

## Reflections from WT- Jerry Faltinek

Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number 26 of Reflections from WT, the art and the soul of the Texas Panhandle. I'm Randy Ray. I'm the Director of Broadcast Engineering here on the campus, and I'm joined today by a couple guys who I think probably have two of the toughest jobs on campus, Dr. Walter Wendler, and I'll introduce our other guest to you in just a minute. So Dr. Wendler, we are off to a good start.

Dr. Wendler: It seems like it, Randy. I'm very pleased with what I see so far, and what I hear. My only fear is there's things I don't hear about. But generally, I'm pleased with what I see and hear.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I feel like I think things are a little different, that the campus seems a little quieter, but maybe not as quiet as I thought it was going to be.

Dr. Wendler: I'm with you. I was still expecting what we left in May, basically. We left it really much sooner than that.

Randy Ray: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Wendler: But, you know. It just kind of petered out and went to nothing. And this really was a kind of a jump start. And you know, our student population is here, the on-campus population, and I think I'm very pleased with what I see.

Randy Ray: Yeah. They're back, and I've been really surprised at... You know, you've mentioned in other things the tenacity of the Buffalos. And well, that's true. They're showing up to class. They're wearing their mask. They're trying to stay away from each other. I see them really trying to do things right.

Dr. Wendler: I do, too. I feel like I'm kind of a privileged guy. I can walk into any classroom, and I've been walking into classrooms, just standing in the back and looking around. Everybody's got their masks on.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: You know, and the people are teaching. And some of the faculty, of course they're far removed. Some of them wear their face shields. One of them didn't have a mask on, but it's understandable, because it's hard to project your voice through that mask. But I couldn't be more proud of the student population. We've got a few knuckleheads. You know that. But that's the way the world works. I mean, it's just going to be a few. But by and large, everybody's doing what they're supposed to be doing.

Randy Ray: I think a lot of it is they want to be here. They just want to be on campus. They want to experience college life as much as they can. And that's what I keep

telling them in my classes. Keep your mask on, stay six feet apart, so that we can keep coming.

Dr. Wendler: That's what I say, and I keep reminding people that... You know, and I cup my hands like I am right now... our future is in your hands, because you make the decisions every day, all day long, to do what we're asking you to do in the interests of safety. And as you do that, I have a very positive feeling. And if we get lax or cavalier about the requirements and the guidelines that are published by the state and the system and West Texas A&M University, we'll be in trouble. But I don't see it. Not yet. And I don't want to get too far in front of myself, because we're only a few days into it, but what I see so far and what I hear so far is all very positive.

Randy Ray: We can stay the course.

Dr. Wendler: Yup.

Randy Ray: I was talking to my wife this morning and I said, "You know, one thing that's really been odd for me is I have not had trouble finding a parking place."

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, it's true.

Randy Ray: Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Well, I've got my own, anyway.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I don't.

Dr. Wendler: By the way, it's for sale. If anybody wants to buy it, get in touch with me. We'll talk price.

Randy Ray: So, it's nice being able to find a parking place. Our guest today is Jerry Faltinek. Jerry helps take care of the parking services. His title is Director of Support Services for the university police department. And Jerry, I'm glad you're here today, man.

Jerry Faltinek: Thank you for the invitation. Appreciate it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I wanted to talk to you a little bit. I said earlier that I think you have a tough job. Do you think you do?

Jerry Faltinek: I'm not the most popular guy on campus.

Randy Ray: Me either, sometimes. You should ask my students in my classroom. But tell us what you do.

Jerry Faltinek: Well, I oversee everything that's related to parking. So, that entails parking permits. You know, the sale of permits, so we're really busy this time of year. Then there's the enforcement side of things, is where I get my popularity from. So, issuing citations, dealing with appeals, stuff like that.

Randy Ray: Well, I have to tell a story. Man, I was so glad that you were here. It was maybe a semester or two ago. We have a broadcasting truck, that I wave at you when I'm passing you out walking, Dr. Wendler. I went out to run an errand, and I came back and there was someone parked in the spot that we had designated for our broadcasting truck. And man, you took care of that in just a few minutes, and I really appreciated that.

Jerry Faltinek: Oh. Well, it's just part of my job.

Randy Ray: Well, you also help with the shuttles. Right?

Jerry Faltinek: Formerly, yes.

Randy Ray: So, what's the deal with that?

Jerry Faltinek: Well, the shuttle bus program, because of some cuts by the state, we had to find ways to make reductions. And so, not to take away anything from campus safety... Because I am under the UPD umbrella, so not to take anything away from that, the only real choice was to eliminate the shuttle bus program. The expenses of operation had increased. Ridership had been down. And I'd like to think it's because parking has improved across campus since I've been here. And so, with that being eliminated, just-

Randy Ray: But then you were able to save it.

Jerry Faltinek: Yeah, with a little bit of help from some community members. I reached out to Panhandle Community Services. They're a nonprofit organization. They provide transportation services to 26 counties in the Texas Panhandle. I had used them a couple years ago. We had a situation where I was having trouble hiring drivers. We had some mechanical issues. And so, in order to keep up service on campus, I reached out to them. They were more than happy to do it. They actually receive funding from the state, based off of ridership and mileage, so they were more than happy to come out to this little two mile course that we have out here. So I reached out to them, and they were interested, and I think it's going to be a win-win situation for everybody.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, I know you want more employees like Jerry.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. Well, that's, you know. This is the Panhandle spirit of work. Jerry saw what the problem was. We decided when we made cuts, to try to keep everything away from the academic mission of the university. You know, as Jerry just mentioned that, really. And of course we don't want to sacrifice

safety. You know, the UPD has been central in providing safety, and we were rated the safest campus in the state of Texas. I'm going to say that again. The very safest campus in the state of Texas, behind no one, not a private school, not a public school. We were number one. And it was a national ranking, and they looked at FBI crime statistics, Department of Education crime statistics, crimes against person, crimes against property. They looked at all these things. We didn't submit anything. We didn't write a letter and beg them to put us at the top on the list. We didn't know they were doing it. And it came out, and I'm proud of it, especially at this time with COVID-19.

But that's tied into what Jerry does. You know, we provide, I think a thoughtful environment, so in response to that, Jerry says, "Gosh. We need the bus service. It's important to a lot of our students." And I knew that when we decided to cut it out, and I approved it. I mean, we talked about it, and I said okay. Student government pushed back. They wanted to, if we were going to do that, get some more ADA accessible spaces, you know, with wheelchair marks on them, so that people, students that needed access because of disabilities would have closer parking. But in the end, Jerry's entrepreneurship saved... Now we have, like Jerry just said, it's a win-win. We saved \$260,000, and we don't have to maintain the buses anymore. Panhandle Transit, PCS is using our buses, but they're paying for the drivers and everything else, and they'll maintain the buses.

I just think it's a wonderful win-win situation, and it just shows you how sometimes an organization gets lemons and they make lemonade. This would have been a good idea even if we had a budget increase. I mean, we're not in the bus business. That is not our business. We're in the education business. We know that if people are going to get an education, they've got to get from the parking lot to the classroom, and if the parking lot's a mile away, well, it's a long walk in the rain, and so on and so forth, so we need buses. But anyway, I'm just, I couldn't be more proud.

Randy Ray: Yeah. There's not many employees across campus that have saved this university \$260,000.

Dr. Wendler: No.

Randy Ray: So Jerry, you've got to feel good about that, man.

Jerry Faltinek: Oh, I do. I mean, that wasn't really my intention. I hated to let go of the program when I was hired here five years ago. That was, my job was the shuttle bus program and parking. And so, to get told that that was going to go away, I have a good relationship with all the bus drivers. I felt like I had a commitment to them. You know, even though our numbers were down, we still haul between 100,000 and 120,000 people a year.

Randy Ray: Wow.

Jerry Faltinek: And so, I was like, that's just going to compound my problems on the other end, of the parking side, of people are all forced to park on campus. And then when you think about some of the major events that we have during regular class hours, and you're competing, bringing 200, 300 people in for an event, say at Legacy Hall, then they're competing for spaces that students pay for. And so, all that combined, because I had experience with Panhandle Community Services, I just thought I could reach out to them. Luckily they hired all my drivers. Actually, they hired six out of eight. Two of them retired. So, everybody maintained their employment. The two apartment complexes that we used to do service for, they continue to get service, and at no charge. Our commitment to Toot'n Totum is still going to happen, because we worked things out for them. And so, like I said, I think this is just one of the rare instances that I've ever been involved in anything, where it seems like everybody's going to come out very well.

Randy Ray: Well Jerry, you're making the rest of us look bad, so-

Jerry Faltinek: I only did one good thing in five years. I don't know if that's really a cause for celebration.

Dr. Wendler: We're still waiting on Randy.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: No, I shouldn't say that. You know, let me just say about some of our staff... Well, pretty much all of our staff. We have a staff on this campus that understands the primary purpose of the university is to help provide students educational opportunity, and this is part of it. And I think many, many of our staff, nearly all of our staff, see that as job one.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: And when they do, they look for ways to get it done where everybody benefits, and that's what Jerry has done with this thing. And the idea of saving \$260,000 out of our budget. You know, this was a budget cut that turned into a great opportunity. Jerry just mentioned Panhandle Community Services serves the whole top 26 counties of Texas, and I say the top 26 counties of Texas probably 10 times a day. Because it's the Panhandle, and that's where we serve. So it's all tied together, I think in a very nice way.

Randy Ray: Yeah. All right. Well, we're going to take a break, and when we come back, we're going to talk about maybe the future of parking here on the WT campus. We'll be back in 60 seconds.

Speaker 4: 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 day, the WT experience is a challenging series of sets that will embolden our

students to use their full potential, and 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.

Speaker 5: 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 episode number 26. I'm talking to Dr. Walter Wendler, the 11th president, and Jerry Faltinek. During the break, I asked you both if you had a story about students that have a problem with a parking. Dr. Wendler, why don't you go first?

Dr. Wendler: I'll go first. I could tell a number of stories since I've been here. You know, people complain about parking tickets and all that. You all are smiling. You know they're just... But this one is the most creative and ingenious one, but it happens to be from Texas A&M. It was when I was a dean there, in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M. We were in a weekly dean's meeting, and the provost came in, Dr. Dean Gauge came in. He said, "I got an interesting email from a father of one of our students. The email said, I can't quote it exactly, but he said, "You know, I'm a good Republican, but I am absolutely incensed that you all are charging our students \$800 apiece to support the Bush Library. That should be supported with donations," and so on and so forth. We didn't even laugh. We didn't know what was going on.

Well, it turns out that Dean Gauge, who was a thoughtful fella, they did a little investigation, and it turned out that the daughter, his daughter, who was the student at A&M, had \$800 in back parking tickets, and her father would have been upset with her if she had said, "I need \$800 to pay parking tickets." But she thought because her father was a good Republican, that it might be he would be willing to pay for the Bush Library. So, that was the most fantastic parking story I ever heard. And when Dean actually personally called the father, because it was kind of funny, and the father just... I didn't see it, but I imagine he just shook his head and said, "Oh my goodness. Okay, I understand. I'll take care of it."

Randy Ray: \$800 in parking tickets. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: \$800 in back parking.

Randy Ray: Jerry, do you have a story?

Jerry Faltinek: I mean, I hear excuses that are reasons for why things are the way they are for the last five years, so I have a lot to fall back on. Really, as far as complaints go, I

think a lot of it stems from small town living by a lot of the students who come from these rural areas, where they're used to being able to park in front of the bank, in front of the grocery store. Well, then when they come to campus, they're upset because they can't park in front of this building. And then when they have to change class, being able to drive over to the next parking lot and park in that one. So, I think that's a lot of the transition. But man, if they ever go to even Texas Tech or any major university, there's some serious walking involved.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Jerry Faltinek: So really, this campus... I mean, you can get from the front of the campus-

Randy Ray: Don't you both agree that students complain about parking on every campus everywhere?

Dr. Wendler: Not only students. Staff, council, faculty, senate. It's always an issue. And the problem is that it's surge parking. Everybody wants to be where they want to be, between I'll say 10:00 and 2:00, and in order to get everybody accommodated, you need a lot of spaces, and people start parking far away. You know, it's just... I had another interesting story on this campus. A girl... Didn't know it at the time. A girl had parked in my parking place.

Randy Ray: Oh, man.

Dr. Wendler: And I had gone to lunch. So I told Sean Burns, our Chief of Police. I said, "Well," I said, "I don't want to do anything abnormal to her. Just give her a regular ticket. But I'm going to make her come and see me." So they set up an appointment. I forget when it was. But I was coming back to the campus to have a meeting with her, and I was going to read her the riot act about parking in my space, and kind of have fun with it. I get back to the campus, she's parked there again.

Randy Ray: Oh, man.

Dr. Wendler: You know? She's parked there again. She said, "Well, I was only going to be a few minutes." And I just couldn't believe it. I said, "Good golly." But anyway, it's funny.

Randy Ray: Well, here's my story about parking, and it involves Dr. Wendler. No. If our listeners will remember, a few episodes ago I invited Dr. Wendler to come to my podcasting class. I said, "Would you mind if students just ask you questions?" And Dr. Wendler's answer was, "They can ask me anything, as long as it's not about parking."

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, that's right. It's funny. It is funny how much of a problem it creates on campuses. But you know, Jerry is right. And this is not to diminish, you know, people don't want to walk a long distance and all of that. But I'll tell you, when I

was at the University of California, you've got to park miles away, and there was no buses on the interior of the campus. I mean, it was completely... And Texas A&M, goodness. The fees, and so on and so forth. So, it's just the way campuses work.

Randy Ray: Do you two foresee any changes in parking on our campus? I mean, we're in really pretty good shape compared to most campuses. What's coming down the road for parking?

Jerry Faltinek: I mean, I think from the time that I started here to where we're at now... I get interviewed by students every semester for class projects, evidently. "Let's talk about parking." And every year, my answer is almost always the same, is that I don't think we have a parking problem. We have more of a walking problem. And it's not to be ugly or cute about it. But since I've been here, we've expanded parking lots. And I think the biggest contributor to ease the parking situation was the development of the ag complex, and a parking lot that goes with that. Because it pulled so many students to the north side of campus, and that really freed up the parking lots that are really maxed out most of the time. I think that's where our numbers dropped with the shuttle bus program too, was just moving so many students over there, that it made it better across the entire campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: By the way, another thing, Randy. James Webb, our IT guy, Vice President for Information Technology, is working on an app, and we have some examples in lots where you can look at the lots and see where the spaces are, so you don't have to drive around. You know, you can't always see the spaces. We actually have the technical power to be able to do that all over campus, so people could download the app, and then... Of course they shouldn't do it when they're driving, but they could look and see where available spaces are. I guess one problem is it may create races to get to... You know, they may say, "Man, that's a good one. I'm going to..." And go too fast. But anyway, I think there's some technology that can help this.

I know in parking garages now, like at Texas A&M, they have lights, little LEDs that hang down over each space. If it's red, that means there's a car in it. If it's green, that means you can park in it. So you can see them when you're coming, and you know how to approach the space and everything. So, I think there's a lot that technology will do to... It's still not going to make... You know, if 20 people want the same space, this is not going to solve the problem.

Randy Ray: It's not going to fix that. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: You have to adjust your desire, and be willing to walk a little bit. Wear sneakers or something. I don't know. It's just, we just can't park everybody where they want to park, when they want to park.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, I mentioned at the beginning of this episode, you guys have probably the toughest jobs on campus. Jerry, this is my curve ball. I throw Dr. Wendler and our guest a curve ball on every episode. This is it. So, you guys have the toughest jobs. What's the worst job that you guys have ever had in your life?

Jerry Faltinek: Oh, that's easy for me. I used to work for Child Protective Services.

Randy Ray: Oh, yeah.

Jerry Faltinek: So... Although I have dealt with some parents that were more upset about their kids getting parking tickets, than having their children removed. So, yeah. That was definitely the toughest. It was rewarding, too. I think I developed as a person, how to take that job on. I actually strived in some areas. Learned a lot about myself. Developed some strengths, and it made me want to do more than just CPS. But that was definitely the toughest job I had. But like I said-

Randy Ray: Tough job.

Jerry Faltinek: ... I take a fair amount of heat here on occasion, but I've gotten kind of used to it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Wendler, what's the worst job you've ever had?

Dr. Wendler: You know, and I've had a lot of different jobs. I've been the construction laborer, a carpenter, a bar boy, a bartender, a busboy, a waiter, faculty member, architect, dean, vice chancellor, vice president, president, chancellor.

Randy Ray: You just can't seem to keep a job, it seems like.

Dr. Wendler: No, I can't. As a matter of fact, I was talking to somebody yesterday on campus who has been... It was Zach Wardman. He's moving to another office, and he's been in that office for 11 years in the same office. I said, "I have never had the same job more than eight years, and that was only before I had this one." So, as a matter of fact, this one right now is approaching my kind of average length of service, about five years. Toughest job? Never had one. I've never had a job I didn't like. I like to work. I like to feel like I'm... I've never had one. And if I had, it wouldn't have been anything like CPS. That is a tough job-

Randy Ray: It is.

Dr. Wendler: ... to insert yourself where there's problems in a family. It's sad, and it's very difficult and challenging. I didn't know that about Jerry, but I'm impressed with that. I've never had a job like that. I mean, you know. People complain to me about certain things. Faculty, staff, students. You know, I hear a lot of different things. But it's just part of the job, and you do the best you can with it.

Randy Ray: Well, I will just real briefly tell you that probably the worst job I ever had, my first summer after my first year of college, I went to work at the carbon black plant outside of our hometown of Pampa, Texas. And the carbon black, I mean you got filthy, dirty, nasty, and that was bad enough. But one day I went to work, and there was a lady that was mad about something, at her boss, so she laced the coffee with arsenic, and I had a big cup of it.

Dr. Wendler: Really?

Randy Ray: Yeah, it was pretty tough. So that's a bad job, when you're drinking poison. So, yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Did you get sick from it or anything?

Randy Ray: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: That is-

Randy Ray: The problem was she put too much in. They said if she had put less in, it'd killed us all. But that's a bad job.

Dr. Wendler: Oh, because you actually could taste it or something-

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: ... and spit it out, and said, "Something's wrong"?

Randy Ray: Mm-hmm (affirmative)].

Dr. Wendler: I don't know. You know, I don't know what drives people to actions like that, how that's supposed to improve their circumstance. You know? I just don't get it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, fortunately we work in a good place, that we don't have to worry about stuff like that.

Jerry Faltinek: I'll keep your story in mind as I go about my day.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: I might quit drinking coffee, actually.

Randy Ray: Yeah. All right. Well, thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT, episode number 26. We are looking forward to you listening to our next episode. We'll see you then.