**Managing Director's Report : AGM 2017**

This year has been uniquely challenging and interesting on a number of levels - both within the organization and in the dust of Tankwa Town.

The 11th AfrikaBurn event saw the total population of Tankwa Town swell to just over 14 000 people, with participants and crew. It's clear we have reached critical mass on our current footprint and that the pressure of density brings specific challenges to bear.

It's also clear that the artificial pressure of popularity has helped push awareness of AfrikaBurn further into default consciousness … sometimes without a clear understanding of the differences between a festival and a Burn. This presents us with an opportunity to share our culture and positively impact on many more people, but it also means there is much work to be done around driving home what it means to engage deeply in this community experiment.

While for many there is a strong sense of wanting to return to a smaller size there is also recognition that the AfrikaBurn event is the engine that drives this movement. Tankwa Town is the most potent access portal to burner culture and values... it is here that hearts and minds are opened. It is in the dust that we deepen our alignment with the ethos and guiding principles of the global burner community.

And of course we must also be pragmatic around the financial considerations inherent in a single source revenue model.

For these reasons, Tankwa Town will hold steady at this population level for the new cycle.

Where 2017 was a year of investing in people and infrastructure to support the work, of system and process review and improvement, the 2018 cycle will be one of fine-tuning, refining, and properly entrenching these systems and processes, and focussing attention on key areas where further support and development is needed.

We have worked hard this past cycle to define policies and processes that better support our objectives and the burner community. Operationally the team is strong, adept and committed to the work at hand, and this was clearly apparent in the planning and build of Tankwa Town. But despite our best efforts, we faced a handful of substantial and unprecedented curveballs this year that were highly visible and had a direct impact on our community and their experience of Tankwa Town.

Many of this year’s challenges were obvious - the toilets, Tankwa Tummy, the Clan, and the plug and play village all sparked vigorous discussion on site and in the weeks that followed. But most of the issues we face operationally are dealt with quietly, efficiently, professionally and largely invisibly.

While we have justifiably met with public criticism for these issues, it's gratifying to see the community making sense of the challenges within the context of the ethos that underpins what we do. And we recognise that these challenges present us also with an opportunity to initiate some strategic interventions that might not have felt warranted without the catalysts provided on site this year.

Some of our most visible challenges were experienced in the creative core of our community. The delayed completion of the Clan left many of those who could not stay past Friday feeling frustrated, disappointed, even angry. The absence of a large central Burn on Friday left the community without an anchor point that night. And the wind factor and resultant mechanical failure when the Clan finally did burn left the artists broken and broken-hearted.

Yet there are positive aspects contained within these negatives that speak to the core of our ethos. To risk such a creatively ambitious project so publicly, for the artists to labour so long and hard while the community played around them, crystalised and made visible fundamental aspects of Burn culture – that we are a culture of creation, not consumption; that radical creative expression and deep participation require hard work and communal effort; that the process is as important as the final product; that AfrikaBurn invites and encourages each of us to move beyond our comfort zone and that risk can result in failure to manifest the plan … and to remind us that the only real failure is to fail to try.

While these are important considerations, we must acknowledge the discomfort this caused across the board - to the community, the artists, and the site teams.

The conspicuous plug and play village also caused much discomfort, shocking and offending many. These turnkey camps rob their participants of experiencing the full depth and texture of a Burn, and attempt to commodify something that holds to a principle of decommodification, presenting a real and direct threat to the culture of AfrikaBurn. But they also present us with a wonderful opportunity to course-­correct, and we have been working to identify red flags and define steps for intervention in the registration process and on site.

By far the biggest curveball was the toilet situation. Despite increasing the number of toilets on site and reducing the ratio of humans per loo, the toilets were pretty much a shit-­show this year. This was the result of an unfortunate confluence - teething problems with a new supplier, mechanical failure of one of the pump trucks, and the outbreak of gastrointestinal illness that struck the community midway through the event. While airborne viruses were the root cause of the illness, personal hygiene is a key factor in minimizing the risk of exposure and reducing the spread of disease, and this will be underscored in an awareness drive for next year’s event.

The R355 lies outside of the event footprint, but it is the main artery into Tankwa Town, and the fatal accident that occurred on it on Monday 1 May affected the community deeply.

We have redoubled our efforts at securing traffic support from the Northern and Western Cape and are exploring partnering with the provinces on the installation of additional formal road signs, an improved communications network, and strategic interventions to more effectively support traffic safety on ingress and exodus.

The AfrikaBurn community have contributed generously to the fund for the ongoing support of Tinarwo’s widow and daughter, and Ainord’s recovery, and AfrikaBurn has matched that amount.

Airspace faced a number of challenges this year, amplified by a significantly increased amount of air traffic to the event, and careful thought is being given to the strategy around air as a means of accessing the event.

While it can be argued that flying in can support the facilitation of turnkey camping, it cannot be assumed that all who fly in want to plug and play. There are also notable benefits - the reduced traffic on the R355, fewer cars on site so more space for camping, the emergency flight support offered by many of the pilots to help people in need get off site, and the fact that the income derived from landing fees helps offset the cost of infrastructure required in order to have aero-­medical support.

There were also notable successes this year. A focus on Rangers, EMS processes, and community health support stood us in good stead to hold the community and the space as we hit these event wobblies head on.

Ranger Council’s intensive work for an extended period of time ahead of the event not only ensured that Rangers on site this year were sufficient in number and appropriately stationed, but also provided an expanded foundation off which the Ranger body (and skilled specialist teams such as Green Dot) can continue to grow and develop in the new cycle and beyond.   
The presence on site of a huge body of skilled Rangers from Burns around the world provided a great opportunity for skills development and in situ training within the AfrikaBurn Rangers. The initiative was an unbridled success and will be rolled out again for 2018, with many of these Rangers committed to returning to AfrikaBurn next year.

Medical support on site was expanded this year under a newly appointed Medical Coordinator, with the aim of providing an integrated community health service to better support the community.

The introduction of a Clinic took pressure off the medics, allowing them to focus more appropriately. This also allowed for better care in the CuddlePod, which was supported by the Clinic nurses and the Sanctuary sitters. A doctor was contracted to provide on site support, in addition to the volunteer support that we’ve had in place to date.

Medical support was further enhanced with a fixed-­wing air ambulance on standby on site over the peak event period, to facilitate emergency medical evacuations within the Golden Hour.

The EMS standard and emergency operating procedures were reviewed and comprehensively revised ahead of the event, integrating EMS and community support responses across all categories of incident. This provided the VOC and Site Managers with a clear and formalized route map to follow, enabling them to handle most situations more swiftly and effectively.

Mutant Patrol came into being this year, responsible for enforcement of DMV regulations on site, and will expand in 2018 to encompass a broader scope of work including the licensing of site and service vehicles, monitoring the behaviour of all vehicles on site, and intercepting where necessary.

The skills exchange (both formal and informal) between AfrikaBurn, Burning Man, and other regionals has continued to flourish, with a number of key team members volunteering their services in support of the AfrikaBurn ops team. Three of AfrikaBurn’s team also spent time shadowing key roles at Black Rock City again this year. And AfrikaBurn team members have shared their expertise and experience to support other smaller burns within South Africa - Aftermath (now in its third year), and Wildeburn (which started this year).

The third artist exchange with Lakes of Fire was almost derailed by US Immigration issues, but ultimately pulled through successfully. We are working with them to bring the applications forward and refine the selection criteria and process. And jointly considering the development of a process manual that could be open-sourced to any Burn to adopt and adapt if they would like to run a similar program.

If the future of burner culture is in the regionals - the offshoots - then these kind of initiatives need nurturing. For this reason AfrikaBurn is supporting burner initiatives in Johannesburg with a R120 000 donation to Jozi Burner Creative Projects to administer in their region on behalf of the AfrikaBurn community.

The same is true for urban projects like Decompression and Streetopia.

Decompression this year was an experimental return-to-source model, with the community invited to generate creative content for a blank canvas in town that ran from day into night. Streetopia applies the same blank canvas model to the streets and village green of Observatory. This community event is primarily funded and driven by AfrikaBurn as it gains traction. We were fortunate to secure R60 000 in funding support from the City of Cape Town for the 2016 event, and raised a further R37 000 from the businesses of Observatory and stall fees.

The third installment is coming up on November 25th. Although we did not manage to secure funding support from the City for this year, they have committed support in kind with safety resources. And we are waiting for the results of an application to the National Lotteries Commission.

The results of the survey conducted with members forms the basis of the draft Resources Mobilisation Policy which guides our decisions in approaching potential funders. And we have created a funding calendar to drive the submission timeline.

Several funding applications were made this cycle - we have pitched to the National Arts Council, Unesco, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, the Department of Arts and Culture and the City of Cape Town. While most of these approaches have yielded little material benefit, the exercise brings us into the funding arena and we learn what the obstacles to our success are. Much of which seems to be primarily a matter of perception around the nature of the Afrikaburnevent, so we’ve begun an engagement drive with the decision-makers. We’ve participated in the City of Cape Town’s Art and Culture Indaba. We’ve made a Cornerstone engagement presentation, exploring internship possibilities. And we’ve begun developing an engagement model for new communities sessions.

We’ve participated in the SA Cultural Observatory with the DAC and started a deeper engagement with the Western Cape Government, which began with the process of evaluating AfrikaBurn’s impact on the province through an Economic Impact Assessment - and we’ve been able to help define with them how this impact is measured, beyond the purely monetary.

With the Creative Survey that went out to all contributors after this year’s event, we have made a first foray into trying to gauge the intrinsic motivation behind AfrikaBurn’s creative contributors and determine the positive individual and social impact beyond the event.

While we recognise the need to pursue additional funding in support of our efforts, the unexpected suspension of the DAC funding at the last minute ahead of this year’s event underscores the importance of self-reliance for our organization.

Internally, AfrikaBurn’s Outreach Committee has worked to formalise the foundations on which it acts for AfrikaBurn, developing a clear mandate outlining what it does, and more clearly defining the areas of activity we support through feedback received from the community survey conducted earlier this year.

A percentage budget has been created for the 7 areas of support identified in the community survey, to support transparency and accountability. The breakdown of a community partnership has prompted us to re-examine our processes and practice, and we are working to define clear objectives and outline a route map for decision-making and action.

Through OutCom partnerships, AfrikaBurn has achieved a considerable amount this year.

We have funded a Grade R teacher for a twelve month cycle at Elandsvlei Primary School.

And provided bursaries and support for two learners at the Calvinia Hoerskool.

We provided emergency support and asistance for school registration and drop offs for learners when their bus failed.

Thirty-six children have received feeding scheme support from supplies gathered during Collexodus and from direct funding support.

The Cart Horse Association and AfrikaBurn visited and supported thirty-eight donkeys, with repeat visits to a further twelve, in two Tankwa Donkey recces.

The collaboration with Pedals for Peace continues, and there has been one bike fixing recce to support the community beneficiaries of this bike recycling program.

AfrikaBurn Outreach assisted the disaster relief efforts at Imizamo Yethu, and provided support to the Garden Route during the fires.

We issued one hundred community tickets to the AfrikaBurn event, in support of economic accessibility and diversity of participation, and are working hard to drive this initiative. Sixty-nine participants received event welfare grants and seventy-three received event transport grants. Three overland trucks were supplied to support Outreach beneficiaries and equipment was purchased.

As part of the Urban Upliftment initiative we assisted with the medical bills for a member of our community, including facilitating a fundraising drive. We have invested in upskilling a new member of our team who was previously homeless. We supported Streetsleeper’s Mandela Day celebration for the City’s homeless. And Streetopia 2016 provided opportunity to fund community artists and to support Straatwerk’s works initiative.

We also awarded Spark Grants for the first time this year - eleven R5 000 grants were paid out to a variety of Burner nominated and Burner proposed projects for activation in the first half of FY18. And two community projects have been supported with surplus funds.

Challenging conduct from within the community has galvanized us to consider ways to align our practice more closely with the principles across all areas of our operations, and has led to the development of foundational policies, procedures and practices. This work is ongoing.

We have been exploring what Inclusivity means in the South African context and considering the challenge of diversity at AfrikaBurn.

We have undertaken an Eco Audit and will develop an internal auditing process so this can be continued annually. We are developing Environmental Goals as a pro-active extension of the Leave No Trace principle, and defining the parameters and objectives of an Ethical Supply Chain.

As you can see, it's been a busy year, and the next looks set to be busier still. We've hit the ground running - you've got to keep moving if you want to be a movement.

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