

Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number six of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. My name is Randy Ray, I'm the director of broadcast engineering here on campus. And for the next few minutes I'm going to be speaking to the 11th president of West Texas A&M, Dr. Walter Wendler.

Randy Ray: How are you sir?

Dr. Wendler: I'm doing fine, Randy. How are you doing?

Randy Ray: It's good to be here. Always a pleasure to talk to you.

Dr. Wendler: Same.

Randy Ray: There has been a buzz in the air, over the last few weeks and that buzz started on February 2nd. Tell me about what happened that night.

Dr. Wendler: We had the gala that initiated the WT 125 from the panhandle to the world, initiated, in a sense, the celebration of that plan and its public presentation. So we're going to start to distribute that plan widely. It's on our webpage. If you go to the webpage, the WTAMU web page and click on WT 125, the plan will pop up in one of these book formats and you can read it, even on your cell phone, although it's a little small. You can. I can't read the cell phone anymore. I'm too old.

Dr. Wendler: But anyway, it'll be there and I think it'll give people a good overview of where we want to go. And we had very good crowd. We had this event, a dinner, and a lot of speaking, public speakers there, talking about West Texas A&M University and their pride in it. And it was a very nice evening. The staff did a great job. We have a wonderful staff here at every level. They did a great job putting all that together.

Randy Ray: Chancellor Sharp was there.

Dr. Wendler: Chancellor Sharp, the chairman of board, Charles Schwartz was there. Dignitaries from all over town. Some regrettably were overscheduled, couldn't get there, but I wish that, it was a good turnout. It was 500 people. 500 people, for WT, is a good crowd.

Randy Ray: So if I were to ask you to sum up WT 125 in a couple of sentences, could you do that?

Dr. Wendler: I can. WT 125 is all about being happy in our own skin, satisfied with who we are in a sense. We serve the panhandle, we serve this region first and that's what we're going to do. And we are going to run towards the character of this region and the nature of the people here as the foundation of what this university should look like in 15 years. The WT 125, some people may not know, but that's

a celebration, a forward-looking celebration of when we reach our 125th anniversary, which is the year 2035.

Dr. Wendler: So with a little arithmetic, you can tell that's a long way out. That's a long way to throw the stone, because it's hard to predict what things are going to be like, but the fact of the matter is we take a stab at it and we set a series of benchmarks and goals and we'll be able to, even if we don't reach them in some ways, I don't care. It's where we want to be right now. It shares our heart, you know? That's what I want to do.

Dr. Wendler: The institution has a heart. It's not my heart. It's your heart. It's all the students' hearts. It's Ann, it's Darcy, it's Jeff. It's everybody. It's their heart. And I want to share that heart with the Texas panhandle without apology. I don't want to be like Texas A&M or the University of Texas or Texas Tech. I don't want to be those institutions. And I don't think that would well serve the panhandle. I want to be WT and what WT has been historically, and there is not a single thing in our history that we have to apologize for in any way.

Dr. Wendler: This is a very fine institution. We've trained over 70% of the teachers in the top 26 counties and the top 26 counties produces I think some very fine people, good insight, good knowledge, strong kind of character, work hard, a lot of grit.

Dr. Wendler: Ford Price spoke on Saturday night and he talked about the grit of the people of the panhandle and it happens to be a word I use frequently to describe the people here. They're gritty.

Dr. Wendler: Grit. They're willing to work. They get their hands dirty.

Randy Ray: The Texas panhandle in a way, it's so isolated. They've had to depend on themselves. And then when we built an institution, WT was built, what? 1909.

Dr. Wendler: 1910. I think it was the first class.

Randy Ray: I think it really changed the personality of the panhandle and I think that the personality of the panhandle has always been a part of the DNA of WT.

Dr. Wendler: I would agree with you. I really do think that we are identified with the panhandle very strongly and I want to continue that again without apology or equivocation. I think our identity with the people of the panhandle is our greatest asset.

Dr. Wendler: We're not trying to be like the University of Houston that serves the fourth largest metropolitan area in the nation. We're serving the combined metropolitan area in my mind of Amarillo and Canyon. That's the SMSA and then all of these smaller communities, this constellation of communities that make up the panhandle. By God, that's a high calling. And this panhandle produces good people that have strong values and work ethic and all that grit

again and that's who we want to cater to. And I'll tell you the truth, obviously I've already over gone, you said two sentences. But the other, another thing that I think is really important about this whole notion is that we're never going to apologize for that.

Dr. Wendler: I don't want WT to try to appeal to people from the major metropolitan areas, say Dallas/Fort Worth to try to adopt those values. There's nothing wrong with Dallas/Fort Worth values. I'm not criticizing that. But ours are different and distinctive and I want to trumpet those as loudly as we can. And we will appeal to people in some urban and suburban areas around the state and around the nation because we've maintained our value system that's strong and encourages hard work, rewards results. We don't give trophies out up here for participation directly.

Randy Ray: Exactly.

Dr. Wendler: We've got to do something.

Randy Ray: My students who come through our program, most of them are from the panhandle and when they go out to the world, I will always get comments from their employers about how hardworking they are and their work ethic.

Dr. Wendler: That's exactly right. You know, Dwight Eisenhower said of Earl Ruder, General Rudder, when they stormed the cliffs at Point Two Hawk, after that and the success of that mission under the most trying circumstances. I mean D Day was, the whole thing was just a trying day. Trying effort.

Dr. Wendler: But he said that if you give me a group of Aggies, we'll get the job done, or words to that effect. That same concept applies to the people in the panhandle. You give them a job, it gets done. And that doesn't happen everywhere.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I totally agree. Let's shift gears a little bit. I want to talk to you about something new and something old. Let's talk about something new. Let's talk about the new building in Amarillo.

Dr. Wendler: The Amarillo Center is ... We started off our event, and I should have said this earlier, but we started off the event on February 2nd at the Amarillo Center, the Harrington Academic Hall of the Amarillo Center. And it's a sight to behold, especially if you'd seen that building and in its previous manifestations. It's a gorgeous building and now I'm talking like an architect. The inside of that building is, its finishes and its composition, everything. Its materials, everything.

Randy Ray: Now, who's going to be housed there?

Dr. Wendler: Well, the speech and hearing and communication disorders, they're down there. Graduate programs in psychology are down there. There's a number of other programs, our small business administration is down there. So there are a

number of programs down there. I'm forward looking, try to be forward looking when I can, we're hopeful to bring our nursing program down there because it's closer to the healthcare core that resides in Amarillo and we think we've got the space.

Dr. Wendler: The basement, the first floor and the third floor are occupied. The second floor is what we call in the trade, shelled out. You know, it's all finished. There's plumbing, electricity and all that, but nothing's in there yet. It's 25,000 square feet. And our intention is to double the size of the nursing program when we move it down there and we have the capacity to do it. We're turning away a lot of students, because we don't have the space here and we don't have the faculty, but I've committed to hiring the faculty to double the size of that program when we move downtown. So, we're very excited about that. And that will fill up the building. The building will be absolutely full.

Dr. Wendler: We had 500 people in that building, having drinks and snacks and stuff before the event and they all took tours and it's amazing. But there's a group and it happens to be in a sense headquartered in Amarillo called the Buffalo Council and they are a group whose primary goal is to do things for WT. They're not against anybody or anything, but they want to help WT move forward. And these are a number of local leaders. You'd know the whole list of names. I won't go through them. I think they have a website. You can go see it on the website. But Randy, they did a boardroom, an executive boardroom on the third floor of that building. And I'm willing to say, and I've been in all of them, I think I'm willing to say that is the nicest executive boardroom within the Amarillo city limits. If somebody can show me a better one, I'd like to see it. It is beautiful. It is absolutely beautiful.

Dr. Wendler: And they sustain that thing, developed and sustained it for us as a gift.

Randy Ray: Buffalo Council?

Dr. Wendler: Buffalo Council. It's a nonprofit group. It's not associated with us in any way. They're not beholden to us or anything else. They're just people, business men and women that want to help WT be as good as it can be. What could be better than that?

Randy Ray: Good community. Yeah. We talked about something new. Let's talk about something old. We had something that was really iconic move this week. Let's talk about the white buffalo out at Kimborough Stadium.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, the white buffalo is something else. People are very interested in it and it went from being on the hill and it's now going to be at the front door of Buffalo Stadium and it's going to be very special. There's a group that has funded landscaping and some embellishments around it. It's going to be a very nice place.

Dr. Wendler: As a matter of fact, I can guarantee you it will be the most photographed place on campus because people will use that for graduation pictures. There'll be people out there getting wedding shots done. I can just feel it. It's going to be very nice. It's an important part of WT but also the panhandle. And of Kimbrough and everything.

Randy Ray: I have told this story before. I had family in Roswell, New Mexico and I grew up in Canyon. So we would drive through Canyon, going to Roswell and some of my earliest memories is that white buffalo, you know? And I love the pictures that our university photographer Rick took of them. He sent it to me. He said when buffaloes fly and it's up in the air, flying.

Dr. Wendler: He sent me the same thing. First of all, he is a world class photographer.

Randy Ray: He is.

Dr. Wendler: He's got a knack for capturing a shot and framing it and all that sort of stuff. And he's ever present at events and things that are important. We'll probably put together a little package of stuff because there's a lot of people that are interested in that, in the buffalo. It's an important part of our history.

Randy Ray: Been there since 1967.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. You know, the original Buffalo Mascot, Charlie, is in the basement of the Panhandle Plains Historical Museum. And it's a sight to see. He looks more like a good sized dog than a buffalo, but it's a real buffalo. And for years, they would let kids sit on that and get their pictures taken. Well, they've worn all the hair off the hide. It's just smooth now. And also when they taxidermied those things, they would use chemicals, some of which had arsenic in it, so we don't want kids on it any more. But I'd like to move that to the president's office.

Randy Ray: Yeah, that'd be cool.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. I could go out and talk to it when nobody else would talk to me. I'd talk to Charlie.

Randy Ray: All right, well we're going to take a break and when we come back, we're going to talk to one of the newest team members here at WT. We'll be back in just a minute.

Announcer: 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.

Announcer: It's our alumni and donors that make the big difference and set us apart from other universities. With your support, WT will continue to award scholarships to

deserving students and strengthen our programs, which means a better campus, more in depth education, and a lasting cultural and economic impact on our region.

Announcer: Now is the time to strengthen connections, support students, and open doors for tomorrow's leaders. Share your experience, share your heritage. Share your pride.

Randy Ray: Welcome back to episode number six of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. For the next 10 minutes or so, I'm going to be talking to Jeff Baylor, who's the new executive director of admissions here on WT campus. Jeff, welcome.

Jeff Baylor: Thank you very much. I'm happy to be here.

Randy Ray: Yeah. What brought you to WT?

Jeff Baylor: Well, it's interesting. I was looking for a new opportunity and some friends contacted me about this opportunity in the panhandle of Texas. West Texas. And initially I wasn't too sure about the opportunity. I grew up in western Pennsylvania, spent some time in South Dakota and after some pursuing on their part, I decided to come and take a look. And as soon as I stepped onto campus, I met some people and I thought, this is a great place. This is a place I want to explore even further. And it's led to me being here today.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I think WT affects a lot of people that way. You have to come here to just get the feel of the place. What was the first thing you noticed about campus when you got here?

Jeff Baylor: Well, I noticed it was in the center. You know, when you come into town, it's right there. As soon as you come off the highway, it's right there. And that's not always the case for some schools. I also noticed that it was laid out nicely. There was an opportunity to navigate the campus of fairly easily, from a new perspective, my perspective, not having been here. And that stood out to me. I saw some very nice facilities. I saw a really a great opportunity to promote something that may not be as well known as it should be.

Randy Ray: I totally agree. And I was just talking to Dr. Wendler. WT is doing a better job about bragging on itself and I think we have every right to do that. We just haven't done a very good job about that in the past. But I think we're getting better at that. So when a student is interested in WT, what can they do about coming to visit?

Jeff Baylor: Yeah, great question. One of the things that I would like to see happen here is to really increase our visitors to campus. You know, I've been doing this for over 30 years and one thing that's always been true is that when you increase visitors to

campus, you increase the profile, you increase your enrollment and increase donor interest. And we have a great story to tell.

Randy Ray: We do.

Jeff Baylor: So, I would encourage a students and their families and not just students coming to visit for enrollment purposes, but alumni and friends of the university that haven't been here for a while to go on our website and click on our visit page. But more importantly for the students in high school, we have the admissions fast track app, which exists in our WT mobile app, that is very cool. It's very smart and it's relevant and I think that's something they should they be checking out.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I think the WT mobile app is really, really a cool thing for anyone. Going to school here, thinking about going to school here, it's got a lot of features on it. So I would encourage everyone to download that.

Randy Ray: Jeff, I found when I took my kids around to visiting different campuses when they were thinking about going to college, I found that within 10 minutes they knew if that was the place for them or not. And I've noticed that when students come to visit WT after 10 minutes, their answer is almost always yes, this is the place. Do you agree with that?

Jeff Baylor: Absolutely.

Randy Ray: And don't you think that families need to go visit campuses?

Jeff Baylor: Absolutely.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I think that's so important.

Jeff Baylor: I had the same experience. I'm a first generation college student and I've spent my entire career in higher education. I knew as a junior in high school when I was joining my brother on his college tour, I knew where I wanted to go and that was that time I spent on campus. And that's something that in my position that's very important to me, is making sure that when families come to campus that we give them a very good look at who we are. You know, we show them our campus and our facilities. They get to meet the faculty. They get to meet our students, they get to try the food. You know, that's all a part of the experience.

Jeff Baylor: And, you know, from my perspective, I want students to come here, live on campus and get the full experience. You know, we want all kinds of students, but those traditional students, we want them here. You know, whether they're transfers or right out direct from high school, we want them to come and have that full university experience, because we have a good one.

Randy Ray: I think so too. And part of it is the culture here. When I started teaching here, one of the things that I noticed that didn't happen where I taught before is I spent as much time with the students outside the classroom as I do inside the classroom. And I love that. I have taken them out to eat. We've gone and done work out in the field. Like yesterday for example, Darcy who works over in comm and marketing came over and we had a drone workshop with my advanced video students.

Randy Ray: I think that's great to get outside of the classroom and just spend time with your students. And if you're teaching in a field, you should be passionate about that field and you should be sharing that passion.

Jeff Baylor: That's right.

Jeff Baylor: You know, since I've been here, I try to eat in the dining hall once a week if I can. I'm advising a fraternity on campus. I try to come in for a basketball games and other activities that are taking place right now on campus. That's a big part of who I am. I don't just work here. This is what I love to do. This is a part of my lifestyle and it has been, you know, ever since I first stepped foot onto a college campus, I knew that's where I wanted to be and I've been very lucky to have that opportunity. I've been blessed to have the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than what I am.

Randy Ray: Well, Jeff, we are glad you're here. I'm going to throw you and Dr. Wendler the traditional curve ball. What would you be doing right now if you were not working in higher ed?

Jeff Baylor: Well, I think based on my experience, I probably would be somewhere in sales doing something, because I think my skill set, I'm a people person, so I could see myself working in a profession that deals with people. And I think sales really does deal with people. But fortunately in this position, I actually get to change people's lives. I get to change the trajectory of families' lives and so I'm able to use that skill set in a way that really benefits our community.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Wendler, what would you be doing?

Dr. Wendler: What would I be doing if I wasn't doing what I'm doing right now? Well, you know, I retired. But it only lasted for two months. And I was playing golf and writing. That's what I was doing. I played golf and I wrote, but, I retired on the 31st of December 2015 and on the 6th of January in 2016, seven days later, my wife said, "You might want to start looking for something to do."

Dr. Wendler: I was driving here ... I guess I was just around too much, you know. But anyway, I'll tell you the truth. The fact of the matter is, and I say this frequently, I can't think of anything I would rather be doing right now than what I am doing, number one.



Dr. Wendler: And number two, I have a lot of experience that I think by God's grace has prepared me to do exactly what I'm doing right now. Even some of the experiences for me which were not that pleasant, they were learning experience and they molded me to be, in my mind anyway, time will tell, a good fit to be here at WT and I'm thankful for it.

Randy Ray: Yeah. You know what I'd probably be doing? Time, probably. Ah, I'm just kidding.

Dr. Wendler: I can attest to that, but by the way, we probably shouldn't say this, but I wish you well on the race that you're involved in right now for the city commission.

Randy Ray: Thank you, Dr. Wendler. I am not really a politician, but I do love living in Canyon, Texas and want to give back.

Randy Ray: That is going about wrap up episode number six of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. Thank you for joining us today. Be sure and join us next time. Until then, Go Buffs.