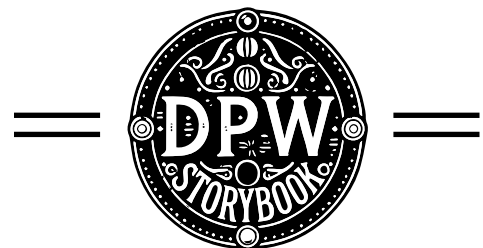


BUCKHORN

Known for his hard work and supportive nature, Dale “Buckhorn” has been with the DPW since 2014. A contractor by trade, Dale is responsible for building the plumbing infrastructure of Black Rock City. His journey with DPW began after a life-changing accident that led him to seek a new direction. In 2016, he brought his two sons to join him at Burning Man.

This interview was conducted by “Flo”, Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2016. Most of Flo’s questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.



“What attracted me was a change.”

Well, about two years ago, I was a general contractor. I built houses, and I fell off the third floor of a building. I was building and was badly injured. While I was recovering, I discovered Burning Man on the internet.



Buckhorn and his son, Bitbox (left). Photo credit: Francheska Gaskins, 2016.

What attracted me was a change. I was looking for a change in my life because I worked all the time. You know, seven days a week. I’d been very focused all my life, and when I left home going to college and starting my career, it’s been everything. So, Burning Man was attractive to me because I wanted to make a change. Last year I contacted Burning Man and offered my services because I’m a contractor. They asked me if I could, and I volunteered. So, I came out early. I worked for about five weeks, and it really made a dramatic difference in my life. I used to be very conservative and very judgmental of people of different sexual persuasions. Not just that, but you know, liberal people. Conservative people: I even made judgements on them.

The thing that I found so wonderful about DPW is that it is the most diverse group of people I’ve ever worked with. From every walk of life, as you can imagine. Every political or social persuasion, every sexual persuasion, and they’re all here working for the same goal. For us all to have the same goal—a goal that has to be met because Burning Man is gonna come on a certain day. It was just a very rewarding experience to be with so many different people all working for the same goal. I think



Buckhorn and his son, Michael (right). Photo credit: Dale D’Alessandro, 2016.

that’s what struck me the most about Burning Man, and one of the things that changed me the most, because I was put into an environment that I probably didn’t expect. But it turned out to be a very positive experience. When I arrived at Burning Man last year I was towards the end of my rehabilitation. When I fell off the house, I broke four disks in my back. I had an artificial shoulder and had a bad brain injury. I was very stiff. I couldn’t move very well. I was a little worried that I wouldn’t be able to do it, but I got here and then the energy, and everything got me out and moving. It really was exactly what I needed to finish my rehabilitation. But when I went back, I found myself really changed. I didn’t want to focus on making money: I wanted to focus on doing things for other people. I always wanted to do that when I retired. I envisioned myself, you know, going to nursing school or maybe going to Africa to help. You know, help other people. That’s not going to happen now because my economic situation has changed. But this is one of the things: I feel Burning Man is an opportunity to come and build a city for thousands and thousands of people to come and enjoy themselves for a week. I really feel proud to be part of that effort. It’s just a couple of months out of my life out of my year, but it’s one thing. Hopefully I will find

other things like that to fill up the rest of my life. So, I guess that’s my story. [chuckles] I guess the other really cool thing about this year is that I talked my sons into coming. My 21-year-old son came with me, so he’s been volunteering with DPW and then my 25-year-old son flew out for the festival. That was really special.

What brought me back was the experience of working. If somebody were to give me the choice of going to Burning Man, or just doing DPW and not going to Burning Man, I would choose DPW. [This is] because of the camaraderie and the experience of working with such a diverse group of people. It had the same effect on me this year. There’s always something to learn by meeting new people that. The way I feel is that we’re all the sum of our experiences, and everybody lives their life with different experiences. So, when you come together, you’re a culmination of everybody’s different experiences and you learn from them. I just have never felt the comradery that I feel here.

I was here eating breakfast one day with a girl. I had just met her. She was off that day and was going to do laundry in town. I said, “Well, I really need to go and get my laundry done. I’m not off for a few more days.” She said, “Oh, I’d be glad to do

your laundry.” She did my laundry and brought it back all nice and folded. I had just met her! That really struck me. I don’t know if that would happen in another environment.

The other thing: I was in a camp working on their water system and there was a girl sewing. My glove was coming apart, and I asked her if she could fix it. I’m missing part of a finger on my left hand, and she noticed that. When she gave me the glove back it was customized for my hand. She had shortened that finger. It was something that was a little touching—that somebody would notice and do that for you. Those were the two things that really happened last year that struck me. I did a lot of research and found that Logan was the person who did the hiring, and I sent him an email. I was surprised by how quick he got back to me. In two or three days, he got back to me and we discussed through emails, and then he agreed to have me come out and work as a volunteer. When I got here, I expected that they would put me in special projects or something where I would use my carpentry skills. They didn’t: they put me in the plumbing department, which I was happy to do. I was surprised when they put me in plumbing because I thought

“what plumbing is out here?” Really, quite a lot.

Obviously here in commissary we have all the plumbing: wastewater and fresh water that they use in the kitchen for cooking and cleaning. Then across the street there are the Fluffers, and they use the water to provide water for the boys while they’re out working and to clean with. Then there’s water for the infrastructure camps. There are camps like the Fire Enclave who provide the gas, and proofers, and things that involve gas. They’re part of the infrastructure of the camp, so they’re provided with things like water and wastewater. First Camp, where the original founders are: they have a kitchen and showers. Then Wet spot, which is behind the Depot: they use a lot of water for their showers for all the people working here. There are water systems for the Rangers and for Gate.

Pretty much anywhere that is not a theme camp or private camp, we provide the water systems for them. So, that’s what I did last year. This year, they contacted me and asked me if I wanted to come back. I said, “Yes,” and I was really surprised they offered me a contract to do the same thing. So, I felt good that they appreciated the things I did.



Buckhorn on site. Photo credit: Flore Muguet, 2017.