

# **The DIRT Dad Fund**

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My father, Christopher, has been a cyclist for the greater portion of my life. He lives and breathes cycling. When he isn't talking about cycling, he most likely isn't talking! My relationship to cycling isn't quite the same, but I've had some really unique experiences in life because my dad is a cyclist. Going different places, traveling to states I wouldn't travel to unless I was going to a bike race. Throughout my career as a designer, I've luckily been able to gain experience and practice my skills by doing little projects that had to do with the cycling world.

Most of those projects had to do with the DIRT Dad Fund, directly correlated to the DIRT cycling team. DIRT stands for Dads Inside Riding Trainers. Training, riding, racing, and socializing on a platform called Zwift. Much like an Xbox or a Playstation, riders connect their bicycle to the Zwift "game" via a bluetooth trainer, which collects all the data needed to ride as a character on your screen. Instead of using a controller to play the game, you are the controller! Players are able to interact, train, and compete in a virtual world. Much more safe than riding outside, you not only avoid the elements, but cars are unable to hit you in your basement, or wherever you choose to ride!

The DDF was created during the COVID-19 pandemic as a means to help the less fortunate riders in our community that were struggling with hardships. Raising over \$30,000 in a little over two years, the DDF grants money to those in need. Money is raised through the purchase of branded merchandise, including socks, stickers,

cycling caps, wristbands, and other branded ephemera. Since 2020, the DIRT Dad Fund has granted money to more than 5 DIRT Members in need. Having such an expansive community has its positives. Most people are willing to help their fellow teammates, and they get unique branded merchandise in return!

Approaching my senior year, I was given the task of figuring out what I wanted my senior project to be. Talking to my parents, we asked ourselves a question... What could I do that'd be great for a senior capstone project but also something that I could continue and develop into my professional career?

After a lot of thought and brainstorming, I found my answer. I decided to rebrand the DIRT Dad Fund, creating new sets of logos, typefaces, and relationships that would positively impact the brand. Since the DIRT cycling team was already established, the DDF used elements from the existing cycling team. I felt that the charity should stand alone from the cycling team, but still have a connection.

I explored what it meant to combine and explore the relationship between design and cycling. What kinds of connections can I make through the comparison between design and sport? How could I portray that?

After some struggles and lots of iteration, I successfully created a new identity for the DIRT Dad Fund. The rebrand of the DDF includes new logos: a regular, condensed, and one adapted for social media. My thought process behind the logo changed throughout the year. At first, I went with a totally static image. This didn't

prove to be effective, so I went another way. I constructed a logo that has the sense of forward motion, and a sense of abstraction that tells the viewer that we are a cycling organization, but that we can be much more.

Along with new logos, I chose to use Nunito as the primary typeface. As you can see in this essay, Nunito has a nice organized, friendly, energized feel, aligning with the friendly and energized Zwift and DIRT communities. You won't see a secondary typeface because Nunito contains so many weights that I didn't feel it was necessary to add another. However, I did add a display face. Komika Display felt to be a great way to display titles and headings because it has a hand-written and friendly feel to go along with the DDF. Our colors have always been orange, black and white, and I decided to keep them as such. The DIRT community has known orange since the inception, and I thought it wrong to change that. Along with new logos and type, I mocked up some products with my new logo on them, some included a water bottle, a drawstring bag, and a t-shirt!

After finally finding my way, and creating something that I felt content and confident in, I reflected upon a year's worth of work. How did I get here? How did my love for design start?

After attending an open house at SUNY Cobleskill and speaking to a graphic design professor there, I was hooked on the extremely vast world that could be created through the use of iconography, text, and how they can be arranged to form a

composition. Further inquiring about what I can do to learn more, I talked with my school counselors, and I was put into two graphic design classes, one for each half of my senior year.

During those classes, I learned the basics of Adobe programs such as Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign. After learning more skills and practicing them, I was faced with the daunting challenge of submitting a portfolio to Purchase. I knew I was coming to this school because of lacrosse, so the stress of finding a perfect school was no more. The portfolio for Purchase College had to contain some drawn elements as well as graphic elements, so that was a challenge. Despite that, I went and took a drawing class or two to complete those elements. Along with the class materials we made during the year, I made a few more pieces to round out the portfolio. I submitted it and hoped for the best.

A couple weeks later I received a letter from SUNY Purchase College. With my dad at my side, I opened it, and inside it said that I had been accepted to the Graphic Design BFA. We both broke down in tears. He congratulated me and that is where I took my next steps to becoming the designer I always wanted to be.

Coming to Purchase College, my skills were definitely put to the test when it came to classes and I felt outshined throughout my college career. My classmates all seemed so brilliant, having much more artistic skill than me and more experience. Where I felt that I excelled was at typography studies, and at making organized,

formatted work. You might not see me making a digital drawing, or a totally intricate photoshop document, but I could format a page at a level that I thought was really good. Later in my schooling I focused more on my physical artistic skill rather than my skills on the Adobe Suite, becoming what I'd like to think as a more well rounded and artistic designer.

Gathering all my skills, I started to work on my senior project. The DDF was already established, but the logo and iconography didn't stand alone. It was the same as that of the DIRT cycling team. So, I figured it'd be a great idea to make new logos that the DDF can use.

This was most definitely a challenge. I had developed a brand and made logos, icons and a brand guideline before during school, but nothing like this. Changing the identity of this charity, and then needing it to be approved by the five board members was a nerve wracking journey.

A long process of iteration took place, starting with a victorian style bust icon wearing a cycling helmet, along with some type. That evolved, becoming cleaner and having multiple type lockups that I thought worked. Then came my senior year mid-term review. I felt great about my work going in. I felt that a person wearing a cycling helmet with some cool text below it would be acceptable, but my professors and critics didn't agree with me. They told me that my first logo didn't work because it didn't have elements of motion or sport, two key themes that I was trying to portray

through this rebrand. I was told to scrap that idea and to make something different. That critique came as a detriment to my morale and motivation, because I felt that a whole semester's worth of work was for nothing.

A few weeks before Christmas break, my dad went on a bike ride outdoors with his buddies and crashed on a slick patch of pavement. He was rushed to the hospital and suffered some injuries, mostly bad road rash. I was there to take care of him, as I have been all the other times he's crashed. Now I see why he's such a fan of riding and racing in the basement.

Confused and questioning if this should be part of my project, and struggling with low motivation, I consulted my parents and my advisor Ben. Ben thought that it'd be a great idea and a great twist to include elements of the bike crash in the project, because it is directly related. My parents felt differently. They believed that if I wanted to continue to work and develop this brand in the future, adding a bike crash element to it wasn't going to fit in. I agreed, and felt that it was best to only work on the DDF brand.

Fresh off the disappointment of my senior year mid-term review, my struggles with motivation and morale only got worse. My procrastination was at an all time high, and my communication with my advisor was almost nonexistent. I only did work when I really had to do work, and a turning point came when I received a positive critique from my senior project advisor, Ben, about that week's most recent work. He told me

that the idea of putting the logo into a container was a good way to go, but gave me positive feedback on what I could do better. That really changed my journey. I realized that the work I was doing was good, and I just needed to see that myself. I really appreciate my incredibly patient and understanding advisor Ben for staying by my side and nudging me in the right direction. Without him and his support I wouldn't have finished this project, or this essay.

My rebrand of the DIRT Dad Fund will positively impact the charity and the entities connected to it. The newest edition of the DDF logo has a more sleek and modern feel, with elements that create motion and allude to sport through geometric shapes and different relationships. In the future, products will be designed with my logos, and the DDF will continue to become a household name in the cycling world.

Also in the very near future, my father will be riding across the country, from San Francisco, CA to Port Jefferson, NY, to raise money for the DIRT Dad Fund. He will be selling t-shirts with the new branding and taking pledges for every mile he rides. This ride across the USA will raise awareness for the DDF through blog and social media posts.

During this project, I've learned many valuable lessons. Some of which I'll share. I learned that I should always be confident in myself and my work. Even if the response isn't what I planned, it's still an opportunity to evolve and change that work to make it even better. Something else I've learned is that you should always communicate with

those who are trying to help you, even if you don't know how to help yourself. I received help from many people during my project and during my graphic design journey, all of those made me the artist I am today. Completing this capstone project gave me a better sense of myself. I now have more confidence in myself as a designer, and I am looking forward to what my future holds.

Together, graphic design and cycling can work, and work well. The geometric forms and natural relationships work together with type and hierarchy to make a convincing and interesting system. Design can be anything I want it to be, and in this case, design and cycling come together to make my new DIRT Dad Fund.