

- Hello everyone and welcome back to the I Am WT podcast. I am your host Thomas Rodriguez, and I'm joined with-

- Micah Bailey.

- And we are here joined with two very special guests, Joe and Laura Street. Tell us about yourselves and your connection to WT.

- Well, I've been a WT student when we first moved here. We moved here in, what, 1984? Yeah, 84 when Joe bought the dealership, the Toyota dealership here and I had been working as a physical therapist and a nurse in Oklahoma City area. Get here away from all of our support system and family and I'm thinking, I don't know what I'm gonna do with myself. I think I'll just go to school and so I decided to come down here and get a master's degree to be a nurse practitioner. I ended up getting both a bachelor's in nursing and a master's in nursing. I already had an associate in nursing and that's what got me involved in nursing in the first place. So I spent quite a bit of time down here. I had a job and I had two children to raise. Joe of course, ended up doing a lot of support during that time when I was going through the educational process. And I was thinking about going to get a PhD in nursing except that I'd have to go down to North Texas to do that. And Joe said, "Can you please wait until the children are gone before you do that?" I said, fine, I did. But then when it came to the time that the children were gone and we still didn't have a PhD program up here, and I thought, you know, I'm making a lot more money than my counterparts who have a PhD and I'd have to spend 50, \$60,000 a year to do that and I just, I'm gonna stay where I am. I ended up working in the OB GYN department at Texas Tech Health Sciences Center. And that's the story.

- I know the doctorate, I mean, we have a doctorate's program now, but I definitely know that like I'm gonna hit my bachelor's degree and then I'm out. I don't need to stick around for a master's. But that's not to say our master's program is bad. We have a very good master's program here at WT. So how did the two of you meet?

- You know, I'll let Laura tell that story. She tells it better than I do so.

- Well, I'm more dramatic than he is. So we had both gone to the University of Oklahoma as freshman as right out of high school. He joined a fraternity, I joined a sorority, instantly we were set up to double date. I was to go out with his roommate and he was to go out with my roommate and we would double date. And Barbara and I got back to the sorority house and I said, "Boy, I sure thought Joe was cute. I really liked him." And she said, "You know, I liked John." I said, "Why don't we see if we can get this switched?" So we asked the person who put us together, "Can you get this switched?" And she said, "Sure." So I ended up with Joe Street, 53 years of marriage we, I, you know, made that right decision. But of course I didn't tell Barbara some things about John I should have told her. But all fair and love and war, right?

- That is hilarious, I love that story.

- 53 years is a long time.

- 53 years is a long time, yeah.

- So are you two both from Oklahoma or are you from Canyon? Where are y'all from?

- I'm originally from east Tennessee, but spent most of my growing up years in Oklahoma City.

- I grew up in Oklahoma City and then, you know, got into the automobile business after graduating. And so then, you know, we moved here from Norman, Oklahoma. We lived there the last eight years before we moved here.

- Cool. So wait, Norman, Oklahoma, is that where you ended up going to college or?

- Yes, we both graduated from OU.

- Sweet.

- I have an uncle out there who would be very excited to hear that. So you two, let's talk a little bit about y'all's involvement with the community. I know you guys tend to give back pretty frequently. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

- My involvement when we moved here was I, you know, I owned the business and I knew that I needed to get involved in the community and learn about the community. The first things I got involved with were involving the arts. I think the first board I got into was the Greater Southwest Music Festival and then that led to, I was on the Symphony board for 10 or 12 years. I was on the Amarillo Museum of Art Board and that's kind of where I got started. Then that kind of went over to more human services. I got involved with United Way. I love United Way and what it does for our community and I was on their board for 10 or 12 years. I was president of the board for United Way for two years, and then I chaired the campaign in 2001 with Guyon Saunders and that's how I got to know him and I'm presently on the Boy Scout board and the Fellowship Christian Athletes Board and on the Guyon Saunders Resources Board. That's what I'm currently involved with.

- You're very involved. That's really cool.

- Very involved. Thanks.

- So how did WT come into play with that? When did WT start becoming an involvement for you?

- Well, I knew that WT was a very important part of our community, we had associates and that were graduates of WT and you know, I know that just for the benefit of helping kids get a great education and then coming into the workforce that we wanted to do things with WT. Randy Ray came to me about 20 years ago and asked me if we could donate a truck to WT for

use of towing the communications vehicle around, especially at football games and things like that, so we've been doing that for a long time, but we have a lot of associates now. We have 150 associates at Street Toyota and a lot of 'em come from WT and we just really realize the value of the university and we want do everything we can to help it.

- Speaking of that truck, I gotta speak because I'm the the radio person in the room. You guys have worked with us for a bit now. Like you guys have been underwriting for the station for quite a few years now. Why do you keep coming back?

- Well, we enjoy our association with WT, we think a lot, especially of Dr. Wendler and we love what's happened on this campus. We also do a big supporter of the athletic programs here. We just know it's a great, you know, it's quality of life and it's helping kids get a great education and becoming part of, like I said, the workforce.

- Well, it's definitely appreciated because, you know, without help from people like you, it would be really hard to get an education because some of us, we come to college with no support, no help. I mean, my parents are amazing and they're extremely supportive and helpful. Some families don't, aren't able to afford to give the students money to get through college. So it's appreciated for sure.

- So we're not gonna talk about y'all's secret gift yet. We'll talk about that after the break. But other than your most recent gift to WT, could you provide us with a few examples of projects or ways you've given back to the community?

- Well, most, you know, most recent gift besides the one to WT is we gave \$1,000,000 to the Guyon Saunders Resource Center and the Transformation Park project. I got involved with the homeless a long time ago. I've been involved with the Guyon Saunders Resource Center for over 20 years just through my involvement with United Way. These are our two largest gifts that we've ever given, the \$2,500,000 to WT and then for the nursing school and then the \$1,000,000 to the Guyon Saunders Resource Center and Transformation Park.

- I have to brag on the Transformation Park project a little bit because the audio for that promotion material that we made was recorded in this very studio. We had them come in here, we had someone ask questions. I actually worked on editing that audio, making it sound all nice and crisp and clean and everything. So it was a super cool project to be involved with. I just can't stop talking about it. I gotta stop yapping about it. So where did those values that you guys have talked about before come from and how do you think that's impacted your life?

- You know, we, we both grew up in families that were very wonderful nuclear intact families with lots of love and lots of support. Neither one of our families were huge in volunteering for organizations. We didn't really know about that. When we moved to Amarillo, we all of a sudden realized that we didn't know anybody. We didn't have any involvement in any groups of people and so we just started volunteering for organizations. And for me, it was, I volunteered for everything and

no one would call me because they didn't know me. You know, in Amarillo area, if you're gonna be part of a committee or a project, the chairman wants to know who they're putting on their committee, and if they don't know you, they don't call you. And it was a project that we got involved with, with Mark Bivins and the Discover Concerts at the Discovery Center, which was the Symphony Outdoor Concert with the Don Harrington Discovery Center and he wanted to do a fireworks display, so he invited, what was it, seven car dealers out to the ranch and to talk about this and we ended up supporting that and I became part of that project and then chaired it the next year and then after that I got my phone calls. So, I love being out and about and involved in the community and knowing what's going on and who's doing what and that's my passion. I worked as a physical therapist and a nurse practitioner until I became involved with the Globe News Center for the Performing Arts and left that career to being the executive director of that project, most fun I ever had. I did not wanna fundraise, I didn't like to fundraise, didn't know how to do that and I told the president of the board at the time when he was talking to me about, "Why don't you come help us with this new project we wanna do?" And he said, "Oh, that's okay, we got that covered." And then I quit my career, I go into his offices and they set me up in a office and I'm getting ready to put this organization together to build a performing arts center and he comes in and says, "Well, these are the people we're gonna raise money from." And I said, "But you told me I didn't have to do that." And he said, "Well, I lied." Well, that was a funny thing. He, you know, he was being funny. So, okay, but he left the office and I'm saying to myself, Laura, you may be dumb, but you're not stupid. You are in the largest fundraising project in the history of Panhandle of Texas and you need to figure this out. So I drive home, on my way home, I stop at Barnes and Noble and I go buy the book "Fundraising for Dummies". Read that, realized I knew nothing. So I enrolled in or registered in a couple of national professional organizations about fundraising and nonprofit management and I figured out how to do that. I am now a community fundraiser. I raised a lot of money for many different organizations. It's still not my passion, but somebody's got to do it. That's where when we first moved to Amarillo, we started getting involved in organizations, we realized what a reward we could have with that and that when you're helping others, when you're, when you're moving the needle for groups of people that need it, or if even in the arts, I see the arts, which is what I've been involved with for a long time, as has Joe, the arts just make my soul soar. I can work really hard all day long seeing patients and working on a construction project or, you know, anything but when I go to an opera or a ballet or a symphony or, or even a country western concert, it just makes my soul soar and Joe's the same way. We just really appreciate the arts, the art museum. The more we get involved in this community, the more we understand the fabric and we feel like we're a part of it and it has returned to us far more than we've ever given. So when we do give, whether it's financially or human resources, it's with a sense of humility and pride that God has blessed us so much that we're able to do that and it's just a very good feeling to help others. So we will not, we've talked about, you know, do we go retire someplace else? Well, no, we're too involved in this community to do that.

- You mentioned about the fundraising, you'd never known how to do it before and you didn't enjoy it but it's really funny because someone told me the other day that if you wanna do a lot of good, sometimes you gotta get into the nitty gritty and the dirty and even though you know you have a passion for this and you, I can see it, you love it, you know, it's not all gonna be easy, it's not all gonna be perfect even though you love it.

- No, it's not and the other thing I've learned too, I love a good challenge and God put me on this earth to be the person who can facilitate and serve and it's really a, it's a hard thing to do when you're sitting in a room where there's a problem or an issue and no one can seem to get through that but you talk it through, you figure it out, and at the end you've all come to some conclusion that is much better than it was before you started. And I call it mini disruptions, you know, anytime there's a disruption anywhere, the other side is always better. It's not fun and sometimes it's messy and sometimes, you know, feelings get sideways a little bit about it but in the end, when people come together and do something good, that's what it's all about.

- You were talking a lot about the arts earlier and I can appreciate that. As someone who has been in the WT, has performed in the WT music program a little bit, I can totally see where you're coming from about how just important that is 'cause I think a lot of people don't really recognize how important music and all that is to our culture and everything and I'm super happy that WT has one of the best music programs out there so we can really like, show off why it's important and all that.

- So you talked a lot about the arts. What is your favorite event to attend art wise?

- Oh my gosh. You know, event events are, well, I like events. I like being among people. I like being out and about and among people, you know, power of the purse. I'm chairman of the community advisory board for the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health at Texas Tech and Power of the Purse is probably one of the biggest, most fun, wonderful events that we have. But I also love going to the Fellowship of Christian Athletes luncheons, the Boy Scout luncheons, you know, we have great speakers in our area that come in to help support the causes that we support and I'll let Joe talk a little bit about that.

- Well, really, I agree with everything that Laura said. For me, I love the symphony concerts. I know that I don't wanna offend the opera or ballet okay, but the symphony concerts are what I enjoy the most if you said just one thing, but, you know, we're very fortunate to live in a city that's very invested in bringing a lot of great entertainment to the city. So there's just lots and lots of great things to see. But I've been involved with Fellowship of Christian Athletes for 10 or 12 years, been on their board and past president of that and you know, we've had some really great, great speakers who are great inspirational Christian speakers within and we're great athletes as well. So those have been very memorable and very fun for me. And we've had scout luncheons and so forth. We've had former governors, we've had some great speakers in that as well and that's been a lot of fun so I've enjoyed that very much.

- Okay, so normally people who enjoy symphonies, I could be having the wrong stereotype here, but I played in the band and I love symphonies and I think it's 'cause we kind of understand the music a little bit more. Did you play an instrument? Is that why you love it so much?

- You know, it's so funny you should ask that, Laura and I, you know, neither of us played any instrument and so forth and we got involved with the symphony because we moved to Amarillo and we didn't know anybody. We went to one of the, we first moved here, we went to a symphony ball and then we got season tickets and then I had a friend that I went to church with that was president of the symphony, and he asked me to come on the symphony board and that was, geez, a long time. That was in the late 1980s. So anyway, that's how we got involved.

- Well, yeah, they're part of that too that I'd like to add to it is we had never been to a symphony concert before we moved to Amarillo, Texas when we were, what, 33, 34 or something like that and so we thought, let's just go see what this is all about and we went and fell asleep. But, you know, we kept going, we kept going back. And I remember talking to the music director at the time, Jim Sapin, I said, "Jim, I think I need to understand this music before I can really enjoy it." And he says, "No, you don't, Laura, you just come then you finally realize what you like, what you don't like, you start hearing things over and over again, then you know what you wanna look for in your listening." And he's right, he gave me permission to just enjoy symphony concerts because I really thought they were very elitist and you had to really know what you were looking and listening to, to understand it. But that's not true at all. And it is the symphony's 100th anniversary this year. And so we're very pleased with how this has happened for our community and we're very much a part of the community with Chamber Music Amarillo, with Greater Southwest Music Festivals, all part of the symphony now. We've both been extremely involved in all of the changes that have happened in the symphony. So that's just one part of... we're a cultural arts district from the Texas Commission on the Arts, which is I think one of 24 in the state of Texas but that is a recognition that we are a wonderful place for the arts and when we were raising \$33,000,000 to build a performing arts center, only 500,000 came from outside our area, outside foundations were astounded that we had so much support for the arts here and we do, we have supports for, we have support for almost any organization that you can think of in our area. People here care about people here. Mary, a friend of mine, told me one time, said, "Laura, we have that true pioneer spirit. We feel like we're so far away from our own capital and nobody up here really cares about us down there, so we make our own quality of life." And she's right. You know, if we decide we wanna do something, we put a few people together and we can get it done.

- A couple things you said I wanna touch on. How kind of like Amarillo is kind of like far away from all the, where the big Texas cities are, so it doesn't get as much love, I can kind of see that. I'm from Houston, I didn't know what an Amarillo was until I came here for college and now that I see it, I can see like, yeah, this is just as important as the stuff that's going on down there. It should also get some recognition and what you said about how non-music, people can still enjoy music, I think

that's a big thing that a lot of people don't pick up on, is you don't need to understand it. It's there for you to enjoy, not there for you to, to have to, you know, understand. It's music. It's just there for you to listen to it. And I think a lot of people get too hung up over the whole I guess philosophical edge and are not just there to be like, "Oh, that was a nice piece. I like listening to that." Well, we're gonna take a quick little break and when we get back we are gonna talk a little bit about that nursing gift that we were talking about earlier.

- Donors to West Texas A&M University give more than their material support. They devote time, expertise, and commitment. WT would not be what it is today without individuals dedicated to our forward progress.

- Welcome back to the I Am WT Podcast. I'm Thomas-

- I'm Micah and we are here today with Joe and Laura Street.

- So we were talking a little bit about the nursing gift earlier. During a March 7th press conference, you two announced a \$2.5 million gift to establish the Laura and Joe Street School of Nursing, which is within WTS College of Nursing and Health Sciences. Tell us why supporting nursing was important to you.

- Well, you know, I should probably do that since I've been through the nursing program here and in Oklahoma too, as well as physical therapy. I've worked as a nurse practitioner for so many years. I've also been involved in so many organizations including both West Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University, Oklahoma University, Amarillo College, to be involved in many aspects of healthcare, including mental health care. I started the Panhandle Behavioral Health Alliance here eight years ago, and I got to travel West Texas through Texas Tech as executive director of the Laura W. Bush Institute for Women's Health. We had seven campuses, and so I got to travel West Texas there. I learned a lot about rural West Texas compared to the middle part of Texas that has so much population and so much attention when we don't. I learned that healthcare is extremely problematic in the rural areas and how important it is that we all come together and do what we can to support it, in particular with mental health care. So nursing is one of those and I say this not because I'm a nurse, but also because I understand more now, nursing is the glue for healthcare, I think. A nurse is someone who is presented with whatever is in front of him or her, and she has to be, he or she has to be prepared to take care of whatever is presented at that moment when it comes to healthcare. And to work with so many different groups of people like physicians and social workers and I mean, it's just, it is that important that nursing be supported because we have to know a lot, we have to be adaptable, we have to be people who can think on their feet, who can think with synergism. I'm just amazed at what you have to know. I also understand that there are a lot of people in this world who really don't understand nursing and what it means to become a nurse and to get that education. And for that reason, I think nursing needs to be supported because without nursing, healthcare is gonna fall apart. I truly believe that. I also know that there's a lot of programs out there. West Texas A&M University has one of the very best programs in the state of Texas. I'm just so proud of what this university has done with its

nursing program and now under Dr. Jeffreys, I mean Dirk Nelson, I really enjoyed knowing Dr. Dirk Nelson and now Holly Jeffreys has taken over. It has completely transformed what nursing education is in our area. I remember I was playing golf with a friend one time, who said, "Laura, I need to, I'm in charge of a trust and I need to give away some money and I'm thinking we need to support nursing because they're gonna be taking care of me when I'm old." And I said, "You're right, they are." And he said, I'm thinking about giving to, and he named a large university. I said, "Let's talk about that for a minute because I wanna talk to you about West Texas A&M University and the region and that most nurses who go through the program at West Texas A&M University are gonna stay in our area. The large universities, they go all over the place but if you really wanna support nursing here in the region, then West Texas A&M is the way to go." And that's where it ended up being. And that's just an example of, we really need to think hard about what West Texas A&M means to, not only our region, but beyond because I know there are people coming in from students coming in from other countries to WT. But I also know and I realize this after traveling the state, no one understands West Texas except for West Texans and I know that people who come back after they've been to Austin or Houston or lived in other places, will come back to their home place, their home region because they understand it's a good place to raise children.

- So we've talked a lot about the fundraiser side and a lot of why people should give to WT and support the community, but what do you think should be more on the student side? Do you have a piece of advice or something that you would tell the students to help?

- Oh, you know, students I think need a tremendous amount of support in so many ways today because our nation is so different than it was 20 years ago. There's a lot of upheaval, there's a lot of division. We all have to decide what we wanna do with our lives, and we're just making up our minds when we come out of high school. I also understand that there's a great number of students who want a college education, can't afford it, they don't have the support from their families to go through it because the families don't understand it. But, you know, it is extremely important that we support anyone who wants an education and what I would say to a student, whether you have the resources or not have the resources, don't let anything be in your way. If you want to have an education, if you want that degree, if you don't want it, that's fine but if you do, talk to others, talk to those that know, you know, come down to the university, talk to a counselor. Let others help you figure out how to get through this education process because the help is there. That doesn't mean it's easy. Sometimes there will be days that you'll think, "I can't do this. It's too hard. I don't have enough money." Let other people help and just keep working hard, persevering, anything we want in life is really about perseverance.

- I agree. I agree.

- So we know you two are involved with pretty much every organization there is to be involved with in Amarillo and you work really hard to support the community. Why do you think others should do the same?

- Well, we all love our panhandle community and we want it to thrive and continue and also to, you know, as new people move into our community as we try and support new businesses and so forth, it's about quality of life and just making this community a better place to live, have more opportunities as businesses, new business come in that gives, you know, students who are graduating and so forth more opportunities and so forth. So that's why we've supported it.

- Should we ask the big question?

- I think we should.

- Okay, it's time for the big question and don't be afraid about it or worry about what you have to say. Just, it's not super hard. So what does WT mean to you?

- Oh, you know, I've already said I love a good challenge. This really isn't a challenge for me because I really feel strongly about WT and what WT means to not just me, but everyone in our area and beyond. I mean, it is a stellar university. I was president of the foundation board of WT when we did our first fundraising goal, which was \$35,000,000 back then. It was the first one that WT had done. It actually transformed the campus, which transformed how we thought in the Amarillo area about Canyon and WT and before that, people in Amarillo thought, well, Canyon's too far away, I don't wanna go down there to a WT event. Well, that doesn't happen anymore. So what it means to me is the growth, the progress, the comradery of people, the people who wanna help and do and you know, it's the universe for our universe and that's what it means to me is I can proudly talk about WT, I can, you know, I can say, look what we've got, look where we are, look at where we were 20 years ago and where we are now and to me, that's essential to quality of life. It's a quality of life as well as a survival issue.

- You know, what WT means to me is great opportunity and a great college experience. You get to go to, if you're a panhandle kid and you wanna come to get a, you know, what I'd say is a major college experience, they have, Dr. Wendler has done a wonderful job of going around the panhandle, of course the last 20 years the university has raised a lot of money, they've got beautiful facilities, great athletic complex, great intramural complex and it's just a lot of fun for kids. They can get the same experience that they would get at a major university and you know, I think Dr. Wendler has done a great job of convincing students that really, you don't need to have this huge debt, you don't need to do that. And I think that's a great, great message. But WT just what it means is this great opportunity for our panhandle area and for kids to go on and have a great college experience and then go on to graduate and contribute to a great working life.

- And I would wrap that up by just saying that the two of us have decided this is where we are from now until we're gone from this earth. What a great place to live. And one of the reasons for that is WT. So when you say what it means to us, it's our life and it's a big part of our life.

- I think opportunity is a fantastic answer for that question 'cause that's always been my number one answer for it. Because I think a lot of students here, they don't realize you can kind of, if you want to do something, you can just go do it. Go be involved, there's so many opportunities all the time to be doing pretty much anything you want here at this campus. There's so many job opportunities, there's so many working experiences you can get and a lot of people that just kind of like flies under their radar and it's like, it's there for you, you can do it and I think that's really important. So yeah, opportunity is a great answer for that question.

- Yeah, most definitely. Well, we really appreciate y'all. I mean, you've given a lot of great insight and we just thank you for being here, honestly, yeah.

- It's our pleasure.

- I'm glad to do it.

- If you want to listen to the rest of our episodes, they are on the W-T-A-M-U website under podcasts, I believe. But yeah, thank you for joining us on the IMWT podcast, we'll catch you all later.