countless doctors' visits, the endless excruciating questions, the strain upon their young marriage and loss of hope. After years of waiting, intrusive home studies, and hoping that a child to adopt might become available, one finally did. One cannot imagine the happiness that filled the car on their way home with that baby boy. The new mother quit her job to stay home and tend to their baby full-time, and the child had a family that was secure, devoted and caring. Before that couple lay a long life of parenting ahead, and they were up to the challenge.

As you might have guessed, the child of both of these mothers was me. I first learned that I was adopted when I was four years old. My family rarely spoke about it again. But it didn't keep my friends from asking about my "real" mother. I bristled then, as I do now at the suggestion that one of my mothers is somehow less than real. I believed that the mother who let me go loved me very much but couldn't keep me, and that my mom was quite "real", thank you. In truth, I did wonder about my birthmother. In my imagination, she was a guardian spirit or a ghost that watched over me from a place I did not know, and I thought of her often at night, in the quiet time before I would drift off to sleep, especially on my birthday. But I did so in my own private space, knowing that questions only pained my parents.

During my first week of college, my birthmother contacted my parents and let them know she had found me and sent me a letter. I was called home and my parents informed me, now a 19-year-old man, that I was expected to ignore her. I returned to school in shock, and when the letter arrived, I started talking to my birthmother over the phone, believing that to give her at least a chance to hear about my life, to know I was alive and that I did not hate her, was the very least she deserved. From our first conversation, I could feel her pain and also how healing it was to be able to know me. My time with her began to fill a void inside me that I never really knew was there, a healing for primal wounds I had never known or acknowledged.

In the beginning, I always just called my birthmother by her first name. We agreed that she was less than a mother, but more than a friend in my life, whatever that means. There are no instruction guides for relationships like this—we were in new and uncharted waters. I decided that I would refer to her simply as my birthmother, but whatever I chose to call her, my adoptive parents would have none of it. I wanted to show them that my knowing my birthmother and caring for her in no way took me away from them. But in rejecting so forcefully my need to have my birthmother in my life, it seemed that my parents' love for me had been from the beginning, conditional—conditioned on my always acting as if I was exclusively and only their son, a condition to which I had never

agreed. For nearly two years, we were estranged, which brought its own peace and its own pain. Today, I have once again a good relationship with my parents, though they still regard my birthmother as someone for whom they have no concern or care. That still puts me, the son of two mothers, in a painful, unfortunate situation... one I wish neither I nor other adoptees ever had to face.

The truth for me is that I have two mothers, not a popular idea in today's world. I still find much resistance to have my choice to have both mothers present in my life, but I simply cannot believe that love must be so limited; that something so incredibly integral to who and what I am must be an "either/or" choice.

“My time with her began to fill a void inside me that I never really knew was there, a healing for primal wounds I had never known...”

One mother gave me life and it is her DNA that courses through my veins-it is her personality I see mirrored back to me at times when I so desperately need to see it. The other mother is who I know as mom. She gave me the better part of her life to give me the most essential ingredients that I needed to thrive. Her place in my heart has never been up for grabs, and my appreciation for her has never been muted by my love for my other mother. I see much of who I am in her, too.

To force an adoptee to make such a choice, to conceive themselves as being wholly tied to one another, when truly nature for us comes from both, is a rejection of our most basic needs. If you'd asked when I was 18, I'd have told you that I never needed to know about my birth, but now I know how it changed me for the better. It was years of feeling that I had no right to claim this need for myself that kept me from wanting to know. Now I can't imagine my life without knowing both of my families.

For better or for worse, life is a circle, and sooner or later, the joy and sorrow, loss and gain come round full, to remind us that at the core of our existence, all is bound tight to the other. The relationship of my adopted and birth families is complex, interdependent, sometimes tragically ironic, and defies easy boundaries or language. Life is messy that way, though richest in meaning when we allow the messiness to invade our restrictions. Rich indeed when we deny our impulse for choices of "either this or that" instead opening our hearts to embracing the need for "both that and this" in the choices we face.

Mother's Day is when we are called to honor what may truly be "the toughest job you might possibly ever love," an experience, as a man, I will never know. In the fullness of the emotions that come to us on this day, may there be room in all of us to give generous thanks to the calling of birthing and raising daughters and sons. I know that my mothers have both had their own difficulties and rewards along the way, and I know that I am the person I am today because of love, concern and care that has come from both. Blessed be.

# Angel Account



## Our heartfelt appreciation to:

The Eckert family  
 The Mitchard-Brent family  
 The Dooley family, in honor of Dean, Cheryl, Brittany, Haleigh & Tiffany  
 The Craft family  
 The Ferraire family  
 The Corrigan family  
 The O'Toole family  
 The Ritchey family  
 The Emani family  
 The Waldrip family  
 The Muller family  
 The Hanson family  
 The Berger family, in honor of Amanda & Alexis Stumbough  
 The Karleskint family

The Kankel family  
 The Tate family  
 The Gonzalez family  
 The Lindeberg-Tucker family  
 The Warlick family  
 The Laliberte family  
 The McMillian family  
 The Kohl family  
 The Starnes family  
 The Ploof-Davis family  
 The Ehrig family  
 The Chow family  
 The Holmes family  
 The Neel family  
 The Bradley family  
 The Reyes-Medina family  
 Magditch Family  
 Wilson Family  
 Singer Family  
 Horowitz Family  
 Howe Family

White Family  
 Morgan-Stanley & Saucedo Family  
 Druenell Family  
 Vilardi Family  
 Ponciroli Family  
 Anastacio Family  
 Mittan Family  
 Snyder Family  
 Corrigan Family  
 Wilkins Family

And many thanks, also, to Reynaldo, our caring building maintenance worker who caught a glimpse of the agency playroom one evening, and donated some toys himself to make it that much more fun for the tiniest visitors to Abrazo's office!

**B**lessings on and many thanks to the many beloved friends and families who made holiday contributions to the Abrazo's Angel Account or contributed stockings and other goodies to brighten the holidays of the less-privileged within our ranks, even without having received an annual giving campaign letter this year!

## Welcome to Abrazo!

# Meet Our Wonderful Staff



**Elizabeth Jurenovich M.S.**  
 Executive Director  
 Licensed Professional Counselor  
 Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist  
 Certified Open Adoption Practitioner



**Ruth Stratton**  
 L.M.S.W.-A.C.P.  
 Acting Assistant Director



**Barbara Weichel, B.S.**  
 Maternity Services Coordinator



**April Beaty**  
 Legal Services Coordinator



**Roxanne Campos**  
 Office Manager



**Kelly Gilbert, B.S.**  
 Administrative Assistant

We're happy to be here to serve your needs and your child's throughout the adoption process. At Abrazo, we consider you family! Please help us know what we can do to meet your individual needs more effectively.

# THE INSIDE *Scoop*

**WELCOME ABOARD** to Abrazo's latest orientation graduates; the Fabulous Six Packers, circa 11/01, and The Mamas & The Papas II, from 1/02, and as of 3/02, the Sleepless in San Antonio crew... **ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET** for the TV premiere of Hallmark's adoption series, set to feature an Abrazo triplet case and expected to air this spring... **STAY TUNED** also on Saturday mornings in San Antonio, where dancing Abrazotot takes a weekly star turn as one of the Catpaws on the cable show Copycats... **PICTURE ME PRETTY:** Kudos to the Snyders and Biddells, Abrazo families whose gorgeous kiddos were featured in "Our Family Album" in the first two issues of Adoptive Families magazine this year. To show off your favorite pix, send sharp, close-up and vertical photos to: Adoptive Families, 42 West 38th St., Suite 901, New York, NY 10018... **SPEAKING OF PHOTOS**, be on the lookout for

greeting cards by Mikwright, Ltd., hilarious featuring vintage pictures, and produced by the prospective relatives of a future Abrazobaby... **"I DO" BELIEVE IN MIRACLES:** Major life changes are in the works for our legal services coordinator April Beaty, presently planning a wedding; and for acting assistant director Ruth Morrow Stratton, who with her hubby and two daughters are completing a much-anticipated move into their palatial new digs... **HAIL TO THE CHEF:** Abrazo joins the world in fond remembrance of adult adoptee, burger emperor and childrens' advocate Dave Thomas, who was divinely reunited with his long-lost birthparents and late adoptive parents in the great beyond, in January of this year... **BIENVENIDOS:** Congrats to alums Tim & Natalie and their daughter on their homegrown baby boy; to Mark, April and son on a new daughter and sister; to Doug and Kim, on the homecoming of their son's two-year-

old sibling; and to Mark, Maria and son on their Texas-born addition... **NEW IMPROVED TAX CREDIT:** For those living under a rock in recent months, great news! The adoption tax credit has been raised from \$5K to \$10K, so contact your CPA for more info!... **HEALING WISHES** go out to birthdad Taron, seriously injured in a recent car accident; to baby Angel, fighting the effects of a debilitating infection; and to adoptive moms Carol, Annette and Jenn, recovering from unexpected health challenges... **FOR, UM, THE BEST ADVICE** and feedback and support available anywhere, log onto Abrazo's Forum at [www.abrazo.org](http://www.abrazo.org) and check on the latest dialogue between the best of adoption experts, our own adoption community members. And see also our newest homepage feature, a library of archived agency newsletters, in case you've missed an issue along the way or want to share it with friends and family... **PRAYER CHAIN:** Those wishing to join Abrazo's Prayer Chain, lifting online chapel requests to heaven in the year to come, please fax or forward current email addresses to Abrazo in care of Kelly and we'll add you to our band of earthly angels participating in this special ministry of love...

**Check it out: Abrazo Forum @[www.abrazo.org](http://www.abrazo.org)**

Online exchanges between birthparents and adoptive families on a variety of important-to-you topics and issues! Log on today!

*Abrazo . . . A Better Choice for a Brighter Future.*

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