

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.

([00:17](#)):

On this episode, we're joined by NC State alumna and supporter Gayle Lanier to discuss why giving back to the university is so important to her.

([00:30](#)):

Thanks so much for joining us today, Gayle. To kick things off, tell listeners a little bit about yourself and what brought you to NC State.

Gayle Lanier ([00:51](#)):

Well, thanks so much for having me here. I am a proud NC State alum. I graduated in 1982 in industrial and systems engineering. I came here from Wake County. I grew up on a local family farm. I knew that that was not the life for me and that education was a way for me to get off of the farm and have a better life for myself and my future family. So, met my husband here in co-ed volleyball and sent our daughter here as well. So, we kept it all in the family.

Taylor Pardue ([01:23](#)):

A very big Wolfpack legacy, obviously. That's great.

Gayle Lanier ([01:26](#)):

Yep.

Taylor Pardue ([01:26](#)):

What was your time like on campus? You were in the College of Engineering ...

Gayle Lanier ([01:30](#)):

I was in the College of Engineering. I lived in one of the first co-ed dorms. I lived in some on East Campus, and it was a great experience for me. I have a lot of big brothers who helped us get through, but we didn't have a lot of women still in engineering in that time. So, we had our own little society of women who would get together to support one another. It was tough, it was fun, but I had a great experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

Taylor Pardue ([01:56](#)):

What led you to focus on industrial and systems engineering?

Gayle Lanier ([01:59](#)):

The truth is, I started NC State as a chemical engineering major until I got to organic [chemistry] ...

Taylor Pardue ([02:06](#)):

That'll do it.

Gayle Lanier ([02:06](#)):

... and I found out that it was Greek for me and it wasn't my passion. I met with my advisor, we talked about what I really liked, what I was excelling in, and I really liked man-machine interfaces. I like improvement processes, and so we said, well, why don't you look into industrial engineering? And I did, and I really found my true passion.

Taylor Pardue ([02:27](#)):

And you have obviously taken that and ran with it. You've been in leadership roles at several Fortune 500 companies. Talk a little bit about how NC State set you up for all of this career success.

Gayle Lanier ([02:39](#)):

We talk so much about Think and Do. What NC State really does is teaches you how to solve problems. What that did is, I came in with skills that gave me confidence in my ability to solve any problem that was put in front of me. So, I was able to transgress across three different industries in my career from computer manufacturing to telecommunications to the electric utility industry. And throughout that, I had the fundamentals of what NC State taught me about solving problems, but more importantly, about working with other people for problems that I couldn't solve to get the solution.

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

What were some of the highlights of your career that you'd like to talk about? Some of the different companies that you worked with?

Gayle Lanier ([03:23](#)):

I got to introduce the first voiceover IP solution to the world when I was working with Nortel Networks as part of my telecommunications career. That was fun. It was also [a] career that allowed this poor little country girl to travel literally around the world to places I never could have dreamt of going from growing up here on a family farm in Wake County. In the electric utility industry, we really got the company to focus on the customer, put in major new systems to enable our customers to have more interactions with the utility, but also more control of their bill and their landscape and what was going on. So, those are probably two of the key things.

Taylor Pardue ([04:08](#)):

So, you retired from Duke Energy in 2018 as senior VP. How did you come along the way to reengage with NC State as an alum? You've been involved with so many different committees — I believe it's 19 different committees and boards along the way, including Board of Trustees. What has kept that spirit of Wolfpack alliance and everything with you over the years?

Gayle Lanier ([04:31](#)):

It's so interesting. The first opportunity I had to get involved back with the university was coming back and reviewing senior projects in the engineering department, and I enjoyed that so much that, every time they would ask for volunteers to do anything at NC State, I would raise my hand, and then NC State started reaching out and say, would you be interested in this and would you be interested in that? And regardless of what they ask, I would always say yes because I have a deep love for this university, for the

students that it serves. I also believe that representation matters. People need to see females in power, in leadership. They need to see other African Americans to know what's possible. So, whenever there was an opportunity to lead, to volunteer, to help out, I was always there. I love this university.

Taylor Pardue ([05:20](#)):

What are some, sort of like we were talking about with your career, what are some of the highlights that really stick out of your participation with these different boards and things? Some of the success stories, and some of just the fun things that have come along as you've reengaged with the university?

Gayle Lanier ([05:33](#)):

I think one of the biggest things was the opportunity to serve as a Trustee for eight years and to be on the search committee for Randy Woodson, our sitting chancellor. That was a phenomenal opportunity. I learned so much more about the university and the students that it serves, but also about the faculty and staff and the needs across this equilibrium to make NC State what it is today. So, for me, I think that that's one of the highlights. I'm currently serving as chair of Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy. I chair the Shelton Leadership Center, and it's all about focusing on women and focusing on our students. So, anything that gives me that opportunity has always been a highlight.

Taylor Pardue ([06:18](#)):

If listeners don't know, talk a little bit about what, especially, Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy is. That's a fairly new organization here at NC State. Just talk a little bit about that group and the importance of its work.

Gayle Lanier ([06:29](#)):

Wonderful question. So, Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy started in 2018 where we had an inaugural group of 40 women who were brought together under Brian Sischo, the vice chancellor of Advancement, in conjunction with Ann Goodnight and Susan Woodson to really focus on how we could change the culture of philanthropy at NC State. If you look at the incoming freshman class, we have over 50% now are women. Women are in power in industry, in their homes. They're making more decisions about, financially, where they're going to give philanthropically, but they also give differently. So, there was an opportunity to tap into that and figure out how NC State could bring in more women to help us change that culture and look as we move forward. So, I had an opportunity to be part of that group. It was a great honor. We had a lot of work establishing what we wanted to look like.

([07:30](#)):

We interviewed about 12 other organizations across the nation at other universities to see how they were set up. So, we focus on impactful giving, influential leadership, amazing learning and engagement. So, those are kind of the four pillars of what we focus on to teach women more about how they can become more involved with NC State, how they can have an impact across the university, but how they can be truly engaged. One of the other things we're really focused on is building a pipeline of leadership throughout our major boards. So, we have looked at the composition of our boards across the major 20-ish boards across the university, and we have built a pipeline of women so that when they're looking at term limits and people rolling off, are there women in the pipeline we can identify to support them? We also recognize and nominate women to great positions.

([08:31](#)):

We have, now, one of our leadership council members who is sitting on the Board of Trustees, and last year we had one of our leadership council members who won the highest non-academic award, the Wataga medal. So, we're hoping that we continue to get more women involved because engagement leads to philanthropy. I was a scholarship recipient while I was here at NC State, and so, for me, it's a way to give back, to let others know that there are people who need. There's a misconception that the state, because we are a state-supported institution, funds everything that the university needs. The university needs much more than that, and it does need people and donors and people who are philanthropic. So, I'm giving back because someone once gave to me.

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

Which scholarship were you the recipient of when you were here?

Gayle Lanier ([09:25](#)):

So, I was a recipient of two scholarships. One was the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority scholarship, and then the other was a Celanese scholarship for women in engineering. So, that helped me along with loans that I had because my father was in the military, so I was actually able to get some military loans to help me through college. I want to make sure that others don't have to struggle with huge debt once they graduate. So, that's one of the reasons my husband and I have set up endowments, both in the College of Engineering and the Poole College of Management, to help other students offset that cost.

Taylor Pardue ([10:05](#)):

That does give you such a[n] invaluable perspective on things, to have been a scholarship recipient and see the importance of that, but also having some debt that you had to pay back through loans and everything. So, you really see both sides of the issue and really, like you said, really understand the importance of philanthropy and how it moves the university forward.

Gayle Lanier ([10:24](#)):

Absolutely.

Taylor Pardue ([10:25](#)):

I think that's, you mentioned earlier, I think that's my favorite part of your involvement here and your story with NC State is not so much how you became a leader and have been willing to give back your time and talent and everything, but also how you, through Wolfpack Women and other organizations, have worked to help others be leaders and be involved and really give back with the university, too. I think that's a great legacy to leave here at the university.

Gayle Lanier ([10:53](#)):

Well, thank you. As I say, I love the university. I love giving back. I love empowering the next generation. I think that's part of our mission as humans here, but NC State's all about the Pack, and so we've got to make sure the Pack is strong.

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

Speaking of leadership, you mentioned Shelton Leadership Center. If listeners don't know about that, tell a little bit about maybe its history, but also your involvement with that and the work that you're doing.

Gayle Lanier ([11:19](#)):

So, a great center that focuses on building future leaders and servant-leadership. So, General Hugh Shelton started this center and gave his name to the center because he knew his struggles as being a first-generation college student. He wanted to make sure that there was an opportunity to build leaders, but for students to have a way to come in and have a pathway to leadership. And so, I got involved several years ago when Barbara Mulkey was heading the center. Barbara and I served both as Trustees during the same time, and we kept a great friendship, but a great love for this university. Barbara also serves on Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy. So, the center is really about building the principles around servant-leadership.

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

So, we can't tell your story without talking especially about how passionate you have been about Wolfpack Athletics. Talk a little bit about your involvement with these different teams, but especially women's basketball. I know that's a sport near and dear to your heart.

Gayle Lanier ([12:28](#)):

So, my husband and I have always loved sports. As I mentioned earlier, we met here in co-ed volleyball, and so, we've always had this joint love for sports. It's something that brought us together. My husband started here in 1975, and he was able to watch a lot of the first games that Coach Kay Yow coached here. And so, we would go to every home game whenever we were not traveling or out for work, and we just loved the whole concept of supporting minorities, people who are underrepresented. Our teams have been so inspiring. You know, Kay Yow and herself has been such an inspiration for the fight for breast cancer and everything that she's done to build a legacy around Play for Kay and around breast cancer awareness. So, that's been huge for us. But we've kind of adopted the team, and the team has adopted us. We mentor to the young ladies.

([13:35](#)):

We make relationship with their parents so that they know that if they can't make it, there's someone here that really is looking out for their young ladies. So, we have got a great relationship with the coach, the staff and the young ladies that's led my husband and I to say, how can we support women's basketball and their needs more? We met with Wes Moore, we met with Ben Broussard over at the Wolfpack Club and asked, "What do you need?" And our locker rooms had not had any attention in over 40 years. We were very honored to make a naming contribution to redo the women's locker room and have that named in our honor. But I also want to say Wes Moore and his wife were huge sponsors of that, and there were others who stepped up and leveraged our contributions to complete that project. And it was so interesting that by the time it was announced and everyone was asking, "How can I help?" It was already paid for, but that says that there's opportunities for other needs across the university to be done. So, we are looking at other sports that we may support as well as continuing on the educational side through endowments.

Taylor Pardue ([14:50](#)):

I think that that is such a great way to highlight the different ways that you can be involved with NC State. So many times I think people think, once I've graduated, I'm off campus, I'm removed from campus and everything and from campus life. You can obviously give through donations, but like you said, there's so many ways to be personally involved and to still be involved with campus life and really help current students and future students enjoy the same opportunities that you were able to enjoy as well.

Gayle Lanier ([15:20](#)):

That's right. Part of Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy is this amazing learning portion of that, and it is really — we have had webinars, we've had guest speakers who've come in and they talk about different ways that you can become engaged, different ways that you can give. So often, people will say, "Well, I don't have millions to give." I don't have millions to give. I started with a small contribution, I think of \$10 or \$15. Every penny counts, man. You know, having been a student with needs, I can tell you that \$10 or \$15, they start to add up, and they really do help the needs that students have here at the university.

Taylor Pardue ([16:01](#)):

Like you said, state funding helps so much, but there is a gap that goes beyond that, and that's really where philanthropy makes such an incredible difference. Supporting the university throughout the year is important, but we have a special day that's coming up, as of this recording in a couple of weeks. Talk a little bit about Day of Giving, which will be later this month. Are there any special funds that Wolfpack Women are championing this year that you'd like to mention?

Gayle Lanier ([16:27](#)):

Yes. So, Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy doesn't have a fund itself, per se. We don't have a foundation today. What we do is we highlight the biggest needs that we see of women and the organizations that we partner with throughout the year. So, this year, we're continuing our focus around Feed the Pack, around mental health and around the Student Emergency Fund. So, these are needs that are more temporary in nature that we want to make sure that people are aware that there's still a great deal of need. And every year, we focus on one or two of these organizations, and it's so amazing to see the impact that it has by just highlighting those. We see more women making donations. One of the major things, Taylor, that I've been so excited about is, because we put focus on these areas, we've seen the number of women donors on Day of Giving increase since 2020. It's almost doubled from 18% in 2020 to 38% last year. So, we are continuing to see women contribute more and more to the areas that are important to them. So, Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy really just tries to highlight some of those areas and opportunities.

Taylor Pardue ([17:50](#)):

I think that's a great way, too. It's impacting women and students all across campus. It's not just a particular college or anything or a particular program, but really does help the whole student body.

Gayle Lanier ([18:01](#)):

Absolutely. It's about all of our students.

Taylor Pardue ([18:05](#)):

Tell a little bit about how listeners can get involved with Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy.

Gayle Lanier ([18:11](#)):

You can always go to our website. We're under the development tab, on Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy. We have our own homepage there. You can find out a lot about the events that are upcoming, but more importantly, recordings of events that we've had in the past are there as well. We also partner, engage with the Alumni Association to keep up with events that may be of interest to

people: how to become involved, how to come out and support Feed the Pack, other initiatives across the university. So, we keep a calendar of events, we have webinars. There's a lot of information there. So, I think the first place to go would be there, and you can always reach out to me.

Taylor Pardue ([18:52](#)):

It just shows that there's so much more to philanthropy than what I think, sometimes, people think — that it's just a donation, and then there's no connection. There really is that sense of community, and I think Wolfpack Women does a great job of really exemplifying that.

Gayle Lanier ([19:05](#)):

Yeah. If you look at our Day of Giving, that's a perfect example of it starts small. We just want to make sure that everyone out there has an opportunity to say thank you back to NC State on that one day. So, [a] \$10 donation is all it takes to make a donation, to give back, to make a difference, to have an impact. You can do that through our Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy link that we'll provide to you, or you can do it through any of the Day of Giving links that are out there. So, social media sites are all there, so you can join there, but there's more need than we have capability to support. So, please get back. Engagement starts with \$10. I would just like to say thank you to NC State for making me the person that I am, the leader that I became. It gave me a foundation of how to solve problems, to really Think and Do more than I ever thought possible, and I challenge everyone to love the university as much as I do.

Taylor Pardue ([20:16](#)):

Thanks so much for joining us today, Gayle, and just for everything that you do for the university. Like I said, we've talked about it in brief in this episode, but there is just so much that you have done over the years, and the impact is just invaluable. We really appreciate your time and everything that you've done.

Gayle Lanier ([20:32](#)):

Well, thank you. It's only for the love of this university. Go Pack.

Taylor Pardue ([20:41](#)):

For more information on Wolfpack Women in Philanthropy, please visit go.ncsu.edu/wwip. 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. Thanks for listening, and as always, go Pack.