

Randy Ray:

Welcome to episode number 35 of Reflections from WT. My name is Randy Ray. I'm your host. I'm joined today by a couple of guys I have a lot of respect for. The 11th President of West Texas A&M, Dr. Walter Wendler and Vice President for Philanthropy and External Relations. Dr. Todd Rasberry. Good morning, morning.

Todd Rasberry:

Morning.

Randy Ray:

So I'm excited about our topic today and I think we have a lot of information to share. Let's talk about One West. I want to start out by reading something that I read on the WT website. I think this really encapsulates it very well. One vision, one spirit in one Texas. 26 counties, millions of stories, countless ideas and opportunities. And still after more than 100 years, there's one vision, one spirit, one way forward. For the panhandle, for Texas, for world and for the next 100 years, there will always be One West. What is One West?

President Wendler:

I don't know, but it brings a tear to my eye.

Randy Ray:

It was my dramatic reading wasn't it?

Todd Rasberry:

[crosstalk 00:01:14] Yeah, it was your dramatic reading.

President Wendler:

I'll let Todd address that. I think Todd has worked diligently with his people and they've got a great group over there that are really trying to communicate the deep values of West Texas and West Texas A&M. I know he'll have a view of that. Then after Todd speaks, I'll say a word.

Todd Rasberry:

Okay, well, you did a great job, Randy, of reading that. The dramatic reading was great.

Randy Ray:

I practiced.

Todd Rasberry:

Good. We worked very hard when we started planning the campaign. We planned for almost four years for this campaign in various stages, two years we were really in the development and staffing stage. All along, we knew that the backbone of our campaign was WT 125 From the Panhandle to the World, which is our long range plan. This really is the fuel for at campaign. So as we began planning we were looking for those identifying characteristics from WT 125 that resonated both on the campus, but across the region as well.

Todd Rasberry:

What became very clear is this... and I tell Dr. Wendler this often, this concept that he develops and he talks about so often as regionalism, as a defining characteristic. Most often at regional institutions you don't hear them talk about regionalism, because they think it's a limiting characteristic. So it was very unique to hear him talk about that. He embodies that in many ways as our leader, obviously. One of them is that he's throughout the panhandle and the communities of the region constantly just finishing up his school tour. But he has really worked hard to let people across the panhandle know that this is their university and we have a responsibility to them. So with those kind of concepts in mind we were really looking for branding our campaign in a way that was very identifiable. Easy was, West. We're West Texas A&M University. The name has changed five times, but it's always been WT.

Randy Ray:

It's always been in there, yeah.

Todd Rasberry:

SO it was nice to be able to have an identifying logo and a brand that kept the west in there. Then as you, and I know we are in West Texas, but there's also this larger concept that we were trying to capture. That is this notion or this kind of idea of the west that people think about. It's that romantic notion of the west as you think about it. So with those kind of ideas in mind, we landed on this One West idea. No matter where we are in time, it's still the 1WT and we're still in the, One West. The west, as we know it and love it.

Randy Ray:

Dr. Wendler, I know that this WT 125 was something that you're very passionate about still are. How does that tie into this?

President Wendler:

Well, as Dr. Rasberry said, it's in many ways the foundation for the One West Campaign. But I really do believe this unapologetic regional focus, it defines the campaign in the same way that it defines WT. I am so pleased when I go visit high schools. Just recently I visited the 67th high school in the tour, which is the last one. It happened to be in Channing. On the way back I thought, there's some remarkable things about these schools and the communities that compose the Texas panhandle. One is that they're all different. They have their own in a sense micro-regions within their tremendous school pride. The principals, in some of these small schools, the principals know every kid... student, kid, they know them all. They know their families. They know the hardships that some of them had to overcome. They know the advantages that some of them are blessed with. That mix goes into a pressure cooker called the public's school out there in a small community. It brews a result that's positive for all and it's remarkable.

President Wendler:

I was in Kelton, four seniors... and I'm happy to report that 50% of the senior class is coming to WT, which is... Both of them. It's just, it's remarkable. They're attached to the university. Many of the faculty, the teachers and administrators come from those universities. I consider it to be an important charge for me, for Todd, for Neil Terry, for all of the vice presidents, to make sure we sustain the best parts of the value systems that make up this region because they're distinctive. We will be distinctive. Not because we declare it, but because we hold onto these deep seated values. Hard work, a commitment

to family, a commitment to community, sense of personal responsibility. I got a list of 10 of them, I'm not going to go through it, but the bottom line is they're there. That defines in my mind, Todd and his folks' vision of One West.

Randy Ray:

Dr. Rasberry, let me ask you, so your position here at WT, you're over the campaign. What background do you have? What makes you want to do that? Tell me about your love for WT and your background.

Todd Rasberry:

Yeah well, so when I got here it was almost three decades in higher ed, all of it in the fundraising side. That was not my vision of what I would be doing in higher ed. I thought I would do fundraising a little while I finished a terminal degree and then I'd do something else. But I fell in love with it because it really is... I say this often to my staff, "We are the tail of the dog. We don't wag the dog." You don't have to have a fundraising organization at a university in order to be a university. But what we do, what we provide, and it's even more important now than it might have been 50 or 100 years ago, is the fuel for the vision and the plan of a university. Because if you don't have the public private partnership and public education, it's very, very hard to accomplish the things that you want to accomplish and fulfill the vision like we have in WT 125.

Todd Rasberry:

So I started out in the fundraising world, hating it at first, because I thought you should never talk about money. But quickly learning that people want to support things that matter to them. They want to be part of something larger than the selves. Education is easy for us in this country, because most of us have benefited in one way or another directly or indirectly from the life changing experience of higher education. So I came here thanks to Dr. Wendler and-

Randy Ray:

From where? Where'd you come from?

Todd Rasberry:

So we were in Kentucky, Central Kentucky at a small private liberal arts college, Georgetown College. I had gone there when a new president went there because they were financially in trouble and he needed somebody to come and help him raise money. That's another story that was the hardest job I've ever done, but we had a grand baby born. We wanted to come back to Texas. They were in Lubbock. I told my bride, we could be further away in Texas than we are now in Kentucky. I got to go where there's a job.

Todd Rasberry:

I had a friend, a friend of Dr. Wendler's, who I had worked with at a previous institution, who said, "I think Wendler at WT is looking for somebody, are you interested?" I said, "Well, you know what? I think I am." Stepping foot on this campus, I hadn't been on this campus in a long time, Randy and I didn't recognize the place. It had just transformed in such an exciting way.

Todd Rasberry:

Then visiting with Dr. Wendler and Dr. Brad Johnson, who was the cheer era of the Search Committee, about how WT was envisioning itself and what it was accomplishing was very, very exciting. I'd just come from a place that we were working really hard to save it from the accrediting agency closing the doors because of being out of financial compliance. Then hearing this kind of renewed vision for what higher ed, particularly regional higher education could be, was very, very energizing.

Todd Rasberry:

I've just continued to be excited about it. What really makes my job easier is the right people are excited about it. Our alumni, the people in the community, who want to support the kind of vision that's been created here. That really is what our campaign is doing. It's the fuel for WT 125. The success really needs to go to... for our campaign, needs to go to our donors because they're the ones that make it successful. But we do have a great group of people who are working very hard to help share that vision.

Randy Ray:

Well, when we come back I want to talk about that fuel a little bit more. And I want to talk about those three critical areas that you guys are focusing on when it comes to One West. We'll be back in one minute.

WTAMU Commercial:

West Texas A&M University is proud to call the Texas Panhandle home. And providing the top 26 counties with opportunity and qualified graduates is an important WT mission. From their first experience on campus to graduation date the WT experience is a challenging series of steps that will embolden our students to reach their full potential. Then in turn, go out into the panhandle and make a difference. Quality education with a big local return is one thing you can find here at WT. For more information about West Texas A&M University visit our website at [wtamu.edu](http://wtamu.edu).

WTAMU Commercial:

West Texas A&M University is a student body that learns by doing and is always seeking opportunity, talented and accomplished faculty that teach both in and out of the classroom, programs that provide timeless information and meet the challenges of today's world, facilities rich in technology, as well as WT history. Now is the time to strengthen connections and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience, share your heritage, share your pride.

Randy Ray:

Welcome back to Reflections from WT. We are talking about the new campaign One West. The ultimate goal is to raise \$125 million. And we've already raised \$80 million of that. But of our goal of \$125 million, we have three critical areas, people, programs, and places. Would you guys speak to that just a little bit?

President Wendler:

I'll speak first to the general subdivision of those. Those are the things people first, always, the programs that those people create and the places that they create them in. That covers the full range of campus resources. Of course, people are always the most important and the focus on this campaign. We are receiving gifts and will continue to receive gifts related to places and programs. There's no question about it. But we are interested in endowments for faculty and for student scholarships to support our people. This becomes increasingly important for students because of us of education that continues to

rise due to inflation and many other things. We're cautious about how we spend money, but we've still got to pay our faculty, and we have to put gas in the cars, and, turn the lights on and so on and so forth.

President Wendler:

So we believe that this public private partnership that Todd so frequently talks about, can we help produce the cost of students, and we are expanding our scholarships for students. Then endowed professorships, it's hard for us to compete with major land grant universities, and flagships, and so on to attract the best faculty. But the recognition that's brought to a faculty member through an endowed position, even if it's a modest endowment is very valuable. It's the nature of the profession. I've been teaching students on and off, mostly on since 1975 when I started teaching at LSU. Faculty appreciate the recognition for their good efforts that comes from, being rewarded with something like an endowed professorship. So these two things are critical in my mind to the campaign.

President Wendler:

But we are funding programs and you'll see and hear about some of these as we move along... and places, facilities on the campus and so on that support our activities. You're going to see a lot. I say, and it makes Todd nervous when I say it, but we're going get to that \$125 million ahead of schedule. I can promise you that it's going to happen. It's just going to happen.

Randy Ray:

Dr. Raspberry what's the hardest part of your job?

Todd Raspberry:

Well, the thing that we have the least control over is timing. We don't make decisions for our donors. They decide when they're going to give and what they're going to give. This is a comprehensive campaign by the way. So if you give a philanthropic gift to anything at WT during this campaign, it counts. So we want to make sure that we have structured... And when Dr. Wendler and I visited early on, this isn't his first campaign as a university president. We talked about the importance of that. Being able to say to our donors, "What's passionate to you? And what is it you want to invest in?" So we've structured it where that works. We do have priorities as you have mentioned and Dr. Wendler has mentioned, people being our first priority. So the hardest part of my job is being patient. Knowing that my timing is irrelevant in my work, it's always the donor's timing.

Todd Raspberry:

But that's okay too, because we want to make sure that we don't get one gift from a donor, but we get a lifetime of gifts from a donor. So when they give the money, the work really just begins for us because we have to steward that where they feel good about it, they see how it's making a difference, and they want to do that again. I can share with you story after story of people who have given money and say their life has been transformed by it right here at WT.

Randy Ray:

Oh yeah.

Todd Raspberry:

It's a lot of fun to hear those stories.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. You mentioned before our break you said it is probably more important than it was 50 years ago, a hundred years ago. And, and I know that to be true because when I went to school here as an undergrad, we really heard very little about fundraising. Would both of you say something about how important it is and how little funding we get from the government now?

President Wendler:

I'll go ahead and start. I've looked at this very carefully. Some public universities in America if you look at their total budget, all of their expenditures, less than 10% come from public sources. That's just the way it is. The vast majority comes-

Randy Ray:

And that keeps going down, doesn't it?

President Wendler:

It keeps going down. Then the vast majority come from tuition and fees, from gifts, from grants, from contracts, from auxiliaries, from selling coffee cups, to all kinds of things. Universities, there a business. They're very special kind of business, no different than a house of worship. You have to keep the lights on and make sure the bills are paid. The state used to own that. I'm not being critical of Texas or any other state because the cost of education keeps elevating. People are expecting more and we have to be cautious. We have to be mindful of how we utilize resources, but I can tell you this 40 years ago, 70% of WT's budget came from the State of Texas.

Randy Ray:

So going back to what I said, when I was an undergrad 70%, now it's 10%.

President Wendler:

Well, it's not 10% here, it's closer to 30%. The regional institutions like ours still tend to rely more heavily on state funding because development funds are a little bit more challenging to raise at smaller institutions.

Randy Ray:

Right. Yeah.

President Wendler:

They don't have some of the kind of big name recognition. Our football stadium seats 8,000. When you seat 100,000 it changes the nature of the institution, it's just a different kind... Not better or worse, just different.

Randy Ray:

Yeah.

President Wendler:

I think that's one of the reasons, the primary reason. But that's not a lament about the State of Texas in many ways. I think the State of Texas done a great job in sustaining our funding. I just looked at some figures the other day and we are dead on the national average for how the state supports higher education. But when I look at indebtedness, our indebtedness is below the national average. So I think we're doing a good job. That's a combination of the state house and the university's working hard to give value for the dollar.

Randy Ray:

Well, I know I'm speaking for everyone that has a love for WT. Thank you both for helping us keep the lights on, helping us keep students coming back, and taking care of our beautiful campus. Dr. Rasberry, I always throw a curve ball to all of our guests.

Todd Rasberry:

All right.

Randy Ray:

Are you ready?

Todd Rasberry:

[crosstalk 00:18:29] I'm ready.

Randy Ray:

I was talking to our engineer, Johnny Story this morning and he says, "I had a good idea."

President Wendler:

Ut-oh! That's trouble right there. I know this guy. That's trouble.

Randy Ray:

He said, "Get them to talk about their favorite Christmas tradition." Because this is going to air right before Christmas. So what's your favorite Christmas tradition in your family? Again, the silence is-

Todd Rasberry:

Yeah. No, I know mine. I was waiting for Dr. Wendler. So I don't know how this started. This is in my little nuclear family with my daughters and now my grandkids. But somewhere along the way, very early, we started... everywhere we went, and for things that were meaningful, we started collecting Christmas ornaments.

Randy Ray:

Yeah?

Todd Rasberry:

So when we put up our Christmas tree, it's bad when we take it down it's really bad because everything has its own box, but we probably have 500 ornaments that we've just collected and all of them have a little story behind them. So I don't know if my daughters like this or not, but every year they get at least

one Christmas ornament that means something. Either related to life experience or just something that's meaningful to all of us.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. Some of my favorite ornaments on our tree are the ones that the kids made 30 years ago-

Todd Rasberry:

Yeah.

Randy Ray:

... 35 years ago.

Todd Rasberry:

I've got those too.

Randy Ray:

Yeah.

President Wendler:

Yeah. We have those too. Yeah.

Randy Ray:

Dr. Wendler?

President Wendler:

Mine's a little different. It's not about something that we alone as a family do, but it really is about the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, that's so important to us. We work diligently to stay focused on that because it's hard with all the bright lights, and the food, and the gift giving and everything. I think our tradition is to really pay attention to the origins of our faith in Christ and make that the center of what we do on the holiday to the best of our ability. By the way, we eat plenty. I don't eat as much as I used to. It just things change, everything changes. We of course exchange gifts and do all of those things. But to me what's really important is the namesake of the holiday, Jesus Christ. That's our tradition.

Randy Ray:

I thank you guys for sharing.

Todd Rasberry:

How about yours? Wait, you can't-

President Wendler:

Yeah. [crosstalk 00:20:41] Hey, good for you. That old Todd, I'm glad he's here. We always give up. What's yours? Yeah.



Randy Ray:

Christmas Eve, my wife always, we always have a special kind of... It involves food.

Todd Rasberry:

Yeah.

Randy Ray:

For some reason it's always shrimp. I don't know. So shrimp on Christmas Eve, I don't know where that came from.

Todd Rasberry:

Sounds Cajun to me.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. I don't know, but that's what we always do right before we open gifts, we have a shrimp boil so-

Todd Rasberry:

Fun.

President Wendler:

Oh, interesting. Do you open the gifts on Christmas Eve?

Randy Ray:

We do. Yeah.

President Wendler:

Oh man, he's a heathen.

Randy Ray:

I did that. My wife did that grow up. We always you opened gifts on Christmas Eve and then Santa comes, and then that's Christmas.

Todd Rasberry:

Hey, that's a West thing by the way.

Randy Ray:

Is it?

Todd Rasberry:

I think that's a West thing.

Randy Ray:

Did y'all do that?

Todd Rasberry:

We did well. We had multiple Christmases because we all lived in the same town. So grandmother's house with one side of the family.

Randy Ray:

Yeah.

Todd Rasberry:

Christmas Eve Christmas day.

Randy Ray:

Right.

Todd Rasberry:

But I look at my wife's family and they were Christmas morning people. But they kind of wanted to be Easterners, so.

President Wendler:

We were that too. But it was Old World stuff. Until I was in high school, this is almost a little embarrassing to admit, I never saw a Christmas tree set up in our house until Christmas morning.

Todd Rasberry:

That's right.

President Wendler:

My parents set it up after we went to bed.

Randy Ray:

Really?

President Wendler:

Yeah.

Todd Rasberry:

Christmas Eve.

President Wendler:

Yeah.

Todd Rasberry:

That's right.

President Wendler:

That's when they set it up and then-

Todd Rasberry:

[crosstalk 00:22:03] You left it up 12 days of Christmas.

President Wendler:

Yeah. We left it up a long time until all the needles were falling off. But the bottom line is that was a tradition. We don't maintain that tradition. Our tree's been up since Halloween now, I mean just about. But that was a powerful tradition in our family. My father, we came from working class family, my father would go out on Christmas Eve and buy the tree. I'll tell you what, \$1 will get you a whole lot on Christmas when you're talking about Christmas trees almost as good as a baby when you're hiring a fundraiser. But at any rate, that was a kind of a tradition in the family. So the house for that 24 hour period on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day was energized with getting everything ready.

Randy Ray:

Yeah. Well, on behalf of everyone at West Texas A&M University, we want to wish you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. We will see you next year.