

Reflections from WT- Angel Tree

Randy Ray: Welcome to episode number 16 in Reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. My name is Randy Ray. I am the director of broadcast engineering here on the campus at WT and I'm once again joined by Dr. Walter Wendler, the president of the university. How are you sir?

Dr. Wendler: Randy, I couldn't be better.

Randy Ray: I see.

Dr. Wendler: I live in the Texas Panhandle in the beautiful city of Canyon and I'm associated with this great university, WT, I couldn't be any better.

Randy Ray: Well I agree and it seems like I haven't seen you in a long time.

Dr. Wendler: I know. I feel the same way.

Randy Ray: You've been on tour.

Dr. Wendler: I've been on tour. I have been out and about and yeah, I've been all over.

Randy Ray: How's that going?

Dr. Wendler: It's gone very well. There are 66 schools in the top 26 counties of Texas in what's called region.

Randy Ray: 17?

Dr. Wendler: 16.

Randy Ray: It's 16.

Dr. Wendler: This is the top 26. The ones I did a couple years ago, region 17 wherein now there are 70 schools. And how is it going? Well, I've got 60 done and 10 more to complete before Christmas, which I think I'll do.

Randy Ray: Wow, 60.

Dr. Wendler: 60. So far between the two I visited 126 high schools.

Randy Ray: Do they seem receptive?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, they do. And I'll tell you the truth, experience is a good teacher. I think they are more receptive now than they were on the first trip. And because I didn't know what I was doing on the first trip, I'm not even sure I know now to

be completely honest with you. But I do want to talk with students and also with teachers and principals and superintendents to let them know that WT is interested in them. And I will tell you this, and it's a kind of a turn on words or a play on words, not in spite of who they are in small communities, and so on and so forth. But because of who they are. They bring those community values to West Texas A&M and that helps shape, the students shape West Texas A&M. We like to think we do, the president, the faculty, the deans, we all think well we shape.

Randy Ray: It's the students.

Dr. Wendler: We have a part of it.

Randy Ray: I totally agree.

Dr. Wendler: But it's the feedstock that determines the quality of the iron when it's all done.

Randy Ray: Correct me if I'm wrong, but there has never been a university president from WT that has done this before. Is that right?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. And I don't mean to be full of myself. I don't think so. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure there's been a president in the state of Texas that's done it before. And again, it's not to be full of myself. I find it a joy to do it, although it is a bit tiring because I usually...

Randy Ray: A lot of miles.

Dr. Wendler: Lot of miles to get, especially just to get to here, from here to the closest schools, at least an hour down in Klondike and Jayton, Girard. And these, the places that are three hours away. We spend a lot of windshield time.

Randy Ray: What is the smallest school you've been to?

Dr. Wendler: Dawson. Dawson ISD is the smallest school. And Cotton Center is almost the same size. Dawson has a 100 students pre K through 12. You don't have to be a mathematician to figure out, that's less than 10 a year. And when I got to Dawson I pulled up and the principal came out to meet me in the parking lot that was barely paved and I was sure that he knew that I must be from WT because I came in a car that he wasn't used to seeing and they were small. And normally I talk with juniors and seniors and he asked me, he said, "Can you speak to the whole high school?" And I knew it was a small school district because we have one of the people in my office does background on these schools. I know how many students roughly and I know how many alumni and so on and so forth. I knew it was small. He says, "Can you speak with the whole high school?" I said, "Sure," I said, "how many are in it?" He said, "12. Nine through 12 grades, four grades, 12 students."

Randy Ray: Wow.

Dr. Wendler: Three per year and it wasn't that, there were only two seniors. They can't even play six man football, and I'm going to tell you that's another thing in these small schools like Cotton Center, even the football players and the marching band, don't ask me how they do it, but they're so small. Everybody participates in everything. And those kinds of students, when they come to WT, bring that participation, sense of community, working with others, they bring it to WT and it shapes WT.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I was amazed. There are a lot of small towns in the state of Texas. Canyon, Texas is in the top 13% so all the rest are small.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. It's funny you mention that. I just looked because I'm actually, I'm working on a commencement speech and I just looked because some people say, "Well, WT is a small university." It's not small. If WT with its 10,000 students and another few thousand faculty and staff was a city in Texas, it would rank around 240 and it would be in the top 10%. Well, no, excuse me. I'm sorry. Top, I think top 15% not top 10%. but that would be just the university. If you put Canyon in with it, well we're top 10%.

Randy Ray: I want to shift gears a little bit.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, sure.

Randy Ray: Every once a month you write a blog, is it once a month?

Dr. Wendler: Once a week.

Randy Ray: Once a week. Wow. That's very prolific.

Dr. Wendler: It's a lot of work. And I know I've read your book on the editorials. I think that you wrote up at Pampa.

Randy Ray: In Tennessee. When I was in Tennessee.

Dr. Wendler: Oh it was in Tennessee. But you were writing about your upbringing.

Randy Ray: In Texas. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, yeah, and I really appreciate it though. They're humorous and they're insightful.

Randy Ray: Well I appreciate that and I appreciate, boy, just the discipline that you have writing that much. I thought it was once a month, so I especially enjoyed the one that came out just a few days ago on Thanksgiving and accountability. And I want to talk to you a little bit about that. One of the things that you mentioned

in your blog and by the way, your blog is titled same as our podcast Reflection from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. And this one was especially interesting to me.

Dr. Wendler: By the way, Randy, I'm sorry to interrupt you, but I just want to say it's post, these pieces are posted on walterwendler.com which is, and they also go to the newspapers and they're published pretty regular, Pampa one of the, they publish everything. They have, actually I have my own masthead. It's called the Buffalo Desk.

Randy Ray: The Buffalo Desk.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. But anyway, what I wanted to say was at walterwendler.com, all lowercase .com, somebody could just go on the internet and they'll pop up.

Randy Ray: Do you do these just out of a love for writing? Why?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I do like to write. And I'm not very good at it, so I want to practice. I don't know what for, but I like to practice because it helps me communicate and I can't actually think about too much before I've written something about it. I just, the writing helps me think. It helps clarify my thoughts. But I really do it to communicate, especially to the campus community. The things that I'm thinking about that affect higher education and how we work with and for students at WT. A lot of people aren't sure about the, what the president thinks at a university. They don't hear from him much, they might see him or her at a state of the union address or something once a year. But I want those people to, our people, our faculty and staff and our students, to hear if they want to, to hear from me. If they don't want to they don't have to. But if they'd like to see what's on my mind, I want to be transparent about the things that I think are important.

Randy Ray: I think you do a great job at that in your blog. One of the things you hit on is the Hawthorne effect in this, in your latest blog. And I think that's an interesting thing. I talk about that in my media management class a lot. Tell us what the Hawthorne effect is and I want to ask you about it.

Dr. Wendler: Okay. These original experiments that were conducted at a Cicero.

Randy Ray: In Illinois.

Dr. Wendler: In Illinois, on the, at Western Electric. They separated a group of people. They told that group that they were going to be observed very carefully and they were going to be involved, if I remember correctly, the details, these people were going to be involved in a very special project and it was supposed to be kept confidential and all that. Well, what happened was they were doing the same thing that everybody else in the plant was doing, but they believed they were special basically and that they were going to be observed and what they

were doing was very important and productivity went through the roof. What's interesting though is you can't live on that. Eventually it started to taper off, not unlike in our world what it takes to get tenured.

If you look at product, and I saw a study on this on that from the American Psychological Association that productivity as you approach the year of tenure continues to go up and then it drops off slightly after tenure is granted and levels off. But the level is never as high as it was the years, with a few years preceding the consideration of tenure. And that's the same thing. People are being watched.

Randy Ray: Yeah. so the Hawthorne effect is when people are noticed or appreciated, their performance will improve.

Dr. Wendler: Yes.

Randy Ray: I think that's interesting. You had a short paragraph in your blog that I really, really love. I'm going to read that one. You said change and accountability are fueled in successful organizations by the belief that what I do can make a difference. And you went on to say this is a powerful concept to carry to work every morning. It makes work a mission, not a job. I really like that.

Dr. Wendler: I like it too. It almost makes me cry. I really, I feel sorry for people that have to labor at something.

Randy Ray: That they don't believe in.

Dr. Wendler: That they don't believe in.

Randy Ray: I totally agree with you.

Dr. Wendler: And by the way, I've worked in construction trades on construction sites from the time that I was, I'm going to say from the time that I was an adolescent, 14 I was out picking up beer cans and chunks of wood and stuff from my uncle and so on. Ditch diggers, somebody might say, "Well, that's a lowly form of work." But a good ditch digger, you look at the ditch, the walls are square and true and straight, and they take pride in their work and I'm sorry, when I see a man or woman dig a sloppy hole. I'm sorry when I see a man or a woman teach a sloppy class. By the way, I do this sometimes myself on it. I'm in a hurry to do something and I'll do it to get it done. But in fact, when we take pride in what we do, when we sense it serves for me a greater purpose than just what I'm doing, it's powerful. It affects me deeply.

Randy Ray: I totally agree with you. You love your job if you can believe in the mission behind it. And I think we both do. We both do.

Dr. Wendler: Oh yeah, as a matter of fact, I have to tell you, I was down, I forget where I was. I've been at so many of these schools, 60 of them. I can't remember all, but I was somewhere and they came up to visit up here and they wanted to do radio and television. They met you and I asked them, "What'd you think?" And they said, "I really liked him."

Randy Ray: Yeah. Wow. Only good to hear, especially when they tell the boss that.

Dr. Wendler: Well, and I'm not blowing smoke at you. It's the truth. And I get that about all kinds of people in programs up here on the campus.

Randy Ray: It's the culture of our campus.

Dr. Wendler: Yes it is. Yes it it.

Randy Ray: We're going to take a break and when we come back, we have some special guests to talk about something that happens during a special time of year. We'll be back in about 60 seconds.

Speaker 3: West Texas A&M University is proud to call the Texas panhandle home and providing the top 26 counties with opportunity and qualified graduates is an important WT mission. From their first experience on campus to graduation date, the WT experience is a challenging series of steps that will embolden our students to reach their full potential 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.

Randy Ray: Welcome back to episode number 16 of Reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. Dr. Wendler and I have a couple special guests with us on this segment. Please welcome Dawn Huseman. Is that right?

Dawn Huseman: That's right.

Randy Ray: And her advisor, Joyce Stone. Welcome ladies.

Joyce Stone: Thank you.

Randy Ray: Let me ask you, I'm just going to, you guys are involved with what's called the Angel Tree and it's here on campus. Tell us a little bit about that.

Dawn Huseman: The Salvation Army's Angel Tree is basically a program where they provide a Christmas to children and families that are in need that can't afford to basically have their own. They do that through donations, through people from just the regular community. A child will be registered as an angel. Once they registered, the Salvation Army makes a promise that that child will receive some form of

gifts in a Christmas that year. It's just a really good program for the community to get involved in helping others.

Randy Ray: Joyce, you're the advisor for Angel Tree. You're a financial aid specialist here on campus, right?

Joyce Stone: Yes.

Randy Ray: How did you help start this on campus? How did it get started?

Joyce Stone: Our division, the division of Student Enrollment, Engagement and Success, Mike Knox oversees us. He's our division director and we do a service project every year at Christmas time. And last year was the year we decided to do the Salvation Army Angels. And last year we only adopted 20. We went in thinking we would only adopt 10 in our division, but when we got to the Salvation Army, we just felt we could do more than 10 so we did 20. This year at our division meeting, we took a poll because we felt we could do more than 20 and the division came up with a number of 50 angels. And so in order to have 50 angels adopted, we picked 15 leaders. We call them champions and they each are adopting out 10 each and so there's trees in the JBK. There's an Angel Tree in Old Main, in the international, the new office, there's one there with Amanda Rogers, and so we've adopted almost all of them out. I have to say 30 of them were adopted out two days after we brought them to our university.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, I'm going to ask you, how important is it for a university to give back to the community?

Dr. Wendler: I think it's incredibly important, incredibly important. And I appreciate the work that you all are doing. It's important because in order for university to be successful, it needs to be connected to the community. And this is a way that connects to the community. And I think it's very important because a lot of times, and I don't, I hate to think that I do this, but I think I do. I look past people sometimes and these people are in front of us.

I visited a high school recently, Triumph High School down in Lubbock, and there were probably 40 juniors and seniors and half of them were homeless. I wouldn't know when they walked in the room. Four of the women in there, and there's young women, four of them had children out of wedlock. I mean that, and I think I've got it rough when I don't know, when they're painting the house and I have to move the furniture or something. It's just a level of, I'm going to call it generosity, but it's appreciation, it's concern, it's care. And I think when universities demonstrate it in projects like this, it becomes part of the institution. And I really do believe that's critically important.

Randy Ray: Yeah, so let me ask you two, how can the community and campus contribute to Angel Tree?

Dawn Huseman: The community and campus can help us out by contacting our champions, which Joyce was talking about that previously, we've got five champions and each champion has 10 angels and you can contact one of the champions to actually adopt an angel. If you don't want to adopt an angel, you can go up to the warehouse and help organize donations, help with shelving, labeling the gifts, and then you can also go help actually give the gifts out to the families on December 19th. You'll just meet at the Rex Baxter building and you can actually go and distribute the gifts to all of the families that the gifts were donated for.

Randy Ray: They will allow you to take it.

Dawn Huseman: That's right.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I was telling you guys before we started the podcast, when my kids were growing up, we used to adopt a family and we would, I would take my kids with us and we would take them to the homes to deliver the gifts and we got as big a blessing out of it as the people that we took the gifts to. And I think it really made an impact on my kids when they got to see, like Dr. Wendler was mentioning, really, we've got it good and some things are maybe a inconvenience but it's not really a problem. It's just a slight inconvenience. I think it's a great program, a great program. How long has it been around, do you know?

Joyce Stone: Oh, I don't know. I don't know the exact date. It's been around for a while. It was started in another state by the Salvation Army local in another state, not Texas, and it just spread from there. It's been around quite a while.

Randy Ray: Well, traditionally with our podcast, I always throw Dr. Wendler and our guest what I call a curve ball. You all ready for the curve ball today?

Dawn Huseman: Let's hear it.

Dr. Wendler: Start with them, Randy so I get a chance to think about it. I'll look smart. I appreciate that.

Randy Ray: All right, well I'm going to ask you, would you, if you had the opportunity, would you rather meet your ancestors or your descendants? If you had a chance to go back in time or forward in time, which one would you rather meet?

Dawn Huseman: I think probably personally I'd like to meet my, probably my ancestors, I guess I would say because I come from a pretty traditional family. Basically my whole family's from Nazareth, Texas, so we know if you know anything about Nazareth, it's a small town where basically a bunch of German settlers just decided that they were going to make this tiny little town. And that's, I'm related to basically all of it. I would like to see kind of how that got started. We have massive family reunions. You see all these pictures, but I think it'd be

pretty neat to actually get to meet the people that created the community that my entire family is from.

Randy Ray: Joyce, what about you?

Joyce Stone: I would rather meet my descendants. I have nine grandkids, one great grandson. And I keep looking towards the future and I just love these children. I went to a funeral yesterday in Dallas for an aunt and I saw some family and I was just so curious, what will this look like 20 years from now? And so I have to say my descendants. Yeah, I met the ancestors yesterday.

Dr. Wendler: You wouldn't want to ask this question on a Monday after a long holiday or something.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, what about you?

Dr. Wendler: You're going to say I'm always riding the fence. I'd like a little bit of both to tell you the truth. My, I'm a, both of my parents were the first in their families to be born on American soil. I'm for all practical purposes, the second generation American. My mother was of Italian descent, actually Albanian, but they moved to Sicily in one generation there and then they came to the United States through Ellis Island and my dad, Swiss, Germanic Swiss. That's the Wendler part of my name. And they came, his father was born in Bern and became a cabin boy on a freighter, traveled the world. My father had a box, two, three boxes of postcards from all over the world where he traveled. But I don't know that much about them. And I think it would be interesting, but I don't have as many grandchildren Joyce as you do. But I've got six and I wonder about them.

And there's some, were pretty much traditional, all of us traditional families, but one of our sons, our youngest just recently adopted a little Chinese fellow, four years old, they brought him back to the back home to the Dallas Fort Worth area. And I was touched by that whole process. The thing that touched me the most was, this is my son Brad, Mary and I, our son Brad. And Brad told me this story that he was told, somebody at church mentioned to him, "Do you know the impact that young fellow is going to, that you're going to have on that young fellows life?" And Brad said, "Do you know the impact that young fellow is going to have on our lives?" And it will change the trajectory of a family. It's going to change their view of the world and so on and so forth. And I'd like to see what that looks like because I think I have some ideas but like most of my ideas they probably off. Be interesting to see that. I'm riding the fence Randy, I'm riding the fence. Little bit of both.

Randy Ray: Actually, if you were asking me, I think that I would say ancestors and here's why. My great, great, great, great grandfather came from a family, the Rays in Tennessee in Williamson County, Tennessee. Two of them went off, during the Civil War, two of them went off to fight for the North and two of them stayed in

the South to fight for the South. And I would like to see how family reunions were like after that. Yeah, so interesting.

Dr. Wendler: That's cool.

Randy Ray: Ladies, thank you for joining us today. Dr. Wendler, if I don't see you again, happy holidays. Merry Christmas. And I'm looking forward to 2020 at WT, aren't you?

Dr. Wendler: Oh, I can't tell you how much I am. I am. I am. And thank you guys for being here with Randy and also for the good work you're doing through Angel Tree. It's going to touch the hearts of children.

Randy Ray: That is it for episode number 16 of Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. We will see you next time.