

Reflections from WT with Randy Rikel and Shawn Burns

Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT. I'm your host, Randy Ray, Director of Broadcast Engineering on campus. Joined, as always, by my co-host, Dr. Walter Wendler.

President Wendler: Randy, good morning. How you doing?

Randy Ray: Good morning. I was telling you this before we started the broadcast. I was flying back from Austin this weekend, and as I was waiting for my plane, someone came up, introduced themselves, and said that they listened to this podcast. So, that's always nice to hear.

President Wendler: Who was it?

Randy Ray: It was Jimmy Lackey.

President Wendler: Jimmy Lackey.

Randy Ray: You know Jimmy Lackey?

President Wendler: Oh, Kids, Inc. Jimmy Lackey's a good man. Kids, Inc. is a good organization. I'm so thankful they're moving forward the way they are under his leadership. He's a good one.

Randy Ray: Yeah, he loves WT, and he loves this podcast. So, always nice to hear.

President Wendler: There's question of his judgment, but other than that, he's all right.

Randy Ray: Today, I'm joined by a couple guys I really have a lot of respect for. Randy Rikel, who, by the way, I get about half of your email. Did you know that?

Randy Rikel: I do.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Randy Rikel: I have noticed that. Yes.

Randy Ray: And you probably get about half of mine.

Randy Rikel: I do. We trade out.

Randy Ray: Yeah, so-

Randy Rikel: So this one's yours, Randy.

Randy Ray: The double Rs. So Randy Rikel is the Vice President of Business and Finance. And we also are joined today with the University Chief of Police, Shawn Burns. Gentlemen, thanks for being here.

Shawn Burns: Good morning. Thanks for having us.

President Wendler: Let me just mention one thing before we get started. I want to compliment Shawn and the PD. For a couple of years now, we've been named by yourlocalsecurity.com as the safest campus, safest university campus and community in the State of Texas, which is a high mark. And it's-

Randy Ray: It is a high mark.

President Wendler: Because of good policing. Been in the top 10 in the US a couple of times. And a lot of the schools are religious schools and so on. You might think there'd be more security, more safety there for all kinds of reasons. But Shawn and his people do an excellent job. I'm proud of them, and I know the campus is proud of them too.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree. I was thinking about that this morning. I think one of the basic needs of a student... They need to eat, and they need to sleep, but I think also safety is a basic need that we all need.

President Wendler: We do. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs, and safety is right at the top. You can't learn if you don't feel safe.

Randy Ray: You can't learn if you don't feel safe.

President Wendler: That's exactly right.

Randy Ray: I think we all appreciate that. Chief Burns, so let's talk about that. So Canyon, Texas, our home, was named safest city in Texas, and it arrives as the 21st in the nation. That's a big deal.

Shawn Burns: It's a very big deal. And the Canyon community has always been a very tight-knit community. I think that's why so many folks desire to come and live here. Our school districts are phenomenal. The university is here, provides a lot of services to the top 26. And Canyon just has that small town feel, with easy access to other stuff in Amarillo. But the other thing that's special about Randall County, Texas in particular is the collaboration of law enforcement in this area. Between WTPD, between Canyon PD, between Randall County Sheriff's Office, and even our DPS brothers, we all work very well together. And it's all about doing what we need to do to protect our community. And so, that's a seamless endeavor that doesn't happen in every jurisdiction.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree with you. I serve on the City Council, and I have talked a lot with Chief Steve Brush. He has nothing but great things to say about you guys. Then I

also serve with Cody Jones, who works in Randall County. I agree with you. It's nice to see collaboration across the different organizations. And so, that says a lot about you guys too.

Randy Rikel: Chief Brush and Sheriff Forbis and I, we get together and meet periodically just to sit, and visit, and talk about what's going on in our respective agencies and jurisdictions, just to make sure that we keep those lines of communication open. But the collaboration, it's one of the reasons I've chosen to stay in Randall County all these years, is this doesn't happen everywhere. When you talk to officers around the state, there's a lot more jurisdictions with animosity and division between law enforcement agencies. And that doesn't happen here.

Randy Ray: It's crazy, yeah. Dr. Wendler, I'm going to ask you, how's this different to other universities you have served at?

President Wendler: Thankfully, it's not too much different, although it is special here. And I think it's got the special distinctives of the panhandle. People appreciate their neighbors, and are respectful of each other, and so on, and so forth. And that's been that way... At Texas A&M, College Station, I found that by and large. I found that at SIU, Southern Illinois University where I was a chancellor for six years.

Those communities, we had very nice working relationships with all of the PDs. And let me just say, as a matter of fact, to bring Randy into the conversation, leadership starts at the top. And Shawn reports to Randy. Randy does a great job in working with the PD, and he values the public safety. And in every campus I've been on, the PD has been deeply respected by university leadership. And I can imagine some where that's not the case, but it's not been the case in my experience. Maybe the one with the least in a sense of obvious relationship was in Baton Rouge when I was at LSU. But it was just because Baton Rouge was a big community, and LSU was a big campus. And I was a pup. I was 25-years-old. I didn't know left from right, or sickum from come here. And the bottom line is, I was tending to my business and not thinking about the other things. But it too was a fairly safe campus community. But it starts at the top, and-

Randy Ray: Let's talk to the top. Randy, I going to ask you, and I was asking Chief Mearns about this before we started today... Why is a CFO over a police department?

Randy Rikel: I think it goes back to your first comments about safety being a basic need. That's always been my wife's number one thing. She's always telling me, "A woman needs safety." And so, I take that to every daughter that comes to this university, every wife, every woman, but it also goes to the men too. And so, wherever I've been as CFO, I've always poured in resources to this team because we need to be safe. We need to be well trained. We need to be prepared on any situation. So I'll take other resources that might be needed elsewhere, but I will make sure these guys have the vest. They'll have the guns, the training, whatever they need. They even go further than just the shooting training and all that. They come back in and do the healing training where they pack the

wounds. They do all that. So they set out and set a good example for our community, both the university and the surrounding community.

President Wendler: Randy, let me just say, just want to point out that I get the police reports every day. And this is the first thing I read in the morning. I read them at 4:00 this morning when I got up.

Randy Ray: Am I ever on them? I hope not. Okay, that's good.

President Wendler: No. I get these reports-

Randy Ray: That was my attempt at a joke. And as it turned out, not much of one, so.

President Wendler: No, no, you're never on them. Not that I've been aware. I do read them. And sometimes I'll giggle a little bit. I'll laugh about something. Somebody the other day lost their iPods. Well, they called the police. But what's amazing is, the police respond. And they put this in the report. They discuss it, and they're going to look for the iPods. Or somebody twists their ankle playing volleyball or basketball. I'm not talking about the athletics teams, but intramural sports or just pickup games. And they call the police. They don't know what else to do, so they call a cop and the police show up. And they treat these things with seriousness, and dignity, and in my mind, care and compassion. That's the way the police report reads to me. And I know a lot of these officers... And I don't know them all, but I know many, and that's generally the way they behave. They treat people with dignity and respect. I just wanted to add that in, because there is something just reading those reports.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, when we think about it, a police officer, unfortunately a lot of people think about getting a ticket or getting in trouble. But these guys provide stuff like escort services. They unlock vehicles. They boost vehicles. So it's really a service oriented position.

Randy Rikel: Very much so.

President Wendler: Ambassadors for the university. They represent, in many ways, the Golden Rule on legs. They're out there treating people with decency and respect. We should all be doing that to each other, but they're great examples of it, I think.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I can't imagine what our campus would be like without them.

President Wendler: I can't either.

Randy Ray: We're going to take a break. When we come back, I want to talk about the Safe Zone app, our buses, and just what the future... You guys think WT's going to be like. We'll be back in 60 seconds.

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Randy Ray: Welcome back to Episode Number 44, Reflections from WT. I'm talking to Chief Shawn Burns and Vice President of Business and Finance, Randy Rikel. Gentlemen, let me ask you, there's some things that I don't know that a lot of universities do this, and maybe they do, things like the Safe Zone app. Tell me about that.

Randy Rikel: Well, the Safe Zone app is something that Shawn and his team have brought on board it. We're replacing the old Buff Alert system, which was mainly text and email system. But now, we've got an app, and we're rebranding it still Buff Alert, but it's available out there on their Safe Zone. And people can download it, and then as long as they've got a WT extension on their email, they can register with [inaudible 00:09:55]-

Randy Ray: So it's like a panic button, right?

Randy Rikel: It is.

Randy Ray: Wherever you are.

Randy Rikel: There's a big red button down at the very bottom. And if you touch that thing, it sends an alert to all the police officers to say we got a problem here. Locates me... It knows exactly where I'm at, and then they'll be able to come right away. But it does a little more than that too. It gives opportunity to students to alert the police saying, "Hey, I'm walking out to a dark parking lot. I'm going to check in, and I'll let you know when I get there."

Or they can say, "Hey, come help me. I need an escort to my car." Or they can just say, "Hey, I see something strange here. Would you guys go and check that?" We also have the well-being assistance there. So if they press that button, it'll give them opportunity to talk to one of our counselors here on campus. Or if it's after hours, it goes to the national hotline. So if somebody's having some major problems, they have that opportunity. It also gives first aid. "Hey, I need first aid here." It alerts where they're at. And it's just a very good app. Shawn's also got it to where it's going to be able to alert your computer. If you're sitting there at your computer, you don't have your phone there, it'll alert that says, "Hey, we have this event happening." Boom. It's going do whatever it says next.

Randy Ray: So it sends it out globally to the entire university.

Randy Rikel: Correct, as long as you're registered.

Randy Ray: Have we done that yet?

Randy Rikel: We've tested it, but I don't think we've done anything with that yet. Shawn, do you want to say anything else on that?

Shawn Burns: No. The desktop notification feature is in process. Once it's completed, I expect what we'll do is, we'll test it in the spring semester. Supposed to be implemented before we close for the Christmas holiday. Once we get the desktop notification feature fully loaded and ready to go, then we'll do a test.

Randy Ray: Yeah, that just makes our campus even safer.

President Wendler: Just as a tag on that. Randy mentioned the escort service. I tell every new student and every new group of parents, and I talk with all of them that come to visit unless I'm out, but I talk to almost all of them. I said, one of the things that I really like about WT, if you're in the library at night and you find yourself by yourself, and now it's dark outside. It's 9:00 or something. You were with friends, they all left. You don't have to walk back to your dorm. And our campus is safe, and I tell them about how safe it is.

But the fact of the matter is, one of the reasons it's safe is because you can call the police and they will come and escort you back to the dorm to completely remove any fear that you might have. And I think that's, what I would call, proactive safety. Because after it happens, it's too late. Somebody's been harmed. Somebody's been attacked. Somebody's been assaulted, whatever it may be. But this way, a student can call ahead. And I don't know how often they use that, but I encourage students. I said, "Never be afraid." You could be 6'4" and 250 pounds and a martial arts guy... Three or four people come after you, you could have trouble. Call a police. That's what they're there for, and they're very willing to do it. It's not a admission of weakness or anything else. It's a way to be safe.

Randy Rikel: Well, one of the things we also task our officers with is night staff. They do a light inventory. And so, they're making sure that all of our lights around campus are lit. And if there's anything, then they turn those into SSC to get repaired on a weekly basis.

Randy Ray: So how big is our police staff? Our police force.

Shawn Burns: We're authorized strength of 20.

Randy Ray: So we have 20 officers, right?

Shawn Burns: Right, 20 commissioned officers. Yes.

Randy Ray: And does that include the office staff and all that too?

Shawn Burns: No, I've got an additional 18 office staff in various functions. I oversee the lock shop, as well as Buffalo Gold Card. And then I have dispatchers, and then my general office staff, parking services, [inaudible 00:13:37]-

Randy Ray: And do you oversee Thunder Express too?

Shawn Burns: Well, we outsourced Thunder Express a few years ago. And so now, we have more of a liaison role with them. Jerry still acts as a liaison to Panhandle Community Services. They're the ones that took over the shuttle bus operation when we chose to outsource it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Well, I appreciate you guys being here today. One of the things that I always do is, I always throw our guest a curve ball. I was thinking about a good curve ball for you guys today. Here's what I think would be a good one. And here's what I'm going to ask you this...

When I was going to college, in the hallways, students were always talking about music. They don't talk about music as much as they used to. Now, it's usually about superhero movies. I'm going to ask you guys, who's your favorite superhero?

Shawn Burns: Captain America, I guess.

Randy Ray: How come Captain America?

Shawn Burns: Old school, stood for truth, justice, and the American way, and was willing to die trying to defend it.

Randy Ray: What about you, Randy?

Randy Rikel: This would shock my family, but I'd say probably Spider-Man because kind of have those Spidey-senses and to feel what's going on, but then also be able to act on it too.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Wendler, do you have a favorite super hero?

President Wendler: Fact of the matter is, the old one of course is Superman because that's what I watched when I was a child. I guess I'd say he's my favorite. And he was truth, justice, and the American way. I think the way that's the way that show opened, talking about truth, justice, and the American way. And he would stop a speeding bullet, and a train, and so on, and so forth. As a child, I thought that was cool. Who's yours?

Randy Ray: I think I'd say Iron Man. I like Iron Man, mostly because Robert Downey Jr. is getting to be my age. So, any old guys out there hanging in there, I still like.

President Wendler: You like the technology too, of Iron Man.

Randy Ray:

Yeah, I need an Iron Man suit. I had a student the other day, said, "You remind me of Robert Downey Jr." I said, "That means, you're basically sitting in class with Iron Man." So, he [inaudible 00:15:46]. Well, thank you for joining us for Reflections from WT. This was Episode Number 44. Please join us again next time.