A five-hour drive north of Salt Lake City and seemingly a century away is a stunning valley located north and east of the Continental Divide along the Montana-Idaho border. Centennial Valley contains the largest wetlands complex in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, complete with rivers, alpine meadows, and wildlife. Nestled in the heart of the valley is an old ghost town called Lakeview, which has turned out to be a true treasure and a magnificent gift to education.

Thanks to the extraordinary generosity of John and Melody Taft, and Bill and Sandi Nicholson, who bought and renovated the entire town, Lakeview is now a new home for University of Utah education: The Taft-Nicholson Environmental Humanities Education Center.

The Tafts and Nicholsons, both landowners in Centennial Valley, shared a vision of preserving its unique ecosystem while educating future leaders with an ethic and understanding of the environment. Together they brought about the multi-million dollar restoration of the abandoned ghost town—a process that has taken more than 12 years to complete—in the hope it could serve as the educational center they envisioned.

“Lakeview was a disaster,” notes Melody Taft. “And it’s at the heart of this very sacred valley.” She didn’t want to see the ruin and abuse continue. Her husband John says that in the beginning, he had no great plan for the town. He just knew he had to do something. “I find a challenge in building,” he says. “I love it. I’ve done it for years in one form or
Education Center Cont.

another.” So together they started, bit by bit, and the project took on a life of its own.

Three years ago, the Tafts and Nicholsons entered into a partnership with the U’s College of Humanities to establish the Environmental Humanities Education Center, a unique education venue that quickly became self-sustaining and now attracts students from across Utah and Montana. The center hosts workshops, research activities, private events and retreats, literary and environmental educational classes, meditation classes, and artist residencies.

The success gave the Tafts and Nicholsons confidence that the University would be good stewards of their vision, and this past fall they gave the entire town to the University—16 beautifully landscaped acres and 24 fully renovated and furnished buildings, including a dorm, private cabins, meeting spaces, and a cantina. The gift was celebrated at a gala held at Red Butte Garden.

The Tafts and Nicholsons have built a center that provides an enhanced educational experience, preparing students to face a changing world head-on. “We want to provide a transformative experience for our students at this center, and translate theory into practice,” says Robert Newman, dean of the College of Humanities.

The Taft’s and Nicholson’s vision is now being realized as the University of Utah takes ownership of the legacy created by these amazing people who brought an old ghost town to life. “Our world is in trouble,” says Melody Taft, “and this place gives people their souls back.”

A Century of Piano at the U

For 100 years the University of Utah has been preparing piano students for professional careers in performance, musical accompaniment, and teaching as Utah’s premier center for piano education. The U is commemorating this legacy with a centennial campaign focused on increasing resources to ensure student success. With a goal to raise $100,000 by spring, the one-year campaign for the piano is part of a larger five-year effort to raise $500,000 to ensure that the next century remains as successful as the last for the School of Music.

The areas of greatest need include scholarships, K-12 outreach programs, and educational enrichment experiences.

Scholarships

The rigors of practice make it difficult for piano majors to work while in school. With in-state tuition above $8,000 a year for music majors, scholarships are needed to support students and allow them to complete their degree in a reasonable time.

K-12 Outreach

Through its programs for children, the Piano Area develops not only piano proficiency, but also broader life skills including discipline, focus, and goal achievement. A decade-long partnership between the U and the Salt Lake City School District employs U students to teach piano in Title 1 schools, which have high percentages of students from families living in poverty. Research has shown that music instruction helps students improve in core academic subjects, including math and reading, while helping prevent behavior and truancy problems.

Educational Enrichment

Master classes with world-class artists travel to international competitions, and solo recitals on
Century of Piano Cont.

the symphony stage offer extraordinary opportunities to prepare students for the competition they will face as performing artists.

The U’s internationally trained piano faculty offer diverse instruction and preparation for performance. (The U is the only school in the state to offer a doctoral degree in piano performance.) In addition, the U is one of only 135 all-Steinway educational institutions in the world, meeting Steinway’s rigorous standards of quality and excellence. As part of an all-Steinway university, the School of Music offers some of the finest performance pianos and facilities in the country.

One additional aspect of the program includes an annual international piano festival, which is held on campus each summer, giving participants the opportunity to fine-tune their skills by participating in classes and learning from prominent teachers and concert pianists. The festival’s challenging program prepares participants for a final piano competition at which winners receive cash prizes.

“Our history of dedicated faculty, innovative teaching, community partnerships, and leadership opportunities for students has produced graduates who have become outstanding piano performers and teachers, well-prepared for careers in music and leadership roles in their communities.”

—Susan Duehlmeier Piano Area Chair

Recent Major Gifts

We thank the following supporters for their generous gifts received between October 1, 2013 and December 31, 2013.

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Go Girlz Introduces Young Women to Higher Education

Young girls’ minds are full of fancy—maybe they daydream about the latest fashions, pop bands, or shopping at the mall. A U program is adding to those dreams by showing how the opportunity of a college education can be part of any young girl’s future. Young women who otherwise might not consider going to college are broadening their horizons by participating in the Go Girlz Community Initiative.

Developed in 2004 by the Women’s Resource Center at the U, Go Girlz has a goal to target underserved female students in grades six to 12 in the Salt Lake City School District and give them early exposure to higher education. Many of the recruits include minority, first-generation, and economically disadvantaged students.

Go Girlz received initial support from the U’s Office of Student Affairs, and then grants started coming in. With generous support from the Lawrence T. & Janet T. Dee Foundation and the Hemingway Foundation, Go Girlz in 2013 expanded to 75 the number of students it reaches each year. Support from University Neighborhood Partners this past year allowed the program to have its first full-time coordinator.

During the school year, the coordinator meets 12 times with each school cohort and provides programming to address self-esteem issues, study skills, classroom behavior, creative projects supporting personal growth, and other types of activities that are meant to guide the girls toward an understanding of what preparing and pursuing higher education involves.

Female college students from the U serve as mentors, often sharing their experiences, such as personal choices and study habits they developed to prepare themselves for higher education. The program strives to provide role models who can reflect back to the young girls their socio-economic and racial profile. Some classes will have primarily African American girls, and others might be Latina and/or Pacific Islander students. Regardless of the makeup of the cohort, mentors are recruited who can relate directly to the students.

“As of fall 2013, we have graduated six Go Girlz from the University of Utah and have 27 former Go Girlz students currently enrolled here,” says Debra Daniels, director of the Women’s Resource Center. “We see the Go Girlz program as an early intervention and early recruitment effort to address not only the goal of educating young women who have historically fallen through the cracks of public education, but also to address the stated goal of the University of Utah to recruit and retain women and minority students.”

A survey of Go Girlz students this past year shows an increase in their school involvement, more confidence in their academic ability, and more certainty that they will attend college since participating in the program.
John R. Park: A Legacy of Giving

John R. Park was born in 1833 and raised in Tiffin, Ohio. He graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University, taught school for a year or two, and then attended medical school, receiving his degree from New York University in 1857. He returned to his home town to begin practicing medicine and also took up teaching again. Park became head of the grammar school in Tiffin and later taught zoology and anatomy at Ohio Wesleyan.

In 1860, he decided to leave the medical field to follow his three brothers, who had set out to seek gold in California. On his way west, he stopped in Utah in 1861 and ended up staying. He settled in Draper, joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and became a teacher at what is now called the Draper Park School (listed in 1890 on the National Register of Historic Places).

The University of Deseret, the predecessor to the University of Utah, was opened first as a business college. The school became so popular, and the demands of the students were so varied, that it was decided to establish it as a university in the true sense of the word. The University of Deseret was reopened as a university in September 1869, with John R. Park as president. Chosen by the university’s board of regents, Park served as president for 23 years, from 1869 to 1892, the longest tenured president in the history of the University of Utah. At the end of his tenure, the name of the school was changed to the University of Utah and discussions were initiated to move the campus to the east bench of Salt Lake City.

Park was one of the U’s earliest benefactors, and when he died in 1900, he left his entire fortune, including his library, to the University of Utah.

That same spirit lives on today. Much like Park, the University is fortunate to have many friends and benefactors who have made provisions for the University in their estate plans. More than two decades ago, the University of Utah established the John R. Park Society, which pays tribute to Park for his leadership, foresight, and generosity, and to all those who carry on this particular tradition of philanthropy at the University. The John R. Park Society members support the U’s mission through charitable bequests, life income plans, insurance gifts, charitable trusts, retirement assets, and other planned gifts. Through their generosity, John R. Park Society members demonstrate how one generation can provide a legacy of support for generations to come.

According to his last will and testament, Park’s gift was used to establish two endowments, both of which are still in place today. First, The Park Library of American History and Literature is used for the purchase and maintenance of a library. Second, The John R. Park Teaching Fellowship enables graduate students and/or others employed as teachers by the University to spend one semester pursuing courses of study at educational institutions abroad or outside the University. The 2012-13 recipients of the teaching fellowship include Darby Lorraine Fanning, Marriott Library; Colleen Farmer, Department of Biology; and Mira Locher, College of Architecture and Planning.
Advancing Public Health in Ghana
Support from Robert and Lynette Gay expands academic mission of Ensign College

On the outskirts of Kpong, Ghana, a campus is emerging on the bank of the Volta River that will be home to the Ensign College of Public Health. The University of Utah, along with its longtime partner in Ghana, the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, is working with this developing institution to help guide the expansion of the campus and the design of academic and administrative programming. With generous support from Lynette and Robert Gay, Ensign College is developing into a world-class academic institution designed to advance public health in Ghana and throughout West Africa. Partnering with Ensign College also represents a new level of involvement by the University of Utah in West Africa.

Under the guidance of Lynette Gay, Stephen Alder, who serves as chief of the University of Utah Division of Public Health, is working closely with longtime collaborator and fellow Ensign College trustee Tsiri Agyeneyega, provost of Kwame Nkrumah University Health Sciences, to establish this college as a world-class academic institution, committed to producing impact-driven scholarship that will contribute to global knowledge for community health development and developing workforce resources to improve health in the region. Ensign College also has engaged other prominent individuals in the fields of public health, medicine, and global development, including Dr. DeVon Hale, assistant dean of the U’s School of Medicine’s International Medical Education, to aid this development process. Working with Dr. Christopher Tetteh, inaugural dean of Ensign College, the team assembled by the Gays is committed to creating an academic institution that will join organizations worldwide that are leading unprecedented progress in global health development.

The formal partnership forged between the University of Utah and the Ensign College of Public Health during the development phase of this institution is now transitioning into a long-term relationship. This will provide new opportunities for faculty and students from both institutions to work together to accelerate the development and use of scholarly knowledge to create healthier, more prosperous communities in places as diverse as Kpong and Salt Lake City. Under the guidance of Dr. Vivian Lee, senior vice president for health sciences, and Michael Hardman, the U’s newly-appointed chief global engagement officer, the link to Ensign College is adding another facet to the University of Utah’s global presence envisioned by its president, David Pershing.
In the pursuit of higher education, many young people are unable to reach their goals because of the high cost of a college degree. The University of Utah’s National Advisory Council has established the NAC Utah Promise Scholarship to support undergraduates, while helping the U meet its obligation to provide all students access to quality higher education, regardless of socio-economic status. For its first year, the NAC has raised $50,000 in order to award five students $3,000 each year over eight semesters of study or until graduation, whichever occurs first. We invite you to meet the inaugural group—the 2013 NAC Utah Promise Scholars.

Brittney Bates
Born and raised in Utah, Brittney, has wanted to attend the U since she was a little girl. Both her grandparents worked on campus, and her uncle was a U student. A graduate of Woods Cross High School, Brittney is now a freshman at the U. Her involvement with the Bennion Center has helped expand her opportunities in the community and she plans to continue her association there. “I love the act of service and I want to look back in five years and say my college years were my best years.” Brittney plans to graduate in 2017 and then go into the nursing program with a focus on pediatric nursing.

Natalia Paola Colón Medina
Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Natalia used to go with her grandfather to an assisted living center to visit her grandmother, who suffered from Alzheimer’s disease. “I was fascinated by the idea that I might change a person’s life by helping or nurturing those who need it most,” says Natalia. “So when I applied to the U, I had one goal in mind—to be accepted into the nursing program.” Natalia hopes to graduate in 2017 and continue her education to become a registered nurse. She takes classes in human anatomy and biology, is involved in the LEAP program, and works as an office assistant in the School of Medicine.

Malia Talley
Malia grew up in Vallejo, California, and higher education is a priority for her. “My parents always reminded my siblings and me that we need to go to college to have a stable career so we won’t have to struggle with money anymore,” she says. She moved to Utah, graduated from Ogden High School, and is now at the U, where she plans to major in biology. She also wants to participate with the Bennion Center, and increase her extracurricular activities to improve her resume. Then she wants to apply to medical school and hopes to become a doctor. She considers the NAC scholarship “a blessing.”

Brooks Conway
Brooks comes from a family where college was desired, but never attained. “My parents didn’t go to college and both of my siblings dropped out of high school at a young age,” she says. “Seeing the struggles they have had to face makes me want to push myself to become something for them.” Brooks reluctantly applied for student loans, concerned about how she would pay them back. When she learned of the NAC scholarship, she was able to cancel her loans. “I have never felt so thankful in my life. Without the scholarship, I don’t know if I would be attending college today.” Brooks wants to graduate with a degree in film and says, “I want to show that no matter what the obstacles, college is attainable.”

David Taylor
A graduate of Highland High School in Salt Lake City, where he was on the rugby team, David is now a freshman at the U and hopes to join the U’s club team next year. David works out at the Field House—his favorite building on campus—nearly every day, and plans to major in either finance or video game design and development. “College is important because it can help a new generation bring some ethics to the current economy and political realm,” he says. When he learned he had received an NAC Promise Scholarship, he was surprised. “Once I went to the scholarship office to receive more details on the matter, I was ecstatic!”

Major Gifts cont.

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Phonathon is Going Strong

The University of Utah phonathon crew has been reaching out to alumni since the early 1980s, and although computers have replaced rotary dial phones and the scale of the program has grown, the mission has stayed constant. The primary goal is to connect students with alumni—the students provide campus updates, and enjoy hearing stories about campus life from the different generations of alumni. A second goal is fundraising for the U.

Today the phonathon program employs more than 65 undergraduate students representing all areas of campus. For many of them, this is more than a position to help pay tuition—they have a passion for the U and a desire to share their enthusiasm with others.

Last fiscal year was record-breaking, as pledges were secured from 9,300 individuals totaling $865,000 in commitments. Thanks to many of you, the phonathon program is on track for another record-breaking year. Thank you for taking the time to speak with a student when you are called, and for sharing your campus experience.