

# 2009 ICFAD Arts Achievement and Excellence Recipient

## Beverley Taylor Sorenson - *Founder* - Art Works for Kids



Beverley Taylor Sorenson is a tireless champion of both the arts and education. In addition to raising eight children of her own, Beverley has influenced the lives of thousands of Utah elementary students through her passionate commitment and generous contributions.

Beverley's personal experiences drive her priorities and philanthropic efforts. Her childhood was marked by the Great Depression, which taught her the value of hard work, sacrifice and love. Despite the challenges, the Taylor home was filled with good literature, music and dance. At age eight, Beverley became the first piano student of her oldest sister, Virginia. She learned ballet from Pete Christensen, the uncle of the future founder of Ballet West Bill Christensen. At 13, Beverley began performing with her sisters. Through her junior high and high school years, Beverley earned money for clothing and her future college education by playing accompaniment for the Jean Renae Ballet School.

Ever industrious, Beverley worked her way through a degree and teaching certificate at the University of Utah sorting mail six hours a day after school. After graduating in 1945, she worked as a kindergarten teacher at a Quaker school in Brooklyn, New York, where she met the man she would eventually marry, biotechnology pioneer James LeVoy Sorenson. She also holds honorary doctorate degrees from Southern Utah University and Salt Lake Community College.

Beverley and her husband have been ardent supporters of both the arts and education through the family's Legacy Foundation, and in other philanthropic efforts.

For many years, Beverley 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 recognized both the lack of resources dedicated to teacher training in arts education, and lack of legislative funding for school-based arts programs.

A catalyzing event occurred in 1995 during a visit Beverley made to Lincoln Elementary School in Salt Lake City. During the visit, she saw the dramatic impact a quality visual arts program was having on children in the most troubled school in the area. She saw first-hand the bridges that art created among students of different cultures, religions and economic backgrounds. Beverley heard from the teachers and principal how the arts decreased behavior problems, increased cooperation and self-esteem, and increased learning. She also heard how these benefits spilled over into families and the surrounding community to bring people closer together.

This experience, coupled with a very personal concern for a grandson who was struggling in school, motivated Beverley to dedicate her time and resources to launching Art Works for Kids. She and a small team of professional arts educators started with just six schools and a K-2 program. Thirteen years later, the organization has impacted more than 90,000 children throughout the state.

In addition to serving students and schools directly, Beverley continues to be a tireless advocate for quality arts education. For years, she has lobbied lawmakers to put the arts back in elementary school classrooms. In 2002, she secured public funds to help expand the number of schools Art Works for Kids could serve. When the lawmakers stopped funding the program after just one year due to budget shortfalls, Beverley stepped in and fully funded it herself.

In 2008, Beverley experienced a major milestone when the Utah State Legislature funded the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program. Based on the Art Works for Kids integrated teaching model, this program places art specialists in more than 50 elementary schools across the state, provides teacher training programs, and supports ongoing research to ensure quality implementation and results. Additionally, Beverley has created the advocacy group Friends of Art Works for Kids to increase awareness and garner continued community support for arts education initiatives.

Beverley continues to be a catalyst in bringing together arts and educational entities throughout the state by fostering strong relationships between the state's top four 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. The most recent gift to the U of U will be fundamental in constructing the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts and Education Complex. A principal goal of the new interdisciplinary educational complex will be to research and facilitate teaching methods for integrating arts education into traditional core curriculum subjects such as math, science, history and language arts.

Today, Beverley continues to work with public and private entities, parents, educators, and business and community leaders toward realizing her dream of bringing sequential joyful learning through the arts to every single elementary school child in Utah.