

Lakes of Fire Afterburn Report 2013

Great Lakes Experimental Arts (GLEA) is pleased to announce that Lakes of Fire 2013 has come and gone with great success, much learned, and more to look forward to in 2014. Around a 'Tree of Life' effigy and in keeping with the theme of "Superstition", burners new and crusty interacted with others in and around dozens of theme camps, a handful of art cars, many boats and installations, and the beautiful surroundings of Lucky Lake Campground. The organization executed a successful production cycle while striving to adapt and thrive amidst our continuing growth. The event at Lucky Lake from June 20th to the 23rd was indicative of improvements in our organizational structure, event protocols, and ever-growing infrastructure. This fall, having just finished our Lead Organizers' Retreat, we find ourselves poised to refine our structures and systems to best support an even more successful event.

Pre-Event

Beginning with our retreat last November, we endeavored to refine our organizational design to improve efficiency in team operations while reducing the demand on conference call time and email volume. This initiative met with moderate success and warrants revisiting this fall. The board of directors expanded from three to five members. This change allows for potentially greater representation from around the regions that create Lakes of Fire, for a greater range of talents, and for better coverage during the event without undue burden. Our ticket launch through Black Rock Tickets in March of 2013 was met with overwhelming order volume where our servers were concerned and, consequently, many disappointed community members. Our Gate Ticketing team is heading up a focus group to create and evaluate the best course forward where ticketing is concerned. Ultimately, we sold 1500 tickets and welcomed nearly 50% of ticket holders onsite on Wednesday through a very successful 'soft entry' model which allowed theme camps, artists, and first-shift volunteers onsite Wednesday, June 22nd, before official gates opened.

New this year, the Fire Art Safety Team (FAST) held a first ever pre-event training day with Grant Township Fire Department in April. Representatives from FAST, Medical, Board, and Rangers shared with and learned from the local authorities to help best prepare for the event and increase our skills.

Our pre-event production cycle this year reflected strong communication and coordination across teams, outstanding leadership, and a tireless commitment to successful outcomes on site. As we endeavor to measure healthy growth, we also see opportunities to improve several protocols which will result in greater transparency and consistency and less stress. Among these areas are more specific job descriptions and volunteer agreements to clarify expectations, more intuitive archives of our organizational history and protocols, and greater clarification and communication of policies ingrained within Art Grant and Effigy processes.

Event - June 20-23

As anticipated after last year's experience, we encountered scores of unticketed individuals trying to gain entry through our perimeter. This year, they were met by our enhanced Perimeter Ninja Team, who shepherded infiltrators off-site, often with the help of Rangers or Board of Directors On Call (BODOC), and fewer than 5 times following a visit by LEOs for chronic violations or inebriation.

Lakes of Fire 2013 saw an increase in the quantity and quality of attendance, theme camps, sound systems, art grants, most team budgets, watercraft, art cars, volunteers and shifts, and much much more. The feedback we've received from participants and volunteers has been largely positive, constructive, and encouraging. Our team leads and board members, despite relatively large geographical distances which prevent more face-time pre-event, demonstrated diligence in realizing a coherent, unified system for Lakes of Fire, solving problems as they arose, and enduring the intense workloads that come with a growing event.

On the challenging side, Lakes of Fire 2013 also saw a 3 fold increase in visits to the medical tent and a sexual assault that lead to a participant being taken off site by police. The suspect, Matthew Henry was prosecuted and sentenced in October 2013. He has been officially banned from Lakes of Fire.

For all of us, organizers and participants, we will be enhancing our focus on consent and communication. We are encouraged by the formation of Chicago and Detroit chapters of the B.E.D. project and hope that education and resources like this can spread throughout our communities and at the event. We are also considering proposals to bring more mental health and participant support resources to Lakes of Fire in 2014. We were disgusted and heart broken by the sexual assault that occurred this year. We honor the people who spoke up and brought the issue to light as well as those who've taken an active role in healing our community of this harm.

Financially, the organization closed the books with a surplus of \$6,784 after paying out expenses of over \$86,000. Our financial statement includes \$66,000 in event production expenses for 2013. Total revenue from tickets and our first Kickstarter (this year to supplement the Effigy budget) was \$92,966, leaving a surplus which allowed us to increase some of our program budgets. The new amounts are \$10,000 for Art Grants, \$2,000 for Art Honorarium, and a Community Donation of \$2,000 (all to be distributed in 2014). This effectively doubles our funding for these programs.

Post-Event

As the lead organizers and board of directors approach the November Leads Retreat, we prepare to celebrate the service of several individuals cycling out of their leadership roles (some of them co-founders of LOF), vet and welcome new leadership (including two board members), reaffirm our organizational values and priorities, reflect on our successes and challenges in 2013, and lay our fiscal and organizational foundation for the coming year.

We wish to express our gratitude to the entire Lakes of Fire community, far and wide. We are perpetually humbled by the myriad ways in which our collective commitment to art, wonder, and community is rewarded. As always, we look forward with great excitement and anticipation, backward with fondness and appreciation, and inward for the fuel to fire magic in the moment we share right now.