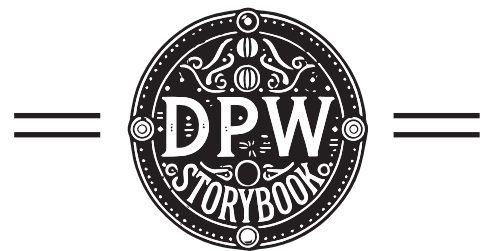


DART!

Dart! joined the DPW in 2015. He manages the Commissary tent and has prevented it from blowing away many times. Born in Memphis and currently residing in Austin, Texas, Dart! works in festival production, specializing in creating artistic installations using metal, fiberglass, wood, and plastic. After leaving the Navy and working in home remodeling, he discovered Burner culture and attended his first Burning Man in 2011.

This interview was conducted by “Flo”, Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2017. Most of Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“My entire world, my whole life, would completely different if it weren’t for my involvement with Burning Man.”

I was born in Memphis, but I live in Austin, Texas now. I’m in festival production, so I do a lot of the same things that we do for Burning Man but on a slightly smaller scale. So, I do fabrication work. I can make almost anything that we can dream up. We work with metal, fiberglass, wood, and plastic to do staging. It’s more like art construction for festivals.

I went into construction after I left the navy. I got out of the navy and started home remodeling. I did that for a few years and then decided I didn’t want to do that anymore. I sort of just fell into working for the company I work for now through Burner connections. I would have never really known about them other than just being a ticketed attendee outside because I had been before.

I got the job through a Burner friend who recommended me. My entire world, my whole life, would be something completely else and completely different if it weren’t for my involvement with Burning Man.

My first burn—my first big burn, my first burn ever—was in Burning Man 2011. I had just started to discover burner culture in Washington D.C. before that with parties and stuff. And then a friend of mine in Washington D.C. was like, “Hey if you wanna go to Burning Man, get yourself a ticket, and then I’m with a Theme camp, and that’s the way to do it. We got a kitchen plan and everything.” It’s hard to do and try without any experience, and to try to do on your own. This was a 30-person camp, and it was a good introduction because we were all able to take care of business and we were all able to rely on each other. But throughout that whole year in 2011, I still didn’t know at all what DPW was, or anything about it, or the fact that they had done anything.

How I discovered DPW was my second Burning Man, which was 2015. I discovered DPW also through the same person who ended up getting me the job I have now. They had hired me to work for that lighting engineer, and we went up to this very small town in Colorado to put in a new computer system, and new data lines. It’s a very boring job. It’s very labor intensive when you’re



Dart! after a dust storm. Photo credit: John Curley, 2017.

just pulling lines through the attic and dropping them through all the walls in a dormitory. Then giving, you know, high speed internet to all the rooms for a college.

My boss’s secretary—the person that had hired me—was like, “Well, Dart, I don’t know if it’s in your world right now, but the car that you’re driving into Colorado is going to go to Burning Man after this. If you can get it together to get a ticket for yourself, you got a ride and you can go to Burning Man.” Then as an aside they said, “By the way, my friend is staffing in the Commissary this year.” I was like, oh a way to work it? Cool.” That comes with the ticket so, it was all done. That’s how I learned all about what DPW was.

I was working in Commissary that first year, now three years ago. I learned about who DPW is that year, and those are my folks. You know, those are the people who are behind the curtain and make it happen: I found ya! You’re not gonna get rid of me quickly. So, I was a straight volunteer. Not a paid DPW member that year or anything. Last year I came back as a paid DPW member for commissary, and then again this year. Like I was saying earlier, I hope to move to a different department. But it’s been nice. I’ve enjoyed the fringe benefits of working the Commissary: you meet everybody!

So, the DPW eats at the commissary kitchen on the playa. The people that make the food are a catering

company that Burning Man hires to make food in a clean way and make sure that’s ok. But the actual tent that everybody eats in, the “dining hall,” is DPW owned. It’s a big, huge tent, and my job is to make sure that the tent stays safe the entire time that it is erect. So, my job for DPW is commissary tent manager, or tent master. It’s the person who’s responsible for the tent. When the winds kick up and people think, “Oh shit, I should maybe go check on my tent,” I’m the one responsible for checking on that tent. A counterpart and I: there’s two people on that job.

The temperature fluctuation between mid-day to mid-night causes all the tent straps to contract and expand. So, every morning you have to retighten everything. Along with going around the perimeter and checking all the tent straps, you take the moment as you’re there to check all the tent wall tie downs to make sure they’re not going to wear out too fast. Because they’re going to wear out. The wind blows and the ways jerk on the twine or whatever. They’re going to wear out, so you keep an eye on it and before it breaks you replace it with a fresh one. So that’s morning.

[We do that] once again in the hottest part of the day, just make sure that the straps are tight. Just keep rechecking things. Also, some repairs. The only time of the year that it’s up those two months. While it’s up, we can do some repairs. Of course, you know as well as I do that it’s an old, old tent. We don’t repair it the way you would professionally. So, it’s a very Burning Man style of repair. My professional opinion is that it’s a little bit dangerous to do things this way. Hopefully the tent will be replaced fully next year.

The maintenance of this space—physically, like the daily checks—is

one thing. But the maintenance of the space emotionally is another thing because all of DPW works very hard. The chance to sit down and have a meal that you didn’t have to prepare, and you don’t have to clean up for, is something that is really needed by these folks. They don’t have the time or energy to fit in making food mid-day or making food in the evening. So, we provide this for them. I really have considered it a real honor, honestly, to be the steward of that space. It’s everybody’s home.

It’s like the living room. Everybody gathers in the kitchen and the living room in any house. So, this is our little living room for the whole community to be there. I feel like it’s been a real honor and pleasure to be a steward of that space and make sure it’s ok for all the people that need a safe place to just sit down for a moment and eat a meal. So that includes wiping off the tables when everybody’s done, and like any meal service thing, chase down a spill if it happens. You know: control the temperature the best we can in the desert with a swamp cooler machine. Just keep the place comfortable.

This year, during Last supper, a storm came. One of the walls split open during a meal, which I personally consider sort of a fail on my part. I don’t want that to happen during a meal. That tent wants to fall down at 55 miles an hr wind gusts, and the wind got to 70 miles an hr. So, it was a very dangerous place to be at that point. The tent wall broke, and I’m not going to take it super personally because it’s a grandmother of a tent. But, it was fun because so many people were there and ready to help. We’re all ready to help at all times: something happens and a whole table load of people reach in and all start helping.