

Beverley Taylor Sorenson Official Biography

Beverley Taylor Sorenson is a tireless champion of both the arts and education. In addition to raising eight children of her own, Mrs. Sorenson has influenced the lives of thousands of Utah elementary students through her passionate commitment and generous contributions. Mrs. Sorenson's personal experiences drive her priorities and philanthropic efforts. Her childhood was marked by the Great Depression, which taught the value of hard work, sacrifice and love. Despite challenges, the Taylor family home was filled with literature, music and dance. At age eight, she became the first piano student of her oldest sister, Virginia. She learned ballet from Pete Christensen, the uncle of Bill Christensen who later founded Ballet West. At 13, she began performing with her sisters. Throughout junior high and high school years, she earned clothes money and tuition for her upcoming college education by playing piano accompaniment for the Jean Renae Ballet School.

Ever industrious, Mrs. Sorenson worked her way through an education degree at University of Utah by sorting mail six hours a day after school. She graduated in 1945 and taught kindergarten at a Quaker school in Brooklyn. While in New York, she met James LeVoy Sorenson, who would later become a biotechnology pioneer, and whom she would marry.

Today, Mrs. Sorenson holds honorary doctorate degrees from Southern Utah University and Salt Lake Community College.

For many years, Mrs. Sorenson has been concerned about the lack of arts education in Utah schools—particularly elementary schools. As a member of the University of Utah College of Fine Arts advisory board, she discovered a lack of resources dedicated to teacher training in arts education and little funding for school-based arts programs.

A catalyzing event occurred in 1995 during her visit to Lincoln Elementary in Salt Lake, a Title I school in one of the city's roughest neighborhoods. There, she saw the dramatic effect a high-quality arts program was having on children. She saw art create connections between students of different cultures, religions and economic backgrounds. Mrs. Sorenson learned from the teachers and principal how arts education decreased behavior problems, fostered cooperation and self-esteem, and increased student learning in core subjects. She also saw how the benefits spilled over to families and the community by bringing people together.

This experience, coupled with concern for her grandson who was struggling in school, motivated Mrs. Sorenson to dedicate her time and resources to developing Art Works for Kids. She and a small team of professional arts educators began with just six schools and a K-2 program. Thirteen years later, the organization has helped educate more than 100,000 children throughout Utah.

Mrs. Sorenson and her husband, who passed away in Jan. 2008, have always been ardent supporters of the arts and education through the Sorenson Legacy Foundation and other philanthropic efforts. In addition to serving students and schools directly, Mrs. Sorenson has been a public advocate for high-quality arts education, encouraging state legislators to return art to all elementary school classrooms. In 2002, she secured public funds to expand the number of schools Art Works for Kids served. When lawmakers stopped funding the program after only one year due to budget shortfalls, Mrs. Sorenson fully funded it herself.

In 2008, she witnessed a major milestone as the legislature passed the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program, allocating \$16 million toward arts specialists in classrooms, funding higher education teacher training programs, paying for art supplies and equipment, and supporting research to ensure high-quality implementation and solid results. Today, this initiative supports arts education in more than 50 elementary schools around the state.

Mrs. Sorenson is a catalyst, bringing together arts and educational entities and fostering strong relationships between the state's four largest universities. Through a series of grants and endowments, she has helped fund arts education programs at the University of Utah, Southern Utah University, Utah State University and Brigham Young University. A recent gift to University of Utah will be the foundation for constructing the interdisciplinary Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts and Education Complex on campus. A principal goal of the new facility will be to research and develop teaching methods that integrate arts education into the traditional core curriculum subjects of math, science, history and language.

Mrs. Sorenson continues to work with parents, educators, and business and community leaders to fulfill her dream of returning arts education to the curriculum of every elementary school in Utah, thereby providing a sequential, joyful arts education for each child.