

Herd

A MAGAZINE FOR NDSU ALUMNI & FRIENDS

2026 EDITION II



**"IT'S NOT ABOUT ME, IT'S
ABOUT WE"** *pg. 5*

ROOTED IN IMPACT *pg. 12*

**BROADENING HORIZONS,
OPENING HEARTS** *pg. 18*

Photo by **Justin Eiler**



As NDSU Football kicks off its first FBS season, Bison fans are bringing the energy of the Dome on the road. Join the Herd at Bison Takeovers across the Mountain West to connect with fellow alumni, fans, and friends at the ultimate away-game experience.



JOIN THE CLIMB
Find Bison Takeover locations at
NDSUFoundation.com/bison-takeovers

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New NDSU President Marshall Stewart and First Lady Jan Stewart explore the Agronomy Seed Farm in Casselton, North Dakota, as part of their statewide tour. See page 5.

Photo by **Justin Eiler**

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Dear readers,

As an alumnus and now 20+ year employee in the College of Engineering, I have a deep personal interest in seeing NDSU succeed today and well into the future. So, when I was asked to be involved in finding the next president of NDSU, I jumped at the opportunity.

But serving on the search committee was a daunting task. Not only were we replacing great outgoing leadership, we were seeking someone who could help NDSU navigate the challenges facing higher education nationwide.

As a member of a large, diverse search committee, I remember looking through the 60+ applicants and wondering, “How in the world are we ever going to come to a consensus?”

Yet even during our initial meeting, one candidate made an especially strong impression. Dr. Marshall Stewart had leadership experience at three large land-grant institutions. He demonstrated innovative thinking and the ability to implement those ideas.

At every stage of the interview process, he listened to many different stakeholder voices and communicated his thoughts and ideas with a meaningful, and seemingly effortless, approach.

Eventually, I knew we needed to win Marshall over and get him and his wife, Jan, to Fargo.

At this inflection point for higher education, we need to think about and do things differently to stay competitive, growth-oriented, and adaptive to new technology and student learning styles. I’m excited to have President Stewart here to help lead these efforts at NDSU.

Our path forward will require collaboration, problem-solving, and a Herd mentality — and by Herd mentality, I don’t mean that we should blindly follow, but rather that we should determine a shared purpose through conversations and consensus-building.

Together, we can support the next generation of students and better serve the citizens of North Dakota.

I encourage you to reach out and get to know President Stewart and Jan. They will welcome your thoughts and ideas on keeping the Herd strong!

Dr. Chad Ulven '01

University Distinguished Professor
Department of Mechanical Engineering
North Dakota State University



I'm pictured (center) welcoming President Stewart and Jan to campus this summer! Get to know the Stewarts on page 5.

“It’s Not About Me, It’s About We”

New NDSU President Marshall Stewart and First Lady Jan Stewart say their leadership will be defined by what the NDSU community can accomplish together.

Story by Micaela Gerhardt | Photos by Justin Eiler

Dr. Marshall Stewart begins his first official day as NDSU’s 16th president on a holiday. The next morning, he greets me in the doorway of his office suite, grinning with all the exuberance of a kid on his first day of school.

NDSU First Lady Jan Stewart arrives promptly, introducing herself with the charming southern drawl both she and Marshall possess as native North Carolinians (though if you ask them, they might gently tease that *we’re* the ones with accents).

The interview begins, and we’re off to the races. To set the table, Marshall outlines his defining priorities and commitments.

Our land-grant mission will be core to his leadership, he says — after all, Marshall is the product of a land-grant education (NC State) and has served 30

years in various leadership roles at land-grant institutions including NC State, University of Missouri, and, most recently, Kansas State.

“A land-grant means that you’re deeply committed to the state and to access and affordability,” Marshall said. “We want to make sure that people have accessibility, not only if they’re a student getting a degree, but also those North Dakotans and others across the country that may benefit from the knowledge we create every day.”

He promises to listen and learn so that he can lead effectively (and if you want to drop him and Jan a friendly welcome or word of advice, **write a note on the postcard on page 16!**).

GET TO KNOW THE STEWARTS

Both grew up in tight-knit rural communities. “There was a lot of school pride at the local level,” Jan shared. “Friday night [high school] football games were a big event.”

“Do your thing, son”

— Advice from Marshall's high school ag teacher

Let's start at the beginning. Marshall's leadership journey convenes at the ripe young age of 14, when he meets his first agriculture teacher. Adolph Warren changes the course of Marshall's life by forecasting a future that, as a freshman in high school, he could not yet see for himself.

“Mr. Warren would say, ‘Do your thing, son,’ and for every student there was a different thing,” Marshall said. “For me, he said, ‘You're a leader. That's what you're going to be.’”

One of the first things he guided Marshall toward was participation in FFA, specifically livestock judging, where Marshall honed his skills in oral reasoning:

providing clear and decisive rationale for his judging choices.

“I think out of that really came this ability to communicate — to assess, judge, make a decision, and go,” Marshall said. “I had no idea what that was preparing me for, but I think Mr. Warren knew exactly what he was doing.”

Fast-forward, Marshall became state FFA president and later spent seven years of his career with National FFA. His son, John, was elected as state FFA president 30 years after Marshall, making them the first father-son duo to both achieve the FFA presidency in North Carolina. They also earned American FFA degrees, the highest honor bestowed by the organization.



A tale of two presidencies: On the left, an 18-year-old Marshall Stewart is pictured serving as North Carolina FFA president in June 1982. He is surrounded by the ag teachers who mentored him, Adolph Warren, Weldon Faircloth, and Charles West. On the right, Dr. Marshall Stewart delivers remarks to the NDSU community on March 30, 2026, the day he was announced as NDSU president.



GET TO KNOW THE STEWARTS

They describe themselves as faith- and family-driven people. They met in Bible study classes and are deeply committed to their faith. Their adult son, John, lives in Indiana, and most of their extended family lives in North Carolina.



“The sons [and daughters] of toil”

— Excerpt from the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862

Marshall's grandparents John and Iva Stewart were cotton mill workers and tenant farmers in rural South Carolina. Without the opportunity to pursue an education, they never learned to read or write. Their son, Marshall's father, experienced poverty and isolation in childhood, but a chance encounter with a teacher named Grace changed his life.

“Had it not been for that interception ...” Marshall

begins, but reflecting makes him emotional. I imagine it is a culmination of the past arriving at the present, the story heightened by the significance of this day: One generation removed from his grandparents' inability to access education, Marshall is now serving as the president of a university.

Jan picks up where his story trails off, speaking in her quiet, measured way. “They'll say in Marshall's family that his father was ‘saved by Grace.’ She saw something in him and really pointed him toward college and faith.” He eventually became a pastor.

For Marshall, his father's experience hearkens back to the ideal of the land-grant mission: that education should be accessible to all.

“You could be ‘the sons and daughters of toil,’ and you had the chance to go to school,” Marshall said, referencing the 1862 Morrill Land-Grant Act, signed by

GET TO KNOW THE STEWARTS

Jan spent nearly 30 years in banking, then turned to consulting and volunteer work. Marshall has held roles in high school education, National FFA, and higher education leadership.

President Abraham Lincoln (and amending the original legislation by including “daughters”).

“Land-grants created social and economic mobility for generations of people ... It might have started in 1862, but I would say that in 2026, we need land-grants more than ever.”

“By choice and not by chance”

— Excerpt from the Ag Teacher's Creed

Inspired by the influence of his three agriculture teachers, Adolph Warren, Charles West, and Weldon Faircloth, Marshall began his career as a high school ag teacher. He took the Ag Teacher's Creed, proudly declaring, “I'm an agricultural teacher by choice and not by chance.”

While his job title is different today, he assures me that his calling — to guide people toward self-discovery, to help them surpass what they thought was possible and achieve something greater — remains the same.

“As a teacher, for each of your students, you help them figure out what's possible, what their potential is, and grow them up, and it's the same running a team or a



staff,” Marshall said. “People have asked me why I want to be president. I want to serve, lead, and grow others.”

Great teachers, Marshall says, bring knowledge out of students versus pouring it into them. To me, this says something about a fundamental belief he must hold: that his students and colleagues are capable.

When working with students or professionals, he poses a hypothetical question, “Who do you want to become in five years?”

“Part of the joy of the work, be it a teacher or be it president of a university, is saying, ‘We are going to go beyond that.’ It's the same thing with the university ... what I want to do is help take NDSU beyond what we have ever imagined.”

“The strength of the Bison is the Herd”

— Excerpt from “The Law of the Prairie”

From his high school teachers, like Adolph Warren, to his colleagues in FFA and at land-grant universities, Marshall says a lot of people on the way opened doors for him.

“None of us get there by ourselves,” he says, and the same rings true for NDSU. Marshall believes it will take the strength and tenacity of all Bison to help NDSU reach new heights and overcome challenges facing institutions of higher education across the U.S.

“Some people have said, ‘We look forward to what you're going to do,’ and I say, ‘No, what *we're* going to do.’ It's about what we can create together as one NDSU.”

Marshall invites NDSU alumni and friends to help amplify and invest in what he calls the “R's”: recruitment and retention, NDSU's R1 research status, and strong relationships in North Dakota, Minnesota, and beyond.

“Over the next decade, there's going to be an intense competition for students and for talent, and we're going to have to work harder,” Marshall said. “Alumni have a vital part. They know what it means to be a Bison, and so their ability to connect with students, families, and people in- and out of the state is really important.”

There are things NDSU can be louder about,

he says. For example, NDSU students who earn a bachelor's degree complete it in less than four years (3.8) on average, while many universities focus on improving five- or six-year graduation rates.

“That's called affordability. We're getting students out quicker. We need to celebrate that.”

He believes NDSU has the opportunity to position itself as one of the leading land-grants in the country, and he feels affirmed in being at the helm.

“It's very humbling, and it's also a huge responsibility — that responsibility is not lost on me,” Marshall said. But he and Jan also share a sense of peace they trace back to their faith.

“I want to do well, and go with you, and that's where relationships and trust will come in,” Marshall said. “We can build that together.” 🐾

YOU'RE INVITED

Alumni and community members are encouraged to join the inauguration celebration for President Marshall Stewart on Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026.

Find in-person event details and the inauguration livestream at NDSUFoundation.com/inauguration



GET TO KNOW THE STEWARTS

They enjoy music and live concerts. Earlier this year, they saw the Eagles perform at the Sphere in Las Vegas. They also love the outdoors, whether hiking or going to the beach (“So we decided to move as far away from the beach as we could,” Marshall teased), and are eager to experience North Dakota/Minnesota lake culture.

Mechanics Behind the Music

A storied instrument finds new life through 3D-printing technology.

Story by Kara Lidberg '17 | Photos by Kensie Wallner

Have you ever heard the sound a harpsichord makes?

Unlike a piano, the harpsichord's notes don't swell or sustain; they appear and vanish. Bright, plucky, crisp, metallic.

This harpsichord (*Figure 1*) belongs to the NDSU Challey School of Music. Prominent in Handel's Messiah and the Madrigal Dinners, it offers listeners an authentic Baroque experience. Between performances, the instrument sits quietly behind the stage in Beckwith Recital Hall.

Overlooking its strings and soundboard, flowers, butterflies, and a western meadowlark — North Dakota's state bird — were painted by local artist Dolores Renden (*Figure 2*).

Its keys, located in two rows, are black with natural wood ends. Above them is the inscription: "R. Laskey – Fargo – 1975."

The harpsichord was built by an engineer, not a musician. Roger Laskey purchased its kit, made popular in the 1960s by Frank Hubbard, as a hobby project — his ultimate goal being the satisfaction of building something.

For years, it was displayed in Roger's home, regularly tuned but never played, until he donated it to NDSU in 2007.

The harpsichord was given a new life at NDSU, but eventually it began to show its age. Once bright and exact, its strings were old, oxidized, and dull sounding. The highest notes were missing parts borrowed to repair the middle range. Its tongues, which allow the plectra to pluck the strings, were worn out, making it unreliable for performances.

While fixable, there was a challenge: the

manufacturer no longer made replacement parts. Enter the NDSU Libraries Digital Fabrication Lab.

With code and filament, more than 200 3D-printed replacement components were produced (*Figure 3*). Small, precise custom pieces designed to withstand the repetition of practice and performance. Each part was replaced by hand.

Exactly 50 years after Roger built the harpsichord, music major and business administration minor Zakk Volk '27 (*Figure 4*) — with guidance from piano technician Christian Heaford — removed its old jacks and springs, then snapped the newly printed pieces into place. The strings responded with their original sound.

"It's unlikely that even the most experienced harpsichord player would suspect new parts," Zakk said. "They function so perfectly and accurately."

As a musician, Zakk is grateful to live in a time when innovative technology can breathe new life into an old instrument, one that may otherwise have slowly fallen out of use.

"I believe musical instruments have their own character and story that live within them," he said. "We are just one part of preserving this one for the next few decades." 🐢

CUE THE MUSIC

Hear professional pianist Dr. Thiago Ferreira perform Baroque works on the restored harpsichord at NDSUFoundation.com/magazine



Figure 1



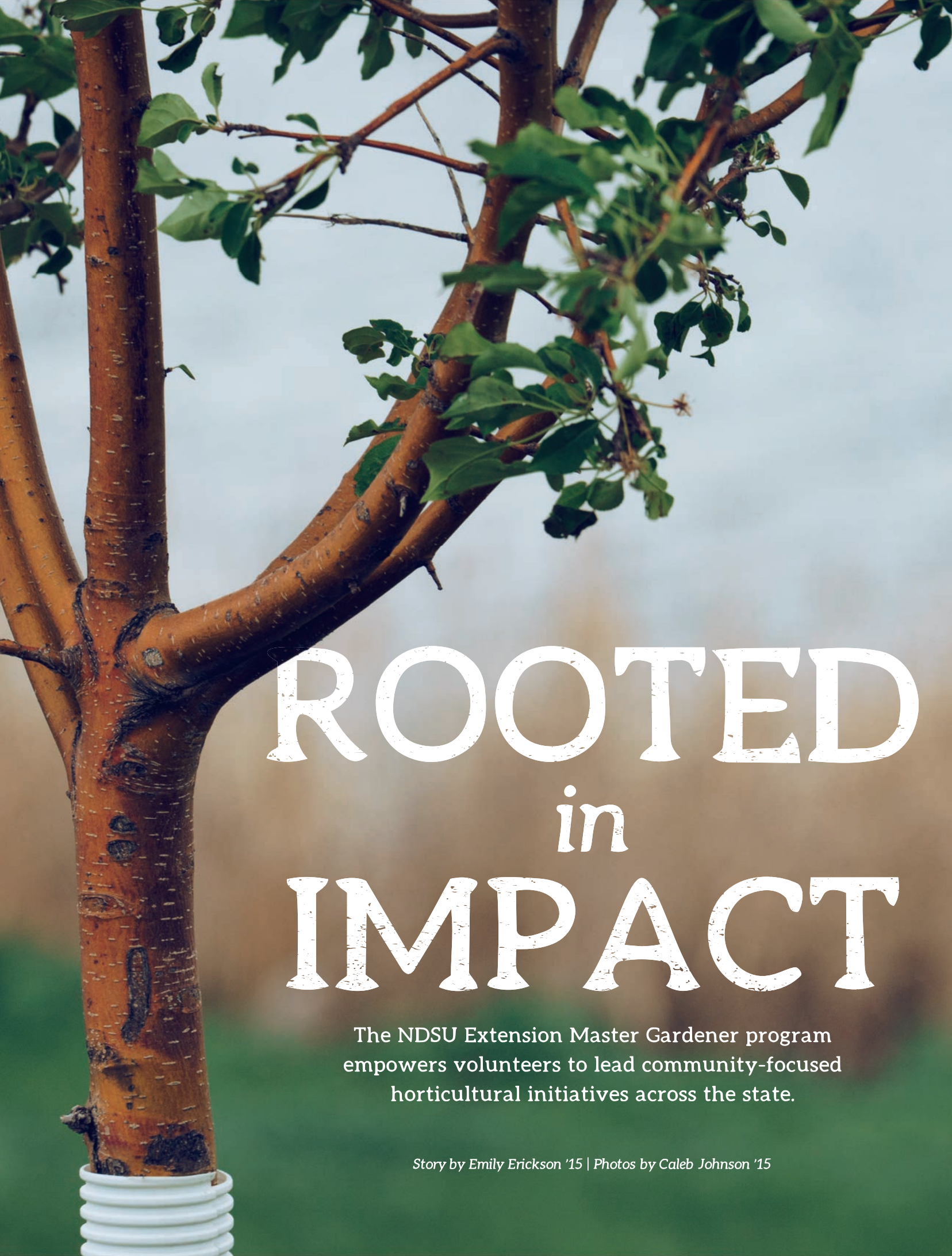
Figure 4



Figure 3



Figure 2



ROOTED in IMPACT

The NDSU Extension Master Gardener program empowers volunteers to lead community-focused horticultural initiatives across the state.

Story by Emily Erickson '15 | Photos by Caleb Johnson '15

Minot, ND

The ponderosa pine, blue spruce, and junipers — planted just two weeks ago along U.S. Route 83 — don't mind the intense wind that whips through Minot, North Dakota. They are right where they belong.

These evergreens are among the many trees that have been planted in the past five years as part of an initiative fueled by NDSU Extension and Certified Master Gardener Volunteers: 2,000 Trees for Minot.

Certified Master Gardener Volunteers Donna Bye '98, a landscape architecture and environmental design alumna, and Tim Baumann set the seemingly lofty goal of planting 1,000 trees throughout Minot to foster feelings of safety, growth, and renewal after the 2011 Souris River flood damaged neighborhoods and claimed so much of the city's tree canopy.

They recognized that today's saplings, both evergreen and deciduous, would improve the city and region for generations to come: A tree's root systems catch and slow down stormwater, protecting against flash flooding and water damage. Leafy, tall tree canopies in neighborhoods act as insulation, lowering heating and cooling costs and increasing home values. Not to mention their visual benefits of defining neighborhood edges, enhancing city aesthetics, and providing vibrant seasonal colors.

Minot's Forestry Department and NDSU Extension quickly became their partners in action, recommending tree species suited to Minot's limited plant palette, disease concerns, and environmental conditions, while helping the pair secure grants, attract donors and, of course, plant a lot of trees.

Together, they turned an ambitious idea into a community-wide effort, so quickly surpassing their goal for 1,000 trees that they set the bar higher and reached for 2,000.

2,000 Trees for Minot is just one of dozens of projects spearheaded by service-oriented Certified Master

►
Ward County Extension agent Emily How and Certified Master Gardener Volunteer Donna Bye '98 (left to right) inspect rows of evergreens.



Gardener Volunteers across North Dakota who have received cutting-edge training from NDSU.

The NDSU Extension Master Gardener course provides education on plant materials suited for North Dakota, plus specific training in soils, fertilizers, plant diseases, insect pests, weeds, wildlife issues, composting, and much more.

After acceptance into the program and a \$250 fee, aspiring gardeners may complete the 10-week course on campus or online. Master Gardener interns are then required to complete 48 hours of community volunteering in cooperation with their county Extension office within two years before earning the title of Certified Master Gardener Volunteer.

2,000
**trees planted in
Minot since 2023**

246

NDSU Extension Master Gardener volunteers and interns in 2025

13,784

volunteer hours reported in 40 counties statewide in 2025

NDSU Extension horticulturist and program coordinator Dr. Esther McGinnis looks for applicants who have a “fire” in them to make their community a better place.

“We as a university train these volunteers,” Esther said. “We give them the tools they need to be a blessing in their communities and to pay it forward.”

Volunteers and interns are busy at work in a variety of projects and initiatives in North Dakota, identifying superior vegetable varieties through NDSU trials, hanging traps for invasive insects, monitoring rainfall amounts, mentoring 4-H students, hosting horticultural workshops, tours, and events, as well as caring for gardens and landscapes in counties across the state.

Bismarck, ND

Follow U.S. Route 83 about 100 miles south and another Certified Master Gardener Volunteer-led project sits atop a bluff overlooking the Missouri River.

Warmed by the afternoon sun, giddy laughter and curious voices float through the air as summer camp participants tend to the lawn of native grasses, construct feats of engineering in an interactive water table, and inspect herbs and vegetables in raised garden beds at the Explorium — the outdoor learning space at North Dakota’s Gateway to Science in Bismarck, North Dakota.



Pollinator gardens like the one nurtured by Master Gardener Connie Sprynczynatyk '72 (right) help support bee, butterfly, and hummingbird populations that provide pollination for horticultural crops and flowering plants.



Beyond the insect-shaped xylophones and other hands-on activities, a cobblestone path invites visitors to a living science exhibit: pollinator gardens planned, planted, and maintained by Master Gardeners.

Two years ago, this space was practically bare.

Around that time, Certified Master Gardener Volunteer Connie Sprynczynatyk '72 visited the science museum with her grandsons and noticed some weeds outside. She called the executive director and offered to come back with her gardening tools — she could use volunteer hours for her Master Gardener internship.

Instead, she was asked to join the committee for development of the outdoor learning space. It just so happened that they wanted a pollinator garden on site.

In the spring of 2025, Burleigh County Extension agent Kelsey Deckert '14 put out the call for gardeners of all skill and experience levels. Fifteen Master Gardener volunteers and interns responded, ready to create a pollinator garden (that turned out to be about 13 times larger than the original blueprint). That year, summer camp participants even got a crash course in digging and planting.

Pollinator habitat support is a major focus of the Extension Master Gardener program. According to the Apiary Inspectors of America, U.S. honey beekeepers

lost more than 55% of their colonies from April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. The staggering drop impacts consumers, farmers, and beekeepers — native bees and honeybees provide pollination for many agronomic, fruit, nut, and vegetable crops.

Extension experts, volunteers, and interns prioritized native varieties that thrive in western North Dakota and attract pollinators: red columbine for hungry bumblebee queens to enjoy throughout May and June blooms, purple prairie clover for a perfect butterfly landing pad in July and August, and New England aster — one of the last blooming plants in the garden — that will be covered in bees even through October.

For Connie, the Master Gardener course gave her the skills to help others channel their curiosity and make the world a better place.

“You work with knowledgeable professors, you hear from people all over the state in Extension who are deeply knowledgeable in a particular area, and you meet other Master Gardeners,” she said. “It’s just this beautiful community of people that care about the land.”



130,493

pounds of fresh garden
produce donated to
Veggies for the Pantry
from 2016 to 2025



Certified Master Gardener Volunteers
Julie Vetter, Deb Miller, and Carol
Burley '82 join Extension horticulturist
and program coordinator Dr. Esther
McGinnis (left to right) in Julie's home
garden, where she grows produce to
donate to Veggies for the Pantry.



Fargo, ND

Orient yourself east. About 200 miles down I-94, Master Gardeners are busy planting, weeding, and harvesting in Fargo.

It's late summer. In home and community gardens throughout the area, tomatoes are heavy on their vines, boxes of cucumbers are ready for pickling (or topping with salt and devouring), and fragrant herbs are ready to be clipped for fresh meals or dried for winter.

On select weekday evenings, area gardeners arrive at designated drop-off sites with trunks — and sometimes just armfuls — of freshly harvested produce. Volunteers collect the donations and deliver them to local food pantries through Veggies for the Pantry, an initiative established in 2016 after a Master Gardener recognized that local pantries often lacked access to fresh, nutritious produce.

It's a simple idea with a meaningful impact: connecting home gardens with neighbors in need in a state where, according to Feeding America, 1 in 10 people and 1 in 7 children experience hunger.

Today, Certified Master Gardener Volunteers Carol Burley '82, Vickie Hardy, and Deb Miller help organize distribution locations, find volunteers, and get the word out to the community — not to mention maintain their own home gardens and harvest crops throughout the season.

At the drop-off sites, they see donors' joy in giving back firsthand. Vickie recalls how one regular donor shared that she experienced homelessness as a child and is now passionate about providing fresh produce to her community.

Beyond paying it forward, produce distribution days create opportunities to connect and learn.

Families often make deliveries together, turning the experience into a point of pride for what has been grown in the family garden — so much abundance that it must be shared.

New community members also introduce crops, such as okra and purslane, sparking recipe exchanges and conversations about culture, food, and gardening traditions. For some participants, the experience inspires even deeper involvement; several Veggies for the Pantry donors have gone on to become Certified Master Gardener Volunteers themselves.

The Master Gardener program is filled with a diversity of community members — city planners, nonprofit leaders, local government officials, 20-something tree nursery employees, retirees — all driven by a passion for supporting their communities. One juniper sapling, bumblebee, or box of cucumbers at a time. 🐝



Get your hands dirty.

Become a Certified Master Gardener Volunteer or get involved in one of the many initiatives across North Dakota. Applications are open for the course beginning January 2027 — available virtually or on campus.





Broadening Horizons, Opening Hearts

The NDSU Transition and Access Program makes history, graduating its first class of students with developmental disabilities and bringing a new sense of belonging to the Bison Herd.

Alexander Aikens '26 might seem like an unlikely pioneer. She arrived on campus in 2021 after spending her school years in special education classrooms. Her speech had a different rhythm from the typical undergraduate, and her walk had a different cadence. A lifelong music lover, she planned simply to sing in choir.

But this past May, Alexander became one of the first three students to graduate from the NDSU Transition and Access Program (TAP). She earned a three-year College-to-Career Certificate with a concentration in music.

At graduation, Alexander took the mic. "We did it!" she called out, flashing her jubilant smile at the crowd that had gathered to celebrate with her and her classmates.

Alexander and her big dream

Alexander was a middle school student when she told her parents she planned to graduate from NDSU, where her dad, Dr. Shontarius Aikens, worked in the College of Business.

But when she shared her dream with her classmates and teachers, "they'd kind of laugh her off," recalled her mom, Christyal Alexington, a special education teacher at Carl Ben Eielson Middle School in Fargo.

They knew Alexander as a girl who needed someone to walk her from class to class so she wouldn't wander off, as a special education student who was assisted by paraprofessionals in general education classes.

Alexander, however, has never been easily deterred. She's been overcoming odds

since the day she was born, 14 weeks ahead of schedule.

Weighing in at only 1 pound 11 ounces, she could wear her dad's wedding ring around her wrist, with room to spare. Her life began with heart surgery and an extended hospital stay. She has since had multiple surgeries on her hips and legs, relearning how to walk, again and again and again.

Shontarius, now an associate professor at Concordia College, says Alexander brings a resilient approach to life.

"If there is something she wants to do, she goes after it and doesn't give up," he said.

This seems to be a family trait.

When Christyal learned of her daughter's dream to be a Bison, she hatched a plan: Alexander, who had been singing since she was 2 years old and had participated independently in various choirs, would take four years of choir at NDSU and then "graduate out."

A new, land-grant approach

Meanwhile, the NDSU Center for Accessibility and Disability Resources was collaborating with faculty and staff campus-wide to create a new program: TAP. It would offer a flexible curriculum and provide support to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Currently more than 300 U.S. colleges and universities offer similar programs for students who traditionally have not had the opportunity to get a higher education.

The goal of TAP involves more than inviting a new group of students into classrooms. It weaves together a web of departments and offices across NDSU that support TAP students as they fully integrate into academic, social, and living experiences and prepare for careers after graduation.

"We talk a lot about NDSU being a land-grant university, and that the mission is to provide education, experiences, and opportunities for all people," TAP director Dr. Molly McKinnon said. "I can't even say enough good things about all of the departments that have created unique pathways for us."

Alexander's NDSU journey

A couple of years before TAP existed, when Alexander arrived on campus to sing in choir, Christyal noticed people staring at her daughter.

"They were not mean looks," she said, "but I could see they did not picture her as a student."

However, as a member of the Cantemus soprano/alto chorus, Alexander started getting to know other students.

"The longer she was at NDSU and the more involved she got, the more friends she made,"

Attending NDSU introduced Alexander Aikens '26 to a whole new world. Her family (below), including parents Dr. Shontarius Aikens (center left) and Christyal Alexington (center right) celebrated her graduation. "She carries herself as an adult now," Christyal said.



While at NDSU, Alexander experienced internships, work, and volunteer opportunities. She also co-presented at conferences and sang the national anthem at Bison sporting events.



“We did it!”

Alexander Aikens '26

Christyal said. “People were seeing her as a person and not her disability.”

Alexander said she loved singing with the choir, particularly their performances of Handel’s Messiah: “It was really good. I know the words, I know everything.”

Her choir director, associate professor Dr. Charlette Moe, says Alexander arrived as a strong musician, and her vocal tone grew warmer during the five years she was in Cantemus. The only thing Charlette adapted for Alexander was a performance protocol: She and the choir members made sure Alexander arrived safely to her spot when processing in and going up and down stairs.

“Learning from others benefits the person, but it also benefits the rest of us,” Charlette, who retired from NDSU last spring, said. “Alexander changes

lives. She changed mine.”

In 2023, when Alexander entered the brand-new TAP, she continued with choir and expanded her studies to include classes in music, communication, computer applications, financial management, and public speaking.

Like other NDSU students, she found internships and on-campus jobs, volunteered, and joined clubs. She used her computer skills at the library to transfer thesis files from one database to another. She washed pots in the greenhouse, sang with kids at the NDSU Center for Child Development, and practiced with the cheer team.

Perhaps the best experience of all was supporting her beloved Bison by singing the national anthem at various sporting events.

“I believe each time she performed at NDSU, whether for choir or singing the national



The TAP graduation ceremony celebrated three students (above) who dared to take a new path with support from the NDSU community. For Alexander, that included her choir director, Dr. Charlette Moe (left).

anthem, she was changing how people see the norm,” Christyal said.

A campus-wide collaboration

In addition to taking core NDSU and TAP courses, each student takes classes in one of six career pathways:

- Agricultural Science
- Animal Science
- Computer and Engineering
- Education and Childcare
- Entertainment, Athletics and Arts
- Hospitality and Business Management

TAP staff assist faculty with making instruction accessible to these learners, and trained peer mentors support the students in class, helping them with notetaking and other tasks.

These students often bring something special to their courses, expanding the usual conversations, says Molly, TAP’s director.

“Sometimes brains take a different route to make the same connection,” she said. “Along with that, integrated learning creates patience, empathy, understanding — those soft skills that I think sometimes we miss when we just want to take a straight path.”

But academics is only one of the program’s four pillars. The others are social, employment, and independent living. Peer mentors — traditional university students — are integral to helping TAP students participate fully in university life.

One of the program’s original mentors, Jayli Wandler ’26, was introduced at graduation as “the big sister of the program.”

“She is always willing to have dinner, go shopping, or give advice,” TAP coordinator Jordan Bentz ’21, ’24 said. “She served this program not only as a mentor but as a friend. A best friend. An advocate.”

With plans to go to dental school in the future, Jayli says she wants to continue helping people with disabilities.

“My life revolved around TAP,”

she said. “I arrived at school without a purpose, and I found one.”

The possibilities of TAP

Now in its fourth year, TAP continues to grow, with 25 students enrolled in the 2026 to 2027 academic year. So far, its students have come from North Dakota, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Ohio. (The student from Ohio chose NDSU in part because he is a fan of Bison football.)

For her part, Alexander, now 26, is long past needing someone to walk her from class to class. She is even starting to use paratransit transportation to get around her community.

“It’s just so much freedom,” Molly said, “and she’s really proud of that.”

Christyal says she’s telling the middle school students in her special education classes about TAP and Alexander’s experiences at NDSU.

“I want them to have a goal in life to reach towards. I keep telling them that they can go to college,” she said. “A person is a person. Everyone can follow their dreams.” 🐾

In Search of a Homeland

A new museum exhibit at NDSU gives one of North Dakota's most essential and least-known stories the home it deserves.

Story by Dr. Jessica Clark '04, '10 | Photos submitted by the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection

"Everybody went to church, because where else could you go?"

Jeremy Kopp '11 has never forgotten that voice. It belongs to a woman in the Germans from Russia Heritage Collection (GRHC) oral history archive, one of hundreds of recordings that capture what it was like to grow up as a German from Russia on the northern Plains.

Not just the hardship, though there was plenty of that, but the softness, too. The grandmothers. The kuchen. The baby rabbits kept in an old Chrysler car body. The children who went to Salt Lake in south-central North Dakota to swim after their chores were done.

As GRHC outreach and operations coordinator, Jeremy has given those voices a new home. This summer, the GRHC opened its first immersive exhibit, *In Search of a Homeland: The Journey of the Germans from Russia*.

The Germans from Russia were German-speaking colonists who left the independent German states for Russia at the invitation of Russian rulers, then emigrated again to the northern Plains in the late 1800s when the promises made to them were broken.

They built the farms, churches, small towns, and much of the agricultural tradition that still defines North Dakota. For nearly 50 years, led by emeritus director Michael Miller, the GRHC has been quietly preserving their stories. Now, those stories have room to breathe.

The new museum-quality installation at the NDSU Library brings together family photographs, handwritten letters, and maps tracing migration routes across two continents. Objects on display tell their own stories: a gold cross necklace given as a confirmation gift, a Russo-Turkish War Medal for military service.

At the heart of the exhibit is the Dakota Memories corner, where visitors can hear oral histories from the community directly. And they can take something home: a traditional recipe

card, because heritage is something you practice, not just preserve.

The exhibit welcomes everyone: descendants of the Germans from Russia community, curious North Dakotans and NDSU students, and anyone who has ever wondered what it cost their ancestors to start over somewhere new.

"Being a home for this story does not mean we own it," Jeremy says. "The story belongs to the community. Our role is to preserve it, share it, and help future generations understand why it matters."

Some stories belong to everyone. This one finally has a home. 🏡

COME HOME TO HISTORY

In Search of a Homeland, located at the NDSU Library, welcomes every NDSU alumnus and friend. Plan your visit weekdays between 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. No Germans from Russia roots required.



Take a journey through the creation of the new exhibit by reading the full story at NDSUFoundation.com/magazine.



Ukrainians in Bismarck, North Dakota (Haynes Photography Studio)

NDSU

FOUNDATION

McGovern Alumni Center
North Dakota State University
PO Box 5144
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NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
HOMEcoming • 2026
SEPTEMBER 28 - OCTOBER 3

FRIDAY, OCT. 2

BISON BASH | 4-6:30 P.M.

CHURCHILL FIELD

Kick off Homecoming weekend Bison-style with food trucks, free inflatable games, and activities for the whole family.

HOMEcoming PARADE | 6 P.M.

N UNIVERSITY DRIVE

Bring your school spirit and cheer on festive floats and the Gold Star Marching Band with alumni, friends, and fans of all ages.

**CELEBRATE WITH
THE HERD!**



Explore a complete list of events, including the presidential inauguration, new facility tours, Bison football, and more, at ndsu.edu/homecoming

