

# A Decade of Global Connections: Shigeru Kaneko Visits Utah State University's Outdoor Product Design & Development Program

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Shigeru Kaneko in the Outdoor Recreation Archive

Ten years ago, a small but ambitious program took root at Utah State University with a simple but powerful premise: train the next generation of outdoor industry designers and developers who understand not just the craft of product creation, but the global impact behind it. As the Outdoor Product Design & Development (OPDD) program marks its [10th anniversary](#), no single event has captured the spirit of that mission quite like the recent visit of [Shigeru Kaneko](#) — Chief Buyer at Beams Plus, celebrated collector, and one of the outdoor industry's most quietly influential figures.

Kaneko's visit served as the culminating event of the anniversary year, a fitting bookend to twelve months of celebration, reflection, and forward momentum. For students in the program, it was far more than a guest lecture. It was a window into how the outdoor industry reverberates far beyond any single trail or trailhead — reaching into the fashion capitals of the world, the archives of history, and the pages of collectors' books that document the gear that shaped a culture.

## The Expedition Club Comes to Campus

Which Kaneko and the Outdoor Recreation Archive first connected, nobody would have guessed the relationship would turn into a worldwide tour featuring outdoor gear history. Together with Mizuki Maeda — Beams' PR representative and Kaneko's skilled translator and collaborator — Kaneko has spent years building his personal garment collection and in collaboration with the ORA, took it on the road to share with the world. More than a display of rare garments, the Expedition Club is a living archive of outdoor history, created through a collaboration with the **Outdoor Recreation Archive** and presented alongside historic outdoor catalogs, magazines, and ephemera that tell the story of the industry's evolution.

The exhibition has traveled to some of the most culturally significant cities in the world — [New York City](#), [London](#), [Tokyo](#), [Osaka](#), and [Portland, Oregon](#) — drawing together outdoor enthusiasts, fashion devotees, archivists, and designers who might not otherwise find themselves in the same room. Maeda's role has been indispensable throughout, not only bridging language but helping to shape how the exhibition connects with audiences across vastly different cultural contexts.

When the Expedition Club came to Utah State's campus, students had the rare opportunity to get up close with the garments themselves — handling and examining pieces that represent pivotal moments in outdoor apparel design. For many, it was the first time they had seen this caliber of historic down wear outside of a photograph.

YouTube video player <https://www.youtube.com/embed/eFkRxqCkI5Q?si=D3fifPm-mBNYUdG25603150>

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## A Lecture, a Collection, and a Conversation

Kaneko's lecture drew a full room of students, faculty, and outdoor industry community members eager to hear from someone who has spent a career at the intersection of function, history, and aesthetic. Speaking through Maeda, Kaneko walked the audience through his journey as a collector and buyer — how an eye for technical detail and a deep respect for the heritage of outdoor garments shaped his philosophy at Beams Plus, the American heritage-inspired line of one of Japan's most iconic fashion retailers.

The conversation touched on what separates a garment that endures from one that fades, how the outdoor industry's DNA has woven itself into global fashion culture, and why the preservation of that history matters for those who are designing the next generation of gear.

In a gesture that underscored his generosity and passion for sharing the story of this world, Kaneko brought copies of his book from the *I Am Beams* series — a publication that showcases his extraordinary collection — and distributed them to attendees. For students who are still building their libraries and their eyes for the craft, it was an extraordinary gift.

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## Back to the Archive

No visit from Shigeru Kaneko to Logan would be complete without time at the **Outdoor Recreation Archive**, the USU Special Collections resource that has become a [destination for researchers, designers, and historians](#) drawn to its holdings of outdoor industry catalogs, company records, and related materials. The Archive has been a foundational partner in the Expedition Club project, and Kaneko's return visit gave him the opportunity to dive back into the collection for research connected to upcoming projects.

For OPDD students who work with the Archive as part of their program, seeing a professional of Kaneko's caliber treat it as a genuine research resource — not just a curiosity — reinforced the message faculty have long emphasized: understanding history is not separate from designing the future. It is the foundation of it.

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## Ten Years, and What Comes Next

As the 10th anniversary year closes, the OPDD program looks ahead with a decade of alumni, industry relationships, and educational momentum behind it. The visit of Shigeru Kaneko and Mizuki Maeda — and everything they brought with them — stands as a reminder of how far those roots have already reached, and how much further they can grow.

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### **Beams**

*Beams is one of Japan's most iconic and influential fashion retailers, founded in Tokyo in 1976. Known for its deeply*

*curated approach to style, Beams has spent nearly five decades introducing Japanese audiences to the best of American and European fashion while developing its own distinctive aesthetic that sits at the intersection of heritage, culture, and contemporary design. With a network of shops across Japan and a global reputation among fashion enthusiasts, Beams is as much a cultural institution as it is a retailer — a place where clothes tell stories and curation is considered an art form.*

### **Beams Plus**

*Beams Plus is the American heritage-focused line within the Beams family, dedicated to the workwear, sportswear, and outdoor traditions that defined American style across the 20th century. With an obsessive attention to detail, authentic materials, and a reverence for the original garments that inspire each piece, Beams Plus occupies a unique space in the global menswear landscape — honoring the past while producing work that stands on its own terms. Under the direction of Chief Buyer Shigeru Kaneko, the line has become a touchstone for those who believe that understanding the history of clothing is inseparable from making great clothing.*

### **Outdoor Product Design & Development / Outdoor Recreation Archive**

*The Outdoor Product Design & Development program at Utah State University prepares students for careers in outdoor product design, development, and related fields through a curriculum that integrates technical skills, industry knowledge, and design thinking. The Outdoor Recreation Archive, housed in USU Special Collections, holds one of the premier collections of outdoor industry historical materials in the United States.*