

A Path Beyond the Playground: Wesley and Lorinda Mortensen's Gift for Outdoor Learning at Edith Bowen Laboratory School

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The Mortensen Family

When Wesley and Lorinda Mortensen considered how they might give back to Utah State University, the place where their story began and where their children's stories are still unfolding, the answer came as naturally as a walk through Logan Canyon: they would invest in outdoor education for elementary-aged children.

The Mortensens, both proud USU alumni and parents of five children, recently established the [Wesley and Lorinda Mortensen Outdoor Education Endowment Fund](#) at Utah State University's [Edith Bowen Laboratory School](#). Their generous gift includes [purchasing a dedicated mini bus](#) to support field experiences for students and [an endowment](#) that will ensure outdoor experiential learning thrives at Edith Bowen for generations to come.

"We just genuinely love the outdoors and believe it's one of the most powerful ways for children to learn and discover," said Lorinda, an educator who earned her bachelor's degree from USU in family and consumer sciences education and a state teaching certificate in 2002. "When I was young, I had the freedom to explore the mountains, but not every child gets that experience at home. That's why it's so important to make it part of the school day."

Wesley, a 2001 USU graduate with a bachelor's degree in biology, who later earned his medical degree from the University of Utah and now serves as an anesthesiologist

at Logan Regional Hospital, is also an Edith Bowen alum. He fondly recalls the school not only for its strong academic foundation, but for sparking a lifelong curiosity and deep reverence for the natural world.

"We had the opportunity to take our children outside as often as we could," he said. "But today, technology grips more tightly on our culture. The outdoors provides a beautiful synergy between capitalism and environmentalism — you can teach stewardship, agriculture, geometry, statistics, poetry, and environmental science. You can learn anything outside."

Their children's experiences at Edith Bowen reinforced those beliefs. Lorinda shared a recent story about their sixth grader, who went fishing twice in one week with his class, using flies he tied himself.

"To see his classmates catch fish, who'd never had that experience before, it was beautiful," Lorinda said. "It's the difference between taking a deep breath outside and one in a classroom. There's healing in sunlight and fresh air." The Mortensens' support goes beyond the bus that now carries students into canyons, marshlands, and fields. Their endowment ensures the program's future is secure, reducing the need for teachers and administrators to constantly seek funding for essential hands-on learning.

"We've seen how hard Eric Newell, the director of experiential education, and all the teachers work to prioritize these experiences," Lorinda said. "We thought, what if they didn't have to worry about how to pay for it? What if we could take that weight off their already full plates so they could keep doing what they're so good at?" Wesley added that Edith Bowen, and, in particular, Eric Newell, have created a culture and system that will last for generations.

"We wanted to help build a foundation under it so it's not just something that's nice-to-have, it's here to stay," Wesley said.

Wesley built a successful career in medicine, and Lorinda, though trained in education, devoted her life to raising their children. Together, they understand how transformative learning experiences can shape a life — in the classroom, the clinic, outdoors, and at home.

"This model of education speaks to the whole child," Wesley said. "It addresses emotional health, academic success, physical well-being — all of it. Who doesn't want that for children?"

Lorinda echoed that vision.

"You don't have to choose between experiential learning, the arts, and rigorous academics," Lorinda said. "Edith Bowen proves you can have all three and still pass the tests. We've seen it firsthand."

Their hope is that their gift inspires others to think bigger about what education can look like — and who it can reach.

"To anyone considering supporting early education or outdoor learning: do it," Lorinda said. "There's a widespread, positive impact. Especially at a place like Edith Bowen, where future teachers are trained. The ripple effects go far beyond a single classroom."

That passion for early education and experiential learning is what led the Mortensens to go a step further. The [couple are matching any donations made to the endowment](#).

"We've already donated enough to purchase the bus, and we'll match what others give up to a certain amount," Wesley added. "Let's double the impact."

Their hope is that this support continues to grow, and not just financially. They want others to feel the same sense of purpose and possibility that inspired their gift.

In the end, for the Mortensens, the motivation is simple.

"Outdoor education helps children grow into people who understand the world around them," Lorinda said. "It teaches them that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door."

Wesley agreed, adding, "It teaches them that the outdoors is not just a place you visit, it's part of who you are."

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