

Lakes of Fire Afterburn Report 2009

Summary

Lakes of Fire, was the inaugural Great Lakes Regional Burn held June 25 – 28, 2009 at Willow Ranch in Lacota, Michigan. A collaborative effort by the Burning Man Regional Contacts and community members from several states and provinces surrounding the Great Lakes including Ontario, Michigan, Indiana, Chicago / Illinois and Wisconsin. 546 attendees of all ages created and enjoyed a range of art projects, theme camps, dance clubs, live performances, and community celebration. The event was capped by the burning of the S.S. Bacon a two story wooden boat effigy based on a historical ship that fought on the Great Lakes during the War of 1812. This inaugural event took many years to plan. The planning included a land search and planning stage, prior to forming an organizing crew of 17 team leads and a not-for profit not-tax-exempt corporation, Great Lakes Experimental Arts Inc., to lead the event in 2009. The land owner, Bim Willow, expressed strong support for the event and has invited us to return in 2010. The local township passed an ordinance in support of our event in 2009 (in lieu of fire permits which they did not have). Feedback from participants has been consistently positive and ideas are already floating for 2010. The event has banked a profit of \$4,164.80 to invest in future events, site down payments etc. The Board of Directors will begin meeting again in October and the Team Leads will resume meeting in January 2010 to launch the second edition of Lakes of Fire. While overwhelmingly a positive beginning, the organizers welcomed suggestions on ways they could improve. All of the Leads logged a “things that rocked” “things to improve” list for the next event. With a solid foundation, we expect 2010 to be a year of growth in art projects, theme camps, volunteer involvement, and overall attendance.

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Communications

Dave “Downtown Dave” Hossler became the voice of Lakes of Fire before and after the event, acting as the “Info Bot” who created and managed the website and email updates to participants. He also created and managed the Survival Guide. Dave did a remarkable job keeping things updated given the changing nature of the event and the amount that had to be figured out and communicated for this first ever Great Lakes Regional. For future events we would like to develop a more robust website that has improved discussion capabilities and to develop a logo and event specific graphic style. Dave also worked with Tom LaPorte to handle press inquiries. We found this to be an area that needs more work and guidance in the future from the Board. We scrambled to prioritize and respond to enquiries without a press policy, event reference materials, or a spokesperson fully prepared to speak for the event. We also were hesitant about preevent publicity that came to us after tickets were closed. This is an area for deeper discussion and preparation before next year’s event.

DMV

Doug “Poochie” Herlihy was the DMV lead for the event. He created permits and waiver forms for all art car owners. Two large, one golf cart based, one A.T.V. based, and one child size art car were registered. In addition, 1 staff golf cart and 2 DPW vehicles were tagged to operate during the event. Approved vehicles were allowed on the marked roads and with limited access to cross the main effigy / stage field. Vehicles were asked to follow

basic safety protocols including lighting, slow speeds, and sober operations. The only incidents occurred with art cars hitting overhanging branches so, with cooperation of the land owner, the trees throughout the woods were trimmed to accommodate art cars.

DPW

Dan "Dirtball" Trevisan was the DPW lead for the event. DPW was also happy to have Patrick "Sweetballs" Gietzen from BRC DPW join the Lakes of Fire DPW crew. He proved to be a huge asset to the DPW crew. Lakes of Fire DPW experienced a great deal of success with the establishment of a site perimeter. DPW also experienced success with the usage of solar lights for public lighting needs. Next year, DPW will utilize more volunteers and resources to improve processes involved with site improvements, restoration, signage, Leave No Trace, and public lighting.

Effigy

Doug "Poochie" Herlihy coordinated a team of approximately 12 volunteers to scheme, build, and burn the S.S. Bacon effigy. The final result was an extremely impressive two story wooden ship structure that included masts, rigging, sails and even hand crafted wooden canons. The S.S. Bacon paid tribute to a ship from the War of 1812 that sailed on the Great Lakes. We are happy to report the S.S. Bacon burned beautifully, and without incident.

Finance

Jon Groot served as the event's bean counter. Groot did an exemplary job managing the development of numerous versions of the budget, putting open accounting practices in to play, working with the Board of Directors to establish bank accounts, and prodding team leads to turn in receipts etc. in a timely fashion. Groot also handled business transactions with the Board's support and knowledge with the land owner. The event's financial report is attached. The event ended with a \$ 4,164.80 profit in the bank.

FAST

Marilyn "Russian Wulfgar" Besasie and Eric "Blazer" Griswold were the Fire Safety Leads for Lakes of Fire. They led the fire permitting process with the local township, coordinated the pre-Burn conclave and safety procedures, and worked with fire artists to comply with basic fire performance safety guidelines. The event site is located on the border of multiple townships and counties which made it difficult to determine which agency might have fire marshal jurisdiction. Eric and Marilyn established positive contacts with all surrounding agencies and ultimately obtained, through a vote of the Lee Township Board, a specially modified permit. The permit authorized us to perform our ground-based Flame Effects (no fireworks) in accordance with national fire code NFPA 160. The Township was also listed, and additionally insured, on our event insurance. Safety trainings were conducted for Conclave performers, propane Flame Effects were checked in with signed waivers and photographed, and a detailed NFPA-compliant Performance Plan was drawn up. These materials were kept near the gate in our Legitimacy Portfolio where they proved to be helpful. Approximately 25 fire performers participated in the pre-burn conclave performance. Over 200 gallons of water in buckets was kept on hand during the Burn and used for spark control. Art projects involving propane blasters were clustered in Fire Town and were a hit throughout the event. The propane blasters also performed as part of the final effigy burn performance.

Greeters

Jeremy "JB" Besemer was the Greeters Lead for the event. He was strongly assisted by an exceptional team of volunteers: Tonda, Roo, Ardy (Michigan) and Widget (California) a long time Ranger and Greeter at the Big Burn at BRC. The Greeter Station had 24 volunteers pre register for shifts with 100% of these volunteers present for there shifts. Another five volunteers signed up for shifts at the event for a total of 29 Greeters at Lakes of Fire. Greeter protocol followed BRC with special emphasis and direction to match the local event needs. The greeters camped primarily as a group and developed great camaraderie. A propane blaster attached to a bell was "rung" by newbie's to the event, and was provided by Widget. The greeters had both the local 3 guidelines (Leave No Trace, Ask First, and Protect the Community) and the full Burning Man 10 principles posted at the Greeter stop. They worked to educate and inform participants many of whom were new to Burning Man events or new to this site. The greeters also unofficially coordinated a daily ice run to the local store that helped many participants. The most unique event held by greeters was a kid shift on Friday evening. Kids of all ages were welcomed to serve as the greeters (with support and supervision) from 5 – 7 PM. The Greeter lead also coordinated special kid friendly arts and crafts and activities during this time. The kids, parents and other participants loved this idea and about 10 kids participated as Greeters during the short shift.

Leave No Trace

We ended up without an active Lead for Leave No Trace so several other leads including DPW, Gate,

Placement, Volunteers, Greeters, and Effigy worked to fill this role on site at the event. The Gate and Greeters worked together to help ensure that participants were prepared and educated to remove their own trash and recycling, understood moop, and basic LNT principles. This site poses unique issues for our LNT efforts since it is a former trash dump. Large amounts of old trash including glass bottles, household debris, car parts, and miscellaneous junk surface over time throughout the site. The landowner and his team have repeatedly thanked the participants and event leads for our overall efforts to reduce our impact and continue to clean the existing site debris as part of our event. 1 bag of gathered moop mostly from the parking area and 3 bags of participant generated garbage that were left behind plus one abandoned tent were removed from the event site on the post-event cleanup on Monday. Theme camps that were located in the area of the debris were contacted about this issue.

The effigy crew had permission from the landowner to burn the effigy directly on the grass and sand main field area. The landowner uses this space for multiple large bonfires throughout the year and was not concerned about fire damage to the land. The effigy site was combed for metal debris post burn on Sunday and the ashes were distributed in the surrounding woods per the landowner's directions. Based on our own and participant concerns, we are reviewing this practice again with the landowner and considering changes for future years including the possibility of a gravel burn pad and possibly reseeding the burn area. A final site walkthrough was conducted by DPW and the ranch manager to ensure that the site was left clean and up to the standards of the landowner. No issues were noted during the site inspection. We recognize the need for a strong and consistent LNT Lead for future events to help educate and oversee LNT efforts. Approximately 5 bags of garbage were removed from the event site on the post-event cleanup on Monday.

Medical

Chris "Sailman" Ahart coordinated the volunteer medical team of 7 EMT's and other medical professionals. A medical station with basic supplies was established near the front entry within a cluster of event volunteer stations (gate, medical, rangers, fire team, and greeters). Staffed 24/7 from Thursday – Sunday, the medical team saw very little action. Less than 10 minor injuries were treated. The medical lead explored contracting with a local ambulance service to be on call, but that service was determined not to be needed with the current attendance. He also compiled and made available at the Medical Tent and Gate the locations of the nearest hospitals.

Organizing Structure

A not-for-profit, not-tax-exempt Corporation, Great Lakes Experimental Arts, Inc. was formed to operate Lakes of Fire. The inaugural board members are Brian "Willy" Bastuba, President and Chicago co-Regional Contact; Steve "Planeto" Curl, Treasurer and West Michigan Regional Contact; and Cynthia "Cooky" Jones, Secretary and Detroit/Michigan co-Regional Contact. The primary role of the board is to manage the business aspects of Lakes of Fire working collaboratively with the larger group of team leads. The board is working to define its role in policy decisions, leadership development, and event development over the course of the first year of this start-up event. The goal of the board is to encourage broad participation and leadership development with each board member expecting to serve a staggered term of 1 – 3 years so that leadership remains fresh and vibrant.

Parking

Phil ("Philamonjaro" Solomonson and Brian "Silver Orange" Veltkamp were the parking leads for the event and did a terrific job parking approximately 300 vehicles in marked grass field parking areas and some vehicles within theme camps. Parking Camp developed in to a craft station which helped the few parking volunteers stay motivated and entertained. On Saturday night and Sunday morning we experienced some issues with triple parking and Rangers had to hunt down car owners to move vehicles.

Placement,

Theme Camps, Art Projects Shirley Meyers and Danielle "Doxie" Kaltz coordinated mapping and placement for theme camps and art projects. 43 theme camps and pieces of art were registered and placed. Three art projects received grant funding for this event through Chicago's B.U.R.N. non-profit. These included B.U.R.N. funded projects: The Acid Tongue, Four Square, and the Kazoo Processional.

Rangers

Thomas "Shoebucks" McGee was the Ranger Lead coordinating a team of 25 ranger volunteers to fully staff 6 hour ranger shifts throughout the event. Black Rock City ranger protocols were used throughout the event, and three training sessions were held. Two of these training sessions were held at Willow Ranch lead by Shoebucks. The other was in Detroit, and lead by Cynthia "Cooky" Jones. Shoebucks also contracted and managed the radio

system used by event volunteers. One contact with local law enforcement was logged Friday night and was handled by Tiara and Cooky. This contact experienced extremely positive results.

Site Liaison, Site Rental, Site Amenities

Dave "Downtown Dave" Hossler served as the primary site liaison with the landowner and event host Bim Willow, as well as with the Willow Ranch site manager Russ Smothers. Downtown Dave, Willy, and Groot negotiated the site rental agreement with Bim Willow. We agreed to pay \$10 per participant up to 1000 participants. In addition we provide 20 free tickets to the landowner. All payment was due post-event based on actual ticket sales.

The site is home to numerous festivals run by the landowner and others, including the Michigan Peace Festival. The landowner has been working to restore and upgrade the site over the past several years. A mix of forest and open sandy fields, the site now includes 50 marked camping spots (fire ring and clearing), a main open field with a stage and sound booth structure, primitive roads, hiking path, and 2 showers that run off a well and septic system. Just after our event the landowner installed 3 flush toilets near the shower building. He is also working to complete the restoration of an old farmstead in to an art gallery. The land owner plans to feature his own artwork and the artwork of others. The landowner has invited us to return for future events.

Sound

Given the site size (43 acres) and rolling terrain that projects sound in odd ways, sound issues were the number one neighbor and law enforcement issue experienced during the 2008 joint Chicago / Detroit decomp held as a test event on this site. A sound team formed to help balance these concerns with the desire to host live music and DJs during the event. Sound guidelines were established then re-thought and tightened even further. This was done to help ensure that this inaugural event would go as smoothly as possible with neighbors and law enforcement. These guidelines were strict to help ensure we could use the site for future events. The final guidelines were: Sound camps were required to cut their subwoofers at 11 PM Thursday night, 12 AM Friday night, and 2 AM Saturday night. A decibel meter was used to measure sound levels after the cut off to make sure sound did not travel very far past the property line. The sound crew did on site testing and identified two primary areas and one smaller area that could accommodate and contain sound as best as possible. Midwest Mayhem and the Freakeasy crews setup large-scale sound camps. Camp Canabus setup a smaller sound system, and live performances were hosted on the main stage

Stage

Dave "Downtown Dave" Hossler coordinated a sound system and schedule for the live performances that occurred on the stage which is part of the site's infrastructure. The second annual (first occurring at the joint Chicago / Detroit Decomp in 2008) poetry reading was a hit prior to the Burn on Saturday evening. There was also an outstanding violin performance by Dixon from Detroit.

Ticketing, Gate and Exodus

Cynthia "Cooky" Jones was the Gate Lead and worked with the finance lead to establish and handle a ticketing contract with Joel Besemer, Besemer Communications. This vendor was new in the ticket sales business. Unlike other ticket vendors we researched he was willing to provide payment throughout the ticket sales period and not wait until post event to provide the revenue to us. We agreed to a \$1 / ticket payment to the vendor plus reimbursement for basic costs including postage, customer service phone, and printing. There were 546 tickets sold to Lakes of Fire. A first and second tier was available in addition to a children's rate. The first 200 tickets were priced at \$35 and the remainder for \$40. Children 12 years of age and under were admitted for free. Twenty tickets were provided for free to the landowner as part of the site rental agreement. All attendees including organizers and other volunteers were expected to purchase tickets. Ticket sales opened in early May and closed on Sunday June 14. All tickets were sold on-line through the vendor created website, via a link from the event's website. Tickets were designed and printed by community members. They also included black-light responsive ink and special number codes as anti-counterfeiting measures. A database of all ticket purchases was provided to the finance and gate leads on a regular basis along with payment.

We experienced some issues with accurate numbers from the ticket vendor but all errors were traced and corrected (he mis-numbered a series of tickets in one of the last fulfilled batches and had some database issues). We also experienced problems with accepting checks late in the ticket sales process since we waited for checks to clear before issuing tickets thus slowing fulfillment. Finally, the Chicago mail system seemed slow to deliver in a number of cases.

The Gate Lead had 20 tickets on hand to resolve ticket issues (above) on a case by case basis at the event. 3 tickets were sold to family members of the landowner at the gate upon extremely special request of the landowner; no other gate sales occurred. After the experience of handling cash at the Chicago / Detroit joint decomp it was decided to avoid cash on site as much as possible. Some tickets were gifted by participants to the Gate Lead and were used in a few instances to help participants who forgot to bring their tickets with them to the event. Approximately 4 carloads of "locals" without tickets were turned away at the gate. Requests for on-site will call, a longer (and earlier starting) ticket sales period, and faster fulfillment methods were logged as ideas to be considered as part of the post-event feedback. Gate volunteers were primarily responsible for taking and accounting for incoming tickets and checking vehicles for obvious contraband (dogs, weapons, fireworks, glass). The Gate volunteers made up various skits, songs and routines to make this fun. We had issues filling gate shifts Friday afternoon and evening when volunteers did not show up for their shifts. The Gate Lead ended up filling in for an extended shift and some walkup volunteers also stepped in to help.

The Gate was a key source of information including local stores and lakes and was the main HQ for Rangers and volunteer radios. A physical gate was installed just prior to the event and was closed and bungee cord secured after the Gate closed Thursday night (midnight CST / 1 AM EST) and Saturday night (6 PM CST / 7 PM EST). The Gate was officially open for advance pre-authorized setup by volunteers, art projects and theme camps from 4 PM – midnight Wednesday (actual hours were 2 PM – 2 AM). Then was open for all attendees Noon – Midnight Thursday, 8 AM Friday – 6 PM Saturday. The time difference between Chicago and Michigan caused some issues with gate times and the Gate actually remained opened a bit later than planned to accommodate CST attendees who forgot to plan for the time change. The Gate and Greeters combined for the overnight shift Friday in to Saturday and was handled by the Leads for each area. A new Gate Lead has been sought out for 2010 so that there will not be any potential for conflict with a Board Member also serving in a Lead role, especially one that can directly impact the event's revenue. There was no issue with this in 2009 but we see it as a potential conflict that should be avoided if possible. Sub leads for shifts will also be sought out to spread the volunteer load a bit more evenly. And shift duration (on average 4 – 5 hours) will be reviewed. Exodus was not officially planned or staffed but developed on site by Lohr (St. Louis Regional Rep) and the Gate Lead. Vehicles were checked on exit to help ensure they were removing their garbage and Black Rock Beacons (heroically printed on site the night before by the Beacon volunteers) were distributed. Excess food and beverages were collected and fed to the cleanup crew that night.

Volunteers

Chris "Breedlove" Breedlove was the volunteer coordinator for the event. He created a form for the website to collect basic data from volunteers. Based on shift matrixes provided by team leads he worked to place volunteers on to teams. We had 80 volunteers in advance of the event, with more filling spots on site as they saw the need. We are reviewing suggestions to increase volunteer opportunities, improve communication, and provide clearer on-site volunteer opportunities for future events.