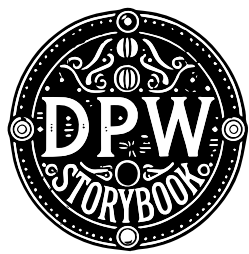


FIERYIRIE

Fieryirie joined the DPW in 2008 at the age of 24, while on an impressive bike tour covering 80 to 100 miles per day. That year, she worked as a volunteer Roustabout, assisting various crews, including Shade. After a personal battle with skin cancer, she returned to the playa in 2009 with Burning Man's Temple Crew. In 2010, she joined back the DPW with Fistica crew. After taking a few years off from Burning Man, she worked as a Fluffer in 2014 & 2015. Her involvement with the Shade Crew began in 2016. In 2017, an injury led her to take on the role of dispatcher. By 2018, she became the manager of the Shade Crew, known for its vibrant culture of hard work, humor, and camaraderie. In addition to her leadership, Fieryirie is recognized for creating Shade patches and the iconic 4" and 11" DPW emblem patches. Irie's journey is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and a deep commitment to the DPW.

This interview was conducted by "Flo", Flore Muguet, a French anthropologist, in 2018. Flo's questions have been omitted to improve reading flow.

The text was carefully edited by Irie to its final version in 2024.



Irie's arrival and early years.

In 2008, it seemed like there were two ways people arrived to work DPW. People would either get in because they knew someone, or they would have this crazy, serendipitous story. It seemed like one or the other. You know? I think at that point in time, DPW was 1/3 of the size it is now, maybe less, around 200 people. If there was a form you could fill out online to sign up, I wasn't aware of it, and it didn't seem like anyone you spoke to came in that way. Either



Photo credit: Dunkin Larkin, 2019.

“I rode the next 60 miles to Idaho Falls asking myself what the fuck I was going to do. In Idaho Falls I found a Starbucks, got a drink, and settled in to check my email. Logan had written me back almost immediately: ‘Sounds good, come on down’”.

you got brought in by someone you knew, or you had some crazy story of how you got there. My arrival to DPW was more of the latter.

In 2008, I'd been really into riding bikes for a few years and had been riding with a fast riding, hard drinking crew in Seattle called Point83. Riding with them, I started getting into long distance biking. In the spring of 2008, I started riding longer and longer distances, often on solo rides. I'd just turned 24 and had wanted to travel all my life, so I made the decision to sell all my things and take off for the great unknown on a bike tour. I made some vague plans to go south, down the West Coast, with a band that was traveling by bike called Blind Pilot but ended up jumping on board with a friend who was planning to ride southeast toward Colorado.

On my mom's birthday, July 23, my buddy Triker Trev and I rode east out of Seattle over the Cascades without much of a plan. Trev was a strong cyclist who rode a low-to-the-ground recumbent trike and I was on an overstuffed upright road bike, so it was an arduous start. We averaged 80-100 miles a day with our longest day being 120 miles. Due to lack of planning, in the cool mornings we would ride through beautiful flats or rolling hills, and every afternoon we found ourselves climbing mountain passes in the mid-summer heat as we got deeper into the country.

Originally, we'd agreed that if we ever wanted to split for any reason we could do so, and after 10 days of heat, hills, and headwinds at 100 miles a day, I wanted to change gears. When we hit Boise, Idaho, with the Rockies looming a few days out, I broke the news to Trev that I was over this riding pattern, and I was going to head out on my own. We agreed to a plan: ride together for a few more days, and then Trevor

would head over the Rockies, and I would go. . . I didn't know where yet. I considered heading back to the coast to meet up with Blind Pilot. I thought about maybe trying to work for Burning Man's DPW which I knew was probably happening right then, a couple hundred miles south of where we were in Boise. Both were total unknowns.

I had been to the burn in 2006 & 2007 but had decided against attending any longer after my second burn. During my couple years of Burning and going to burner parties in Seattle I had met a few people who worked the long haul of DPW and Emergency Services for the burn. So while, Trev and I took some time in Boise, I wrote to Blind Pilot and to some burn acquaintances and hoped a plan would coalesce. After some good rest in Boise, Trevor and I set back on the road, but I still had no plan. A couple days later we landed at Craters of the Moon in eastern Idaho where we would spend our last couple of nights together before splitting ways. One afternoon, I climbed a cinder cone to find a bar or two of reception to see if any of my feelers had landed.

The only response I had gotten was an email from Zarian, who I knew had done DPW in 2007. I'd met Zarian at a NYE burner party, a sweet goofy dude who dragged me around partying all night following both of our first burns in 2006. We'd stayed in touch after that. But the tone of his response surprised me. Gruff and DPW hardened, he wrote back, "We're already out here, you can't just show up down here and get work. But if you want to join DPW you can get a ticket to Burning Man, and when it's over you can come to the Depot and ask for work." I thought "Fuck that!! I don't want to pay for Burning Man! I don't even want to go to the burn! That's not what I'm into right now!" So, after

“I remember my first night sitting on the couch in the Ghetto bar, totally exhausted, knowing no one.”

I read his email, I just closed it and made my way back to camp.

A day and a half later, Trev and I are sitting in a diner in Arco, Idaho having our last meal together before we went our different directions. I'm thinking to myself, "I am broke, I have no plan, and I'm an hour from splitting ways with my riding buddy in the middle of bum fuck nowhere." My mind turned to Zarian's response. I read it again. He had said that I could buy my ticket to the burn and show up OR I could write Logan, the volunteer coordinator for DPW and see what he had to say. But, Zarian said, "Don't drop my name. I've already pulled too many strings. If you're going to write him, you're on your own." And since I didn't know what else to do, I wrote Logan an email, short and sweet, straight to the point, and asked if they needed anyone. I told him that I was in Idaho

on a bike tour, I was in great shape, had everything I needed to camp out, and could work super hard.

A few miles east of the café, Trevor and I leaned our bikes against each other one last time and hugged our goodbyes. I rode the next 60 miles to Idaho Falls asking myself what the fuck I was going to do. In Idaho Falls I found a familiar coffee shop with WIFI, got a drink, and settled in to check my email. To my astonishment, Logan had written me back almost immediately, though I hadn't had reception until then. In classic Logan brevity, he said, "Sounds good, come on down. You'll get three square meals a day, a piece of dirt to camp on, and we got work for you." So, I bought a bus ticket to Reno. These last legs were filled with all kinds of adventures. Reno was alive with the car show Hot August Nights. I spent a couple days gathering supplies for the desert while a bike kid I met at Hot August Nights put me up at his place. And then, the final leg of my journey: Reno to Gerlach, with a quiet and eerie night at Pyramid Lake before I arrived in the Black Rock Desert. I got to Gerlach at 2 o'clock

“I did 52 days in the desert that first year, and it really evolved the concept that ‘Burning Man Ruined My Life’”.



Playa Restoration 2008. Photo credit: unknown.

in the afternoon, emotionally and physically exhausted from the whole thing. I was two weeks and 1,100 miles from Seattle, and I was tired. There were beautiful intimidating people everywhere and I didn't know a soul. I met up with a busy Logan who handed me a DPW Handbook and said, "Go hang out in the Saloon, I'll come get you around 5 o'clock."

Inevitably, I fell off the radar. So, I spent the day wandering the saloon, watching all these beautiful scary people, reading the handbook cover to cover, eating cans of corn from the pantry, and eventually being placed on a couch in the Fluffer trailer to try to sleep with these wild women raging around me. I was so tired; I thought I would cry. I wandered out into the trailer park, and was found by Guilty who occupied trailer 10 year-round at the time, and thankfully he gave me a quiet bed to fall asleep in.

Having ridden my bike there, I didn't need acclimation time, so the next day was blast off! That first year I was a roustabout, though at the time we just said "floater." My first days I volunteered for Special Projects building the commissary walls. My first night on playa was similar to my first night in Gerlach. I remember sitting on the couch in the Ghetto bar, again totally exhausted, knowing no one. The Ghetto was at 4:20 and A back then, had less structure, and I had no idea where to set up camp. Eventually I wandered around the back of the Ghetto, laid out my tarp with my road bike beside me, and passed the fuck out directly under the stars. I had landed in something of an orphan camp, and we built an awesome pod of new DPW there.

Over the rest of the season, I worked on Bikes, and Shade, Man Base, and I did Power Crew, called Lance Land at the time. During post-season, I

worked Collexodus with Drunken Nurse and went on to do Resto. At the end of the season, I remember writing a post about how I had just done 52 days in the desert, and looking back, I can see how that first season really evolved for me the concept that "Burning Man Ruined My Life."

So, that was my serendipitous arrival! It was pretty epic. I had always dreamed of leaving home and traveling so it was an amazing experience to step out into the abyss, to let go of the life I had and to open myself to whatever was going to come next. It was such an awesome thing for me that I found this community so quickly at 24, and 10 years later, I'm still in it and getting to step into this role [as manager] of a crew that I truly love.

I had trauma-loved my first season of DPW and had every intention of



Irie and Trevor during their bike trip. Photo credit: selfie by Irie, 2008.



Irie performing St. James Infirmary at the 2009 DPW Talent Show.
Photo credit: unknown.



Irie doing detail work on the lightbox walls for the 2009 Temple, *The Fire of Fires*. Photo credit: unknown.

returning in 2009, but in the year in-between my first and second DPW, I got skin cancer. I was diagnosed with melanoma in late March and my return seemed less likely.

When I left the desert, I made plans to travel with my newfound community. I bounced from the Bay Area, back home to Seattle, to New York, to Austin where it was discovered that the mole on the septum of my nose was a melanoma.

While I was in Austin, prior to my melanoma diagnosis, my friend Derek aka Drinkwater, who I had met on DPW in 2008, told me about a group in Austin who had applied to build the 2009 Temple, and he showed me the plans. It was called *The Fire of Fires*—an incredibly beautiful design. It looked like a lotus flower with a fire vortex in the middle, and I wanted to be a part of it. I told him that if they got it, I wanted in.

So, before I was diagnosed, I applied to be a part of it. But then life blindsided me and I forgot about it, as any desert plans seemed impossible to me through the spring and early summer. Then, in July I had been cleared of cancer, was pretty well healed from my surgery, and had no plans to head to the desert for the season when I got an email that I had been accepted to Temple crew. It all seemed so fitting, having just faced my own mortality for the first time. So, I packed up and headed back out to the Black Rock Desert to help build Dave and Marrilee Archer's Temple, *The Fire of Fires*.

As a result, when I came back to the desert it was as a part of the Temple Crew, and it was an important experience because of my recent brush with mortality. It felt appropriate to turn around and lean in to creating a project that, for this community, is a physical space to celebrate life and death. When I

arrived in the desert, I again didn't know very many people on crew, so I just fell into working whatever jobs someone would show me how to do. I helped set up camp and work sites, I learned to build trusses for the elevated floors of the structure, I cut metric shit-tons of lumber and found out how very meticulously and quickly I could cut lumber. At first the crew was pretty small, but eventually the number of bodies swelled, and people kind of slipped into the work I had been doing. So, I found myself working on a very meticulous task that no one else was very interested in. I ended up fixing small details on every single upright panel of every ground level wall so that once it was lit up, warped panels and missing pieces wouldn't ruin the effect of the intricately detailed light box walls. It was invisible but impactful, highly satisfying work.

Working on the 2009 Temple was another new and fantastic

“It was such a great thing that I left that life at 24, and immediately found a life that, 10 years later, I’m still in. [..] I love how at my 10-year mark, I stepped into this role [as manager] of a crew that I truly love.”

“In the year in-between my first and second DPW I got skin cancer. I was diagnosed with melanoma.”



Fluffer crew. Photo credit: John Curley, 2015.

experience that opened my eyes to my ability to adapt and learn in new environments. In post-season of that year, I came back over to the DPW side of build and strike, helping run Collexodus under Drunken Nurse, and then did another season of Playa Restoration.

Volunteering for Burning Man and DPW gives you the opportunity to do all kinds of new things, so coming into my third season I wanted to gain more building and construction skills. This was the first time I flirted with the idea of being on Shade. I had expressed interest in either working on Shade or the crew that builds the ice stations, now Black Ice but at the time it was known as Fistica. So, it would go, I was placed on Fistica, and Shade would have to wait.

That season, because I ended up on Black Ice instead of Shade, I met the partner I would spend the next 8 years with. Following that DPW season, while trying to figure out what we

were going to do with ourselves through the winter, someone from Gate posted on the DPW email list that they were looking for someone, ideally a couple, to clean up their family's dilapidated property in Mendocino. So, my new partner and I applied and got the gig and ended up giving up our desert summers to turn that overgrown property into a sweet little paradise. But I missed my DPW community and after 3 years off, in 2014, decided to return for another season.

Before taking those years off, Fluffer Nipps had approached me to tell me she was interested in having me on the Fluffer Crew. When I thought about coming back, I figured the best way would be through a team that wanted to have me. So, in 2014, after 3 seasons off, I came back as a Fluffer driver and team lead. It was overwhelming because there were so many new faces and the Fluffers interact with absolutely everyone, but it was a good way to dive back

in. I spent 2 seasons as a Fluffer, but in my second season I felt the urge again to be gaining skills in building and construction, so I started to scope out the crews I felt drawn to. Once again, Shade was in my view.

Fluffer to Shade

As a Fluffer, you see how crews are feeling all the time, right? I was watching all the crews, and Shade, consistently, despite working extra hard in the sun all day, were always kind of deliriously happy. They were really grateful to the Fluffers. I loved their energy and everything about them. How they played, how they worked, when they had time on, when they had time off, how they interacted with each other. I remember one day towards the end of build in 2015, rolling up on Mira's ShBus crew, and all the dudes—she had a lot of guys on her crew—were in this big bro hug, just, in this big goofy, joyful embrace. And I thought to myself, “This is my crew.”

So, with my heart set on Shade, I cornered Quiet Earp, the guy who managed Shade at the time, during the Jub Jub party, which is usually right before the burn, and I begged to be on Shade. He was taken aback, but he said, “Yeah, totally, you can definitely come on crew with us if that's what you want to do.”

Unfortunately, when I wrote Quiet Earp to follow up the next spring, he told me that he had left DPW, and that long-time members of Shade, Art and Xeno would be the new managers. When Quiet Earp left, so did much of the crew that had been loyal to him for many years. It's a natural flow I've noticed when longtime managers go from any organization. So, in 2016, nearly half the crew was new, after years of relative stability within Shade. I was disappointed and worried it wouldn't be the crew I had wanted to join, as many of the people on the crew were the reason I wanted to be on Shade. But to my joy, Art and Xeno did a

great job, and the essence of Shade remained unchanged. We were still a hard-working roving crew, we still had the camaraderie, the traditions, the shenanigans.

And I loved it, just as I had suspected I would. As someone who loves to learn and is good with my hands, I got it down before the first week was over. There was a point a day or so after I had gotten our basic build down where I had some doubts. It was the middle of a blazing hot playa afternoon, and I found myself thinking, “Is this really it? Is this all we do?” But it didn't take me long to realize that what we do is make a simple and repetitive job silly, fun, weird, and we do it through a culture we create and re-create every year.

One of the things that I love about Shade is that the whole thing is performance art. It's such a huge act. The rig rolls up and all these people jump off. Lumber is coming off the rig, people are everywhere,

“[Quiet Earp] said: ‘I know you're only on crew for a few days, but we really enjoyed having you on crew.’ So, he gave me this patch which was... this was the first DPW patch that I ever got.”



2016 Shade Crew. Photo credit: John Curley, 2016.

moving smoothly from task to task, speaking a language you can hardly understand. There's coordinated yelling of inside jokes, heave-hos, and lifting the walls and tamping in posts. The way the crew rolls up on a site and jumps off the clown car (Shade rigs) and scurries about, like a hilarious yet coordinated machine. We hoot and holler and yell and laugh and play the whole time! It's a fundamental part of our operations to have fun. It's really fun to stand back and watch, and see it all play out, and even funnier to note the people who watch in awe, unsuspecting of the show they get to enjoy as their Shade structure arrives.

The build

Like many tasks involved in building a festival, building Shade is super repetitive. We build over a hundred thousand square feet of the same structure in different sizes, using a modular design. It's 12x12 structure, or its 12x24, or it's a 24x24, or it's a 24x36 of the same thing over and over again.

The build itself is relatively simple for a construction project. We lay the lumber for each wall out on the ground and frame them there, on the ground. Then we erect each wall one at a time starting from the middle wall, moving outwards. Then each free-standing wall is connected, and

“Shade is a roving crew. [...] And shenanigans! They do the Shanquet and the 4:20 Spire. And they yell and scream and laugh and play the whole time!”

then we skin the structure with that familiar black shade cloth from one side to the other. It's a very simplistic process and without the fun that the crew injects, it's not a particularly interesting job for those who are good with their hands.

Once you've gotten the build down, though, that's when the joy of being on Shade really begins. The hard physical work, moving in sync with your crew, this is where we find the joy, the joy of the process, where we're yelling and screaming and you're excited, and you're making sexy noises while you do hard tasks. You see how few times you can hit the hammer before the nail is sunk all the way in. You can start to read

each other's minds, because you know what's next, so there's space for all the jokes. And they build on each other year by year. You might not know where a joke came from, but you build on it anyway. And maybe the joke you make today will become the history of next year.

I love each step of the process, but from erecting the walls on is my favorite because there's such an emphasis on the group moving together. Shade is not a crew where being a particularly strong individual does you much good. It's a team sport. When we raise the walls we've built on the ground, if anyone moves faster or slower than the rest then the wall might break as we raise it. Once the walls are lifted, if you're not working together things take longer, need to be fixed. And once you're up on the ladders, if you're not paying attention or working together, not moving in step with your crew, then you're making it more dangerous for yourself and everyone else. So when you get the build process down, and you find the rig you belong on, and find the rhythm with your crew, so much space opens up for jokes that build on each other day by day, for play, for the music and rhythm of teamwork.

Because the reality is that building shade is a fairly monotonous job. If you don't make it fun, it's gonna suck. You're working in the sun. You're not in the shade you're working to build the shade all day. But the part that makes it so fun is that while we are pushing ourselves to our personal limits, we are doing it with people we come to love and work so closely with. There is so much joy in finding and creating that hilarity, balance, and shenanigans within every action that you take, and doing it with your friends. Without those shenanigans, without that hilarity, it would be a very hard job.

Safety

Absolutely, we do [work in a safe manner], and we are always looking to how we can be more safe while still moving quickly and having fun. I mean, it's very easy in a crew like Shade—any crew in a festival environment that is building—for a lot of dangerous things to happen. You're moving lumber. You're standing high up on ladders. You're handling lumber up while on the ladder. And it's an environment that encourages learning for people who don't have a lot of construction experience, so there's a learning curve. You know?

So, like any work site, there is a lot of danger involved if you're not being mindful. Every year, people wack their thumbs, and drop lumber on their feet, and they fall into holes that are on the site once cones have been moved. Every year, towards the end, those things start to catch up with the crew. We're in our last week right now, and we got all kinds of little injuries happening from just a long season. It's hot, it's windy, you're tired at the end of the day. You wack your thumb! Or someone drops a board on your arm. Those things are a reality of our experience even though we are always trying to minimize those dangers.

“That is one thing I appreciate about Burning Man: it is always evolving...”



Playa Info build. Photo credit: Fierylrie, 2024.

Shade Culture, vocab and shenanigans

We definitely have a language that has been developed out of a combination of hilarity and necessity. We have a lot of smart, fun, and funny people on crew, and through the years that has meant the development of a language unique to Shade. We have so many unique terms for roles, tools, processes, and so on that I'm planning to put a glossary in the training document I'm writing!

One of Shade's SHticks is to add "SH" is added to the beginning of many words, or to combine Shade related words. Our home, the Shade Enclave is the "Shenclave". The Shade banquet is the Shanquet. It's a banquet that we have on top of the commissary shade towards the

end of the last week of build. We show up to the commissary on an unannounced night, dressed to the nines. We drag our ladders over to the commissary shade and eat our commissary dinner on top! It's silly. So silly.

I think that, you know, I was so drawn to Shade because of Shade culture. The thing that I really love is the natural energy of this crew. Culture of shade is hard work, fun, and shenanigans. I've been trying to think how to naturally cultivate it when it's been such an open and fluid thing for this group—because Quiet Earp wasn't necessarily actively cultivating this energy.

I think the culture of Shade has grown really organically out of the work we do and the kind of people

“You’re working in the sun, you’re not in the shade, you’re working to build the shade all day. So, there’s so much joy in finding that hilarity, balance, and shenanigans”

who are drawn to that. It's been really interesting to participate in learning to guide the crew culturally this year, and I've been trying to lean towards accepting people for our crew based on the energy Shade has always had. That fun, the grit, the work ethic combined with hilarity and insanity. That culture.

What I love about Shade is its very gregarious nature. Its excited and excitable, and funny, and thick with big personalities that all get tight knit throughout the course of the season. And it seems like it all has its own momentum. Just so much wild and bright energy. To me, that's the best part of Shade: it's the communal energy and the way that we move and interact and talk, and gel and hang out, and spend time together, and do everything together. That

is probably my favorite part of the culture of Shade.

So, I've already talked a little bit about the Shanquet. The 4:20 Spire is a silly crazy little event we do every year where Spires crew puts up a spire (the thing the Lamplighters hang their lamps off of) at 4:20 on the clock. Shade puts up a Shade structure in an overly theatrical manner, and then every crew contributes something to the DPW art piece. The thing about it is that it's turned into a chaos event over the years. Just, total shenanigans.

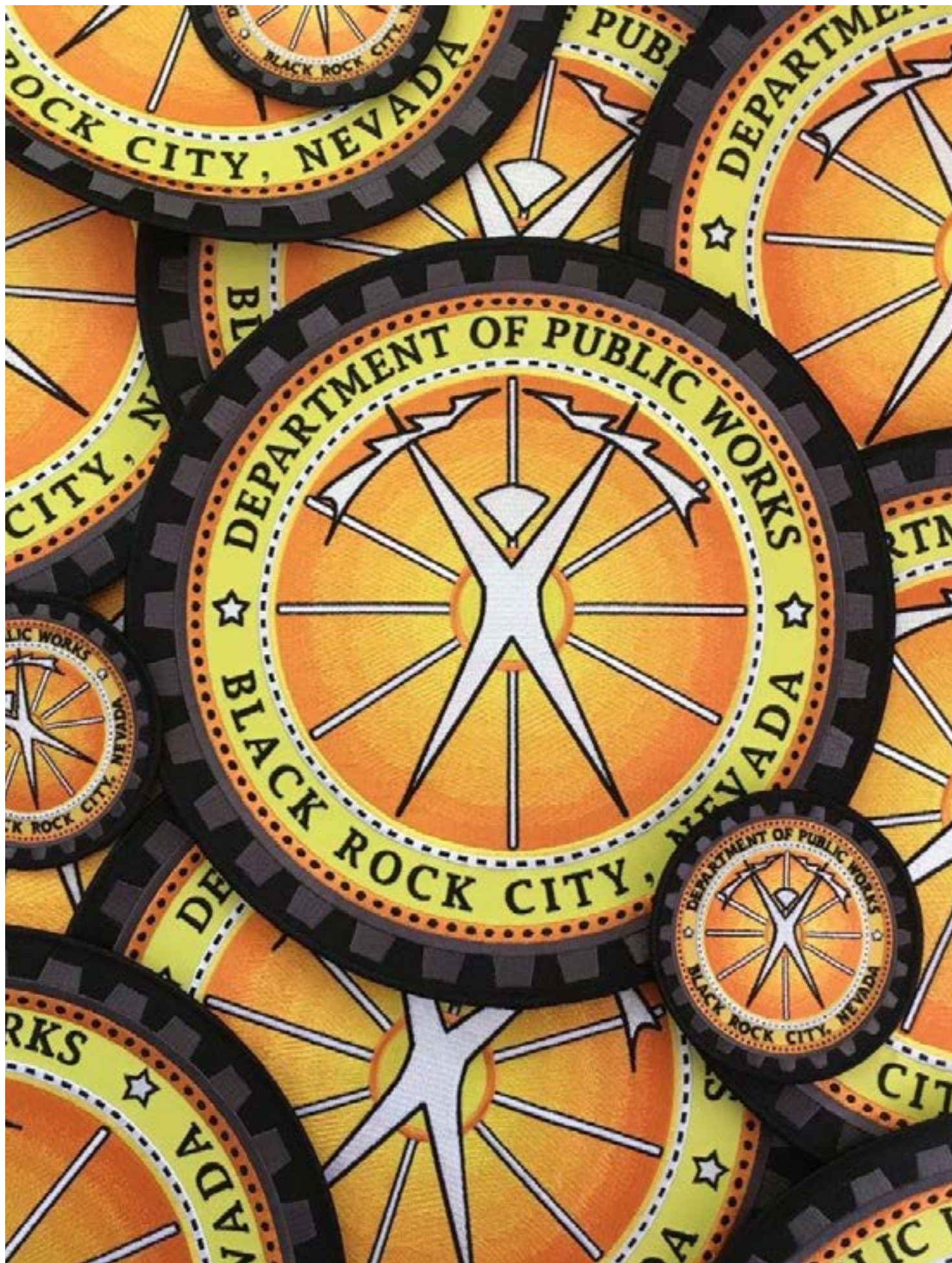
Someone was telling me this year, I think Art, the manager of Shade before me, he was telling me that for the 4:20 Spire event in 2008 or 2009 Quiet Earp was like “You guys need some shade for that.” And then Shade became part of it, but before that it was just a Spires thing. But I remember from the first time that I went to the 4:20 Spire, that I was enthralled with Shade. It was and is truly performance art!

Patches

Making patches and becoming a schwag queen has been one of the great joys of my time in the desert! Of course, we have a patch and schwag culture at Burning Man and most definitely within DPW, but it really became a thing for me starting in 2016.

In 2014 Fyreboi had done a round of embroidered and silkscreened 11” patches with die-cut gear edges. A little over 100 were bought from him, sight unseen, and when they arrived people went nuts over them. I had bought one and like others, wished I bought two. So, in 2015 I asked him if he was going to do another run. But it's no small effort to coordinate the patch gig, so he was one and done.

“I did Shade as a Roustabout in 2008, a full season in 2016, in 2017 I was injured and worked as a dispatcher but had a lot of free time and spent it all working with Shade, and then in 2018 I became the manager. I think that, you know, I was so drawn to Shade because of Shade culture.”



The final iteration of Irie's embroidered DPW patches. 2018 – present.

In 2016, I did a run of patches similar to his using the same company. The following year I had a fully embroidered 4" patch made. After that, I spent some time tweaking an 11" fully embroidered patch. A few iterations later, I now make fully embroidered 4" and 11" DPW emblem patches, and this year I made Shade patches. I was planning these patches before I went for the Shade manager position, but it ended up being fitting when I landed the job! On the DPW patches, all of the money above what is spent on production and shipping, I return to a gift fund that I have mostly used to make more of the 4" patches to gift out to DPW. Additionally, I've made some stickers from jokes made on the DPW Facebook page and have some more fun ideas for gift fund ideas moving forward.

This Shade patch was made by Kevin Dennis in 2008, my first year. Quiet Earp had these patches and during Resto when we were back in town hanging out at the Saloon, I was walking through the porch area and Earp called to me. I went over to him, and he said, "I know you're only on crew for a few days, but we enjoyed having you on crew," and handed me this patch, which was... this was the first DPW patch that I ever got. I was so flattered, and it was so wonderful because I had really enjoyed my days on Shade. That was the favorite crew that I had done in pre-event of my first year. That particular group of people, there were a lot of really supportive women who took me in and showed me the ropes. I loved it and it was an honor to receive this patch.

In the patch that I made this year I wanted to honor the first Shade patch that I had gotten. So, I added a couple throwbacks to the original Shade patch by Kevin, my first Shade patch, and my first DPW patch.

Kevin added the 8 ball for the year, 2008. This year 2018, I added an 18 ball to honor the 10 years since the first patch, 10 years since my first DPW. I also kept the double, crossed hammers as Kevin did in his patch.

One of the things that is really fun about schwag is that it's, like, a pin in memories. Seeing swag from years gone by helps draw up experiences, jokes, memories with friends, and gives life to those times again. And the DPW and Shade patches have that added element of giving a sense of belonging to the memories. How they represent the community is powerful, and I'm glad I get to take part in helping people feel a part of something meaningful to them.



Irie's 2018 patch is a reflection of Kevin Dennis's 2008 patch.

“The best part of Shade: it’s the communal energy and the way that we move and interact and talk, and gel and hang out, and spend time together, and do everything together.”

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Irie (right) at the 2019 4:20 Spire. Photo credit: Hank Lieter, 2019.