

Theme music ([00:01](#)):

Please listen carefully.

Taylor Pardue ([00:06](#)):

Welcome to the NC State Philanthropy Podcast, telling the world how we Think and Do through the support of our friends, alumni and more. I'm your host, Taylor Pardue. On this episode, we're joined by Heather Tart, NC State's senior director of stewardship, to discuss stewardship and its importance to Wolfpack philanthropy.

Taylor Pardue ([00:45](#)):

Thanks for joining us today, Heather. Just to kick things off, tell everybody a little bit about yourself and how you came to be part of NC State.

Heather Tart ([00:52](#)):

Yeah. Well, first of all, I want to say thank you for having me today. So, I started out in communications. I majored in public relations, actually, from East Carolina University and transitioned after I graduated from college over to Pitt County Schools, which is in Greenville, North Carolina — pretty much right there in the backyard of East Carolina. And I was the public information officer for the school system.

([01:15](#)):

But it, I kind of got to a point in my life where I started thinking about what was next for me and wanting to move back home to be a little bit closer to the family. And so, when I started thinking about making that move, I — I've just, I've always been very passionate about public education, I would say, whether that be in [a] K-12 setting or higher education. And so, when I started thinking about what my next step would be, it just seemed natural that I would look here to NC State.

([01:45](#)):

We've always had many, many fans and advocates of the Wolfpack in our family. My husband actually attended the university, and I've just always been so impressed with the work that's being done here at NC State, its people and its mission. So, it just seemed like a great fit for me.

Taylor Pardue ([02:03](#)):

Sounds great.

Heather Tart ([02:03](#)):

And, actually, this is my 10-year anniversary this week, I will say.

Taylor Pardue ([02:07](#)):

Congratulations.

Heather Tart ([02:07](#)):

I just remembered that this week. This is my 10-year anniversary being here.

Taylor Pardue ([02:11](#)):

That is amazing, yeah.

Heather Tart ([02:11](#)):

Yeah.

Taylor Pardue ([02:12](#)):

How did you first find out about — well, I know the role you're in now, but what did you start out as? Were you in this role for the whole 10 years? Or how did you first ...

Heather Tart ([02:22](#)):

Yes. So, I've been in some variation of it. Our office has evolved tremendously over these last 10 years. We were Development — now, we're Development Communications and Stewardship. We started out as Development Communications and Donor Relations. We were in a different division of [University] Advancement at that time.

([02:41](#)):

And so, there have been, definitely, some transitions. Some parts of our job and the scope of the work that we do has transitioned off of our plate. The new Office of Donor Services was created during that time, or after that transition took place, and then our team kind of evolved out of that, especially with the new campaign being launched — or at that time it was the new campaign — being launched publicly.

([03:02](#)):

And so, I started out as a coordinator, and over the last 10 years, I have just grown and different roles and areas through the office, and now I'm the senior director of stewardship.

Taylor Pardue ([03:17](#)):

So, tell us a little bit about this current role. What all does it involve? And, really, just tell about stewardship in general. I think a lot of people, even in the university ... Philanthropy is pretty easy to understand as far as donors and things like that, but stewardship, where does that go after somebody makes the gift? What does stewardship involve?

Heather Tart ([03:35](#)):

That's a great question. So, our team is a central team of Development Communications and Stewardship. Again, there's two sides to our shop, of course, you being a team member of mine that serves on the Communications side. On the Stewardship side, though, we have three professionals, including myself, that are really dedicated to stewardship at NC State, and we like to say — you've probably heard this term before, but we like to say that we lead and support efforts across the university to help with our overall donor relations program.

([04:06](#)):

So, everything from gift acknowledgements to donor recognition to impact reporting. And in some instances, you know, it will be our team leading the effort or leading the charge in those projects. But then, in some areas and sometimes or occasions, it will actually be us providing support or guidance back out to the colleges and units who are more or less leading those projects.

([04:29](#)):

At the end of the day with, when we think about stewardship, it's really about trying to deepen those relationships and build trust between our donors and the university. And so, when we think about why stewardship matters, you know, private support, it really impacts every area of our university. You

know, you get to see and experience this in the stories that you help us tell, everything from students to faculty to buildings, our programs, the research that we're doing.

[\(05:01\)](#):

And so, stewardship is critically important in the fundraising effort, overall fundraising effort, because, you know, our donors should expect to receive a prompt and meaningful thank you for their gift to the university. It's important that they know and understand the impact that their gift is having on the university. It's important that they feel that they're recognized for their contributions and that they feel that they're being engaged in different areas of the university.

[\(05:33\)](#):

And we know when we do these things and when we do them well that it is going to strengthen those relationships with our donors, it is going to build trust with our donors and, more times than not, it's also going to inspire their continued support. So, yes, stewardship is absolutely an important part of building out that culture of philanthropy here at NC State.

[\(05:55\)](#):

But I think it's important for people to know and understand that it's not just any one person's job or responsibility for stewardship. I mean, I think it's easy to say, "Well, as the senior director of stewardship, you're responsible for stewardship at NC State." And yes, absolutely, that would be correct, but I think what makes us so successful here at NC State is that there is that greater understanding that everyone plays a role in helping to steward our donors, especially within our University Advancement team.

[\(06:28\)](#):

So, everyone from our development officers to our gift processors, the donor services team, our events team — we have an amazing events team — our communicators, people just like yourself. Everyone plays a role in helping us with stewardship. I think that's really one of the things that I'm most proud of, especially as I talk to other colleagues from around the state and even across, you know, peer institutions from across the country, is that we seem to have a very deep commitment and a value placed on stewardship here at NC State. And so, I'm really proud of that, and I think that's one of the reasons that we are seeing such a strong culture of philanthropy built out here.

Taylor Pardue [\(07:09\)](#):

I think that, working alongside you and the rest of the team, I think that's been one of the most important things I've learned since being here as an employee was, it's not just a matter of a single donor making a single gift and getting a single thank you. It really is relationship-building, like you said, a culture of philanthropy and, you know, I'm not sure to what degree other universities do this, like you mentioned, but I know, especially here at NC State, it really goes with our "One Pack" mentality and just how we really — like you said, it's not just even your office, your team doing this and stewarding everyone. It's the whole university coming together and saying, "Thank you for what you're enabling us to do." So ...

Heather Tart [\(07:49\)](#):

Yeah, absolutely. And I think it's, our culture, just internally, has shifted tremendously over the last several years, and, I mean, obviously, the success of the campaign, it's just been tremendous in that and seeing kind of the cultural shift here. I can tell you when I started, 10 years ago, the emphasis and the importance of stewardship was probably not as high of a priority across the university as what it is

today, and I think that starts with leadership, from the top down. And we obviously have a great leader in our chancellor who gets it, and then of course in our Vice Chancellor [Brian] Sischo as well.

Taylor Pardue ([08:25](#)):

So, tell a little bit about some specific examples of stewardship. You know, what does that look like? Is it just a thank you note or something like that? Like, what can people expect when they make a donation to NC State?

Heather Tart ([08:36](#)):

So, a thank you. Yes. Again, like a prompt and meaningful thank you. But I think we just, we can't stop with just a thank you. I think it's so much more; stewardship is so much more than a thank you. It certainly is one of the most foundational elements of our stewardship program, but it's just the beginning, honestly. And so, you know, we talk about impact reporting, and so, our office is heavily involved in scholarship reporting, for example. So, at the beginning of each academic year, a donor scholarship will award out scholarships to various students. And so, our office helps connect the donor with those students throughout the year. And so, that's through annual scholarship reports that we send out.

([09:21](#)):

Sometimes our office will participate in doing lifetime comprehensive impact reports for a donor. So, someone that has had, you know, a 30-, 40-plus-year relationship with the university — and not just through giving, but through various volunteer roles and other aspects — we'll go in and, perhaps, you know, and you've even helped us with some of these projects before, but we'll go in and we'll try and really highlight that relationship and map out the donor's relationship from the very beginning and to try and take a comprehensive look at what that has meant, not only for the donor, but for NC State as a whole.

([09:57](#)):

You know, we might have a donor who is celebrating a 75th birthday in some way, and we want to kind of surprise and delight them with a special birthday message of appreciation as well. So, there are many different things that we do to steward our donors. They're not always one-size-fits-all. Every donor is different. There's certainly things like acknowledgements that every donor should and can expect to receive, but there are lots of different things that we do and sometimes that are dependent upon the individual donor themselves.

Taylor Pardue ([10:27](#)):

I think that's so important. Just what you and your team do is invaluable in so many different ways, but, ultimately, just the feeling of letting someone know you are part of our Pack, you really are.

Heather Tart ([10:38](#)):

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Taylor Pardue ([10:40](#)):

Yeah. It's not a one time thing. Just ...

Heather Tart ([10:43](#)):

And it goes back to strengthening those relationships, right? I mean, the better we — and again, research tells us this. We know it, and we've seen it internally from our own data, that when we do these things and, not just do them, but do them well, we know that it will build those relationships. It will help inspire trust and, many times, inspire that continued support from our donors. So, that's why it's so critical.

Taylor Pardue ([11:08](#)):

Especially ... Oh, yeah. Especially, like you said, with scholarships, to be able to see the change that you really made in someone's life.

Heather Tart ([11:14](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Taylor Pardue ([11:15](#)):

Not just one year.

Heather Tart ([11:16](#)):

I think my favorite-ever book, or I guess my favorite-ever stewardship project, was the very first one we ... kind of individualized stewardship project we ever did, and I think just remembering the impact that that made in the donor's response, that we had someone that had achieved, I think it was 25 years of giving to their scholarship. And so, this was kind of a novel idea back then. And so, we reached out to every scholarship recipient that had ever received this scholarship, and we asked them about, you know, what were they doing now. Tell us a little bit about themselves and how this particular scholarship had impacted not only their time as a student at NC State, but it kind of set them on that pathway to where they are today.

([12:03](#)):

And we didn't know how — we didn't know what the response would be, one, from the students. We sent out the Google surveys or, you know, whatever format we used at that time. This was 10 years ago, but we sent it out and kind of unsure of the response that we would receive, and the stories and the photos that came in, I mean, it was just amazing. And to put all of those together in a book for the donor to see this lifetime impact that they have had on all of these students' lives. The donors were in tears. We were in tears. I mean, it was just, it was really a very nice, meaningful piece. And it's probably something I'll, I mean, it will definitely be something I always remember.

Taylor Pardue ([12:46](#)):

I've seen some of these books that we have as examples around the office, and they really are powerful.

Heather Tart ([12:50](#)):

Yeah.

Taylor Pardue ([12:50](#)):

For anyone who's never seen one of these .

Taylor Pardue ([13:00](#)):

In this Philanthropy 101 segment, we're highlighting Day of Giving 2023.

[\(13:03\)](#):

NC State Day of Giving is an annual, day-long fundraising event that typically takes place in March for 24 hours. The Wolfpack comes together to help NC State create greater opportunities, provide broader educational access, foster bolder visions and conduct more innovative research.

[\(13:20\)](#):

Many gifts made on Day of Giving, along with the bonuses earned by colleges and programs through challenges and leaderboards, support funds that will go to work immediately. That's why holding this annual effort makes such a difference. NC State Day of Giving helps us better plan and allocate resources for the very next academic year, allowing us to support our students when they need it most.

[\(13:41\)](#):

And your gift doesn't just provide financial support. It also encourages our students by showing them the Wolfpack keeps investing and believing in them every step of the way.

[\(13:50\)](#):

Every member of the Wolfpack is invited to join us by supporting the part of the university they're most passionate about. That's what giving forward and #GivingPack is all about. NC State Day of Giving bonus funds, which come from unrestricted university-enhancement funds, amplify every gift made that day. NC State Day of Giving bonus funds are also designated for our hourly and all-day universitywide and social media challenges. Even if you can't make a gift right now, you can make a difference by spreading the word and participating in social media challenges.

[\(14:21\)](#):

Day of Giving 2023, the university's fifth Day of Giving, takes place March 22, so make plans now to come together as a Pack and invest in the tomorrow you want for our university. From supporting our students to enhancing faculty research to promoting Extension services and more, your participation in this extraordinary day will ensure that every member of our Pack finds their place and their home here at NC State. For more information, visit [dayofgiving.ncsu.edu](http://dayofgiving.ncsu.edu).

[\(14:51\)](#):

Now, back to the show.

[\(14:52\)](#):

Talk a little bit about — we have, as of the time of this recording, we have Day of Giving coming up in a few weeks, and a lot of stewardship comes as a result of that, with the many new donors and the ongoing donors that come back and support us again year after year, but talk a little bit about events like that. We also have a Pack Appreciation Day in the fall. Just talk about some of these specific examples of stewardship that we have.

Heather Tart [\(15:23\)](#):

Yeah. And so many of these special stewardship opportunities are a result of our campaign. Many of them launched, you know, throughout our campaign. Day of Giving. We're actually getting ready to celebrate our fifth Day of Giving. And so, a lot of work goes in to stewarding the thousands of donors that give as a part of this effort. It's a collaboration between our office, the Office of Annual Giving and many of our campus partners, again, across the university.

[\(15:52\)](#):

And so, we have a number of things that we do throughout the day. We have stewardship pieces that lead up to the day. There's an impact mailer that goes out in advance to all previous donors and several other segments as well. But it'll go out in advance of the day, and it really just talks about the collective impact that we've made over these last five years.

[\(16:11\)](#):

On the day itself, we have a number of kind of real-time, like what we call real-time stewardship pieces that go out. And I think those are the ones we get the most excited about because the atmosphere and kind of the vibe in Command Central on Day of Giving is so exciting in itself, and we have so many students and volunteers and staff members that come and stop by. And so, I think being able to do those — we do videos on the day that are sent kind of real-time back out to donors. We use text messages that we send out to donors throughout the day. This year, we have some new ideas, and so I don't want to say exactly what it is since this will kind of come out before Day of Giving, but we do have some ideas in place for ways that we want to steward those donors that have been with us for all five years of Day of Giving.

Taylor Pardue [\(17:00\)](#):

Oh, nice.

Heather Tart [\(17:01\)](#):

And so, that's, you know, it's always an exciting day. It's a day that's really all-hands-on-deck across the university as well.

[\(17:06\)](#):

Pack Appreciation Day truly, probably, is my favorite day of the year, and I don't just say that because it's our team's event, but I've had so many other people that have come up to me and say that before as well. And so, Pack Appreciation Day launched in 2019. It runs in conjunction with Red and White Week. Jessie Blekfeld-Sztraky, who is the assistant director on our team, she attended a conference, you know, years ago, and one of the presentations that she heard about during the conference was a donor thank-you day that another university was doing. And so, she brought the idea back here to NC State. And so, we pretty much put it into theory, or practice, you know, pretty relatively soon afterwards.

[\(17:53\)](#):

We started pulling together campus partners to talk about, you know, what this could look like, other stewardship professionals from other colleges and units within NC State, our MarComm, our Marketing Communications team, our Annual Giving team. We started pulling together a lot of people just to think through, like, what could this mean for State, and everyone immediately was really excited about it, as well as leadership. And so, we knew we had the support to make it happen, but it was kind of one of those things that, you know, we've got this great plan, we're going to put it out there, but we didn't know what the response would be from students and from volunteers that were needed to make the day happen.

[\(18:35\)](#):

And so, for those that don't know, I guess it would, you know, Pack Appreciation Day is an event, a student event where students come, traditionally, to Stafford Commons. They connect with other students there. They learn about the impact of private support, and they also help us celebrate our donors by writing thank-you notes, by sharing messages of appreciation. They participate in several different stations on the day in return. We give students, you know, kind of cool, unique swag that they

get. They get to participate in food trucks that are there. It's really an amazing event we launched in 2019.

[\(19:11\)](#):

And like I said, that first year, we were not quite sure what the response would be. We set out with an ambitious goal of having about 1,500 students come through, and we actually surpassed that goal. We had more than 70 volunteers from all across UA [University Advancement] participate in the event as well, and I think that's the other piece that I, is really meaningful to me when I think back on it in talking to other advancement professionals at NC State. We didn't know what that response would be, either, and to ask, you know, to depend on 70 people to come out, you know, dedicate, you know, half of their day to making sure this event runs smoothly.

[\(19:58\)](#):

I mean, it really is a big production that goes into this, and I've had so many people tell me that this is just such a wonderful day — a chance for them to kind of reset, refocus, remind them of why they do what they do in advancement. And so, that's a really special piece there as well. But this past year, we actually expanded. This was our fourth annual Pack Appreciation Day, so we expanded beyond Stafford Commons, and we had satellite locations on Centennial Campus, which were manned by the College of Engineering and the Wilson College of Textiles. And then we had another satellite location over at the College of Veterinary Medicine. And so, this past year, we actually saw close to 2,500 students come through and participate in the day. And, you know, again, it truly is just one of my favorite days of the year.

Taylor Pardue [\(20:52\)](#):

For any listeners who haven't been able to be on campus during Red and White Week and see, it really is incredible because, like you said, stewardship is not just something that our office handles. It's not just something that leadership has a hand in. To see the students come out and really say thank you, too, is, it's just really powerful.

Heather Tart [\(21:08\)](#):

Yeah. We actually, I think one of the things that caught me off guard this year, and, again, it was just one of those moments and I was like, we're doing something right here. We actually ran out of some of our swag there towards the end. So, again, students come through and they participate. They have to select two of three required activities — so, writing a thank-you note, and then this past year they could post on social media or they could complete a philanthropy quiz. And then, once they do that, then they get the opportunity to go and, you know, enjoy something from the food truck or get free NC State swag.

[\(21:41\)](#):

And so, this past year, as we got close to the one o'clock ending time — we were probably 30 minutes to go — we had ran out of our giveaway for the day. And I was like, "Ugh." You know, I hated that. But we still had students coming through, and it was kind of one of those moments where you're explaining to the students, "Well, we've ran out of this," and not sure if they're gonnagoing to want to stay and participate. And so, many of them still said, "No, I want to come through and say thank you either way."

Taylor Pardue [\(22:09\)](#):

Yeah.

Heather Tart [\(22:09\)](#):



And so, they still wrote out thank-you messages, you know, knowing that they were not going to get anything in return. And so, I thought that was, that was a really great moment.

Taylor Pardue ([22:18](#)):

It's so nice, too, that, when they do it and when they are able to get swag — I was at a basketball game a few weeks ago, and to see the students still proudly wearing it.

Heather Tart ([22:26](#)):

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. I mean, and it's important to us to be able to show our appreciation back to our students as well. And so, again, it really is, it's one of my favorite days. The chancellor normally comes down. Brian Sisco enjoys the event. We have lots of external volunteers that come through as well. And so, I think that's important to us. Naturally, the UA [University Advancement] staff members participating, but then we have Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy that has always had a strong presence for the day. And then our Foundation Board has participated, and during the campaign when we had a campaign cabinet, we had members of our campaign cabinet participate as well.

Taylor Pardue ([23:03](#)):

Moving past just these specific events, you know, like we said, we've come out of the campaign now. We have Day of Giving coming up soon. But just in general, what does the future look like for stewardship at NC State? You've talked about how much it's already changed, but what does the future hold for us?

Heather Tart ([23:18](#)):

Yeah. So, I think, again, I think I'm most excited knowing that the emphasis and the focus that has been placed on stewardship and just knowing kind of where we were and where we are now, and just seeing the growth. And I'll give you another specific example of that. In fact, we just had, we have a monthly stewardship meeting where we bring all of our stewardship campus partners together just to talk about best practices, any issues, things that they're seeing, and when we started that almost 10 years ago, there were only probably four or five, maybe, stewardship professionals embedded within the colleges and units. And now, and at that time, we could just pull chairs together within Tally Student Union and just kind of gather informally.

Taylor Pardue ([24:03](#)):

Sure.

Heather Tart ([24:03](#)):

Well, because, again, of the emphasis that's being placed on stewardship and how important it is, we have stewardship professionals embedded in every college now. And so, there's a real focus and, you know, effort to make sure that we are stewarding our donors effectively. And so, now, this meeting has grown so big that it's a more formalized agenda. We have to reserve meeting space when we come together as a group because we've outgrown that small little space.

([24:35](#)):

So, again, lots of growth over the university in general, but then specifically within our team, we also have continued to grow over the last several years. Initially, it was just one person; now, we're a team of three, specifically dedicated to stewardship, and then we're also growing and adding two additional

positions. It's a good time. We say this often, but it's a great time to be at NC State, for many different reasons, but I'm really proud of the work that we are doing as a university, you know, within University Advancement, and then especially proud of the work that, you know, we've been able to accomplish these last few years in stewardship.

Taylor Pardue ([25:11](#)):

Sounds great. Heather, thank you so much for taking time to talk today and just tell us a little bit more about this invaluable work that we do here at the university.

Heather Tart ([25:19](#)):

Yeah, thank you for having me.

Taylor Pardue ([25:27](#)):

For more information on NC State stewardship, and giving in general, please visit [giving.ncsu.edu](http://giving.ncsu.edu). If you'd like to hear even more stories of Wolfpack success, please subscribe to the NC State Philanthropy Podcast today in the Apple or Google podcast stores, on Spotify or through Stitcher. Be sure to leave a comment and rating as well to let us know how we're doing.

([25:50](#)):

Thanks for listening, and as always, go Pack.