

Wayne's World

Dad Joins His Children at U of I Where They Play Together on the Esports Team

Wayne Ebenroth interpreted “Vandal Family” literally.

Ebenroth will complete his accounting degree at University of Idaho in Spring 23, graduating a year after his oldest daughter and a few years before his two youngest children.

He did have to ask permission from his children to tag along on their college experience.

“I’m thankful I have the kind of relationship with my kids that when I said, ‘Hey, can I go to school with you?’ they say, ‘Yeah, sure. Sounds fun,’” Ebenroth said. “Not every parent is lucky enough to have that type of relationship.”

Unfinished Business



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— Wayne Ebenroth, accounting senior

In 2019, Ebenroth’s two oldest children were planning to follow their friends north and transfer from the College of Western Idaho to U of I. Ebenroth, on the other hand, was in the middle of applying for project management jobs. Despite having seven years of work experience in the field, he couldn’t land an interview.

“This return to school is me dealing with unfinished business,” Ebenroth said. “It bothered me for a long time that I’d never finished college. Career-wise, I was running into roadblocks. An opportunity presented itself to follow my kids to college, and it seemed like the right time to check that box.”

When Ebenroth arrived at U of I from Boise, he moved in with his son Wayne Ebenroth Jr. and daughter Becca Ebenroth '22, who now works at SEL as a web designer specializing in user experience design.

“It was awesome because we needed another roommate anyways. I thought it was kind of fun,” said Becca, who majored in studio art design. “I was really excited for him because he tried to go back to college off and on over the years. Getting his degree is something he always wanted to do.”

Ebenroth's fourth child, River Ebenroth, is also on campus as a freshman art student, and his youngest, Elliot Ebenroth, started at U of I in Spring 2023 in computer science.

“A typical 18-year-old would be like, ‘Ah, that's lame,’ but it's been really fun,” Becca said. “Most of my siblings have colored hair so he let me dye his hair green for a while. One of my senior studio classmates ran into him and she knew immediately that he was my dad because he had green hair. Then, I'd bring him to my Dungeons and Dragons game every week and all my friends love him and think he's so cool.”

Upon graduating, Ebenroth plans to begin work on his master's in accounting at U of I and pursue a career in tax planning and preparation, giving him the opportunity to stay near his children while they finish school.



Wayne Ebenroth plays Yoshi, King K. Rool or Banjo and Kazooie when competing at Super Smash Bros Ultimate, a one-on-one character fighting game by Nintendo.

New Game+

Ebenroth wasn't satisfied simply getting his degree at age 48. He wanted the college experience.

In Fall 2021, U of I started its first competitive esports team, where multiple players compete in video games in front of an audience. Ebenroth, who grew up gaming, wanted in.

He previously competed locally in Super Smash Bros Ultimate, a one-on-one character fighting game by Nintendo. But the coronavirus pandemic taught Ebenroth that he really appreciated gaming in person. So, in 2022, he started a second esports team for Smash Bros. By Thanksgiving, the squad was getting into its groove competing nationally against other university teams.

“We are to the point that we are scouting the opponent to come up with a strategy for who would make the best matchups,” Ebenroth said. “We’ve shifted from ‘How do we do this?’ to ‘How do we win?’”

Loading a New Game

Esports Team Provides Community and Job Skills

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Prior to coming to U of I, his knowledge of the video game industry waned as adult responsibilities took over. But Becca schooled him on the furiously growing industry. She wrote a paper for a college English class detailing why esports should be in the Olympics.

“It was the silliest thing I’d ever heard. You couldn’t put video games in the Olympics,” Ebenroth said. “And then I read her paper. She had plenty of information where I was like, ‘All right, this actually makes sense.’”

His interest reignited, Ebenroth jumped back into the gaming world.

Now he plays Yoshi, King K. Rool or Banjo and Kazooie against rival schools. He has even had Wayne Jr. and Elliot joining his Smash Bros. team, and the other children stop by as well.

“I enjoy watching the team play, but when I’m seeing one of my kids play, it’s fun to understand how they have matured as a gamer and person,” Ebenroth said. “It’s way more personal to me than watching another student play.”

One of Ebenroth’s previous jobs was running an event company, and he will apply those skills to hosting a Northwest College championship Smash Bros. tournament Saturday, April 29. He hopes to convince roughly a dozen regional colleges to join WSU and U of I for the non-league tournament.

“It’s been fun meeting all these young people who are changing the world. They’re bright kids. They’re the future,” Ebenroth said. “I’ve been surprised by how easy it was to fit in and how often I’m inspired by the students I meet.”

Article by [Leigh Cooper](#), University Communications and Marketing.

Photos by [Leigh Cooper](#), University Communications, and [Garrett Britton](#), University Visual Production.

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