

Reflections from WT- Randy's Class Asks Dr. Wendler

- Randy Ray: Welcome to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. I'm your host, Randy Ray, and you are listening to a very special episode. For this episode. Dr. Walter Wendler came to one of my classes and let them ask whatever they wanted to. Here's how it went.
- Mathina: Well, my name is Mathina Washington, and I'm a junior here at WT. And who are your favorite architects or your biggest influences?
- Dr. Wendler: Oh, interesting. Thanks. Most people know, I think, that I am an architect. I was trained as an architect at Texas A&M and the University of California Berkeley. My favorite architect of all time is probably Lou Kahn. He did a number of really great buildings, but my favorite building that he did in North America is the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. It's a great building, and the reason I love it is there's a certain amount of precision in it. It's a highly crafted building. It's like a watch. And the addition to it that was just recently done a few years ago has those same features about it, so I really like that. And I liked the precision, yet it's filled with big ideas. So, that's what I like.
- David: Hi, Dr Wendler, my name is David Davis. I'm from Panhandle, Texas. I'm a senior here at WT. And the question that I had is, how did, I guess, your family life impact the decisions that you made along the way?
- Dr. Wendler: How's my family life... Well, I've tried to be conscious of my family life. When I was in Baton Rouge, I had a full-time practice. I taught at LSU for six years, and I had a full-time practice there and also taught. And one day I came home from the office on a Saturday afternoon, from the practice office, at about 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon, and my wife said to me, "There's some kids in the living room, you might want to go in and see them." So, I went there, and it was my two sons, Walter and Bradley, and I came back and I said, "What's the deal?" And she said, "I just want you to look at them because the way it's going, they're going to be old and out of the house before you even remember who they are." Because I was working so much, and I was busy at the office and busy at school.
- Dr. Wendler: And from that day, over the next six or seven months, I made a decision that... I told Mary, I said, "I'm going to pick and just do one thing and put myself... Fully commit to it." And it was either practice or teaching, but not both. I chose teaching, immediately started looking for another job because it was going to be way too, in a sense, break off my relationship with LSU and also my relationship with my partner in a very positive way. And it turned out that I got a job at Texas A&M, from where I graduated nine years before. So, it all worked out very nicely and allowed me to focus more attention on my, at the time, young sons. That worked reasonably well, but that is a constant battle. Randy faces it every day, and even when there's only two people left in the family, which is what Mary and I have now, it's still a battle to keep the priorities correct between

work and family life. I had Mary before I had the job. She was my wife. I'll have her, hopefully, long after I have this job and then the other job. So, it's important to keep those things in balance.

Benjamin: Hi, Dr. Wendler, my name is Benjamin Bermudez. I am a junior here at WT, and my question is, what was your main inspiration behind the podcast?

Dr. Wendler: Well, that's a great question, and knowing Randy was helpful in moving in the direction we've moved with the podcast, but my sense is that public education is a public good. It's a public commodity, and I think people in communities, especially around regional universities like West Texas A&M University, want to know what's going on at the institution. We're a large employer. We have a \$70 million annual payroll, which is a huge annual payroll. I don't know how we stack up against other industries, but it's a big payroll. And people in the community want to know that we're doing our job, we're looking ahead, we're planning not just a few feet in front of us, but miles ahead and trying to understand the future of WT and its impact on the panhandle.

Dr. Wendler: We just finished an economic impact study where it was ascertained that nearly \$750 million per year is considered to be WT's contribution to local economic development, and that's important to know. So, I think sharing the intentions and where the university wants to go is of interest to people, even if they're not attending college or don't have children or brothers or sisters or spouses who are attending college, because we're an important part of the community. And I think the way to do that, we can't always get... A lot of what we do is not hard news, it's a kind of a process that we worked through. That's what these podcasts let us share. And the way it's working is, I think, very nice because people are listening to the podcast. Of course, we keep track of all that, and the listener-ship, if that's the correct word, it tends to grow as we go along. Part of that is Randy's depth analysis and his easy personal relationship with whoever he's talking to. And Johnny, Johnny Story, kind of behind the scenes making all the pieces fit together. So, those things, that's the ingredients for this, and I think people want to know about the university. And I'm pleased to help share as much as I can about it.

Sam: My name is Sam Pedraza. I'm from Amarillo, Texas, and I'm a senior here at WT. And my question for you is, what is the weirdest thing you've ever discussed on your podcast?

Dr. Wendler: The weirdest thing I've ever discussed on the podcast. Gosh, I'm not sure. Some things might be weird to listeners. Let me try to think of a... Well, I'll tell you one that was not so much weird but interesting to me. And I now I can't even say his name because I always call him Cash. Randy knows who I'm talking about. He's a student. And listening to his story, his testimony about his own life, came from a challenging background. A lot of people would have folded up the tent and went home. He didn't do that. I think he came through a boys ranch. Randy, if that's correct, nod your head. I think he was... He's not even listening.

Dr. Wendler: But anyway, I think he came through a boys ranch and worked diligently as a student there and now is here, and he's a successful student who has committed himself to getting a good education. And he has one, and it's not so much that it was weird but it was just heartwarming to see what happens when the power of a university education is levied in an individual's life. It changed the trajectory of his life, and it will change the trajectory of those around him because he's such an inspiration. So, weird is probably not the right word for that, but it was moving to me. It made me think, "Gosh this is worth doing, and I hope people listen to this young man," because he's a first generation student who really came out of a difficult and challenging background and made things work.

Cesar: Hi, Dr. Wendler, my name is Cesar Escalante. I'm a junior from San Antonio, Texas, and my question to you is, how do you feel about the recent ban on vaping and what do you plan to do to execute it?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I think it's a good ban. Before you leave the microphone though, I'm going to ask you a question, if turnabout is fair play. What brought you here from San Antonio? Why not UTSA or Texas A&M San Antonio. Why WT?

Cesar: Well, when I was doing my research on where I wanted to go, coming from a bigger city, I wanted something with more of a community feel, a little bit smaller, a family feel. And this is where when I came and toured it, that's something-

Dr. Wendler: You got that feeling?

Cesar: Yes, sir. I got that feeling.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, that's powerful. And that's a great reason to be here. We have values, not better or worse, but different than many of the metropolitan areas in the state of Texas because we still have, in a sense, community values, focused on things that are important to many, many people. And they're alive, they're values with legs. We try to live those things out. We're a performance-based culture, so that's a good reason to be here. Now, tell me what your question was again. Sorry, I forgot.

Cesar: It was, how do you feel about the recent ban on vaping, and what do you plan to do to execute it further?

Dr. Wendler: Okay. The ban on vaping and, to some extents, smoking, and that's being deliberated right now, I think it's important. I don't think we understand fully the health risks of vaping, number one. And number two, I work for John Sharp and the Board of Regents of the Texas A&M University system, and they think this ban is a good idea. So, even if I was a vapor or a smoker myself, I would probably say, "Well, the people I work with want this, and we're going to implement it." And I used to be a smoker. And I'll tell you one of the greatest

accomplishments of my life was quitting smoking. I'm kind of a type A personality, and when I smoked, I had a cigarette in each hand. Then there was a third one burning in the ashtray. That's just the way it was. And I'll tell you what, I look back with glee on the day, many years ago now, when I finally quit smoking, and I tried for years. So, I'm a reformed smoker, and I really do think if we can help people get away from that, there's absolutely no downside from a health perspective. It's all up. So, I'm supportive of it, and I think it's a good idea.

Speaker 9: 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, facility's rich and 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.

Raphael: Hello, Doctor. I'm Raphael Flores. I'm a transfer from Amarillo College, and I just wanted to ask you, what is your favorite part of the President's house and why?

Dr. Wendler: Well, let me tell you, it's not the roof. It's been leaking like a sieve. When we had this... I mean, it's a mess. I mean, in two different rooms that are about as far as part as you can get. It's not the roof. But J Ferg Pro came over and immediately responded and got the leaks to stop, I think, and we're looking forward to getting all that fixed. That's my least favorite part.

Dr. Wendler: My most favorite part is the living room. I don't know if anybody's been in the living room, if any of you have been, but the living room is a... I'm an architect. The living room is beautiful. It's big, which is not what makes it beautiful. What makes it beautiful is, in my mind, is it's got what I call trilateral daylighting. It's got daylight on three sides, windows on three sides of it, and it puts a soft glow in the room that is really nice during the daytime. And the way it's configured, there's very seldom harsh sunlight in there, but there's always a nice warmth in the room that I like very much. And it does happen to be large, and it's got seating in the middle that you can walk all the way around and everything. It's very nice. The house is a very nice house. My wife and I are thankful to be there. And the leaking roof will get taken care of, and I know we're in good hands with all that. But the living room is the nicest part of the house.

Dr. Wendler: One of the downsides in it is you don't have any real neighbors. And both Mary and I come from fairly dense neighborhoods in New York. They're suburban neighborhoods, but they're pretty dense, and when we were growing up, the neighbors talk to each other. Most of them didn't have air conditioning, so you could hear them at night. Sometimes they'd yell at each other and you could hear it from outside, but that was all part of it. And that's all gone now, so I missed the neighborliness of having, if there's people next door, of getting to know him and everything. But it's a great place to live. We like it very much, but especially that living room.

Will: Hello Dr. Wendler. My name is Will Amos, and I'm a senior from Panhandle, Texas. And my question to you is, how do you think the homecoming weekend event went?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I was very pleased with it. Actually, in my mind, every weekend that we play football, the power of that, the exuberance of the event goes up and up, and I know that a lot of people that were not sure about moving from Kimbrough Stadium, which I understand, there was a lot of energy and memories and relationships that were established at Kimbrough stadium. I get that. But there's going to be more energy, more relationships, and more good memories that get established at the new Buffalo Stadium over time, and it's going to take some time. And I'm thankful that Canyon ISD has taken over Kimbrough. We're still playing football there. They've already made some major improvements. They moved the scoreboard, they took away the south berm, which was this a mountain that you had to go over to get in. That's all gone. You can walk in from the parking lot now, and there'll be more and more improvements there. And I think it's going to be very good for them.

Dr. Wendler: And what ISD can do that West Texas A&M cannot do is they can go each couple of years and get more money from bond issues and so on, to do the improvements incrementally. We can't do that. With us, it's all or none. The system will not allow us to take a \$40 million project and take 4 million a year for 10 years. We can't do that. So, doing the new thing all at one time worked for us. Taking the Kimbrough Stadium and making it new one year at a time works like a charm for Canyon ISD. And this is still about homecoming. It's about relationships. And the great benefit, and this has been my contention, and it was also President O'Brien's contention before me, that having the football stadium on-campus would add a lot of life to the campus on weekends. And it's early to tell, but it sure feels that way right now.

Dr. Wendler: And people in the community are just very, very complimentary about how it all works, and I'm thankful for that. I think it really does mark WT. And if you'll notice in the south end zone on the field, there's always a number of chairs. Last time I think there were 150 people out there. Those are visiting students and their families. If they come for a WT Day on a home game Saturday, we get them on the field and have them sit down there and watch football. And I think to be in the middle of all that is a very special experience that you can't do at large institutions, much larger than we are, and it's very difficult to do at smaller institutions where it has the impact. And we're right in the middle there.

Dr. Wendler: And I think homecoming is... I used the word emblematic to describe this to somebody this morning. It's emblematic of what happens when you bring people onto the campus and get them to be excited about WT and also see the beautiful campus, get to meet with Deans and faculty and all of that. It's really a great opportunity. So, I'm thankful for it, and I think it's headed in the right direction.

Halle: Hi, Dr. Wendler. My name is Halle Reid, and I'm from Clovis, New Mexico. And I'm a senior here at WT. And I was wondering, after visiting most of the high schools in the Texas panhandle, what knowledge did you gain from that, and how can that knowledge be applied here at the university?

Dr. Wendler: That's a great question. And I did visit in the top 26 counties, every high school, not most of them, every one of them. There's none that I haven't been to. And when somebody says they're from Panhandle, I think, "Well, I've been to the high school." As a matter of fact, if they're a sophomore from panhandle, maybe a junior, I would have met them probably at the school. What that did, and I had no idea, actually, and I'm willing to say this, I didn't know what I was doing when I started that thing. I didn't know how much work it was going to be or what the value was going to be. What happened for me, though, was I got a chance to meet people from the panhandle where they lived, students and families and school administrators and school teachers, to better understand what their expectations of the university, of West Texas A&M University, what their expectations were and are and will be. So, it was a very powerful learning experience for me.

Dr. Wendler: And it's like I said in the beginning, a public university has a public responsibility to share with people, especially around at a regional university, like WT, what we do and why we do it and how it might benefit the community. And that tour was very successful, and matter of fact, it's been so successful now I've started doing Region 17, which is the South Plains, and I've been to a just a few less than 20. I'm not even sure how many schools I've been to, but about 20, and that is reinforcing, giving me another jolt of energy about what's important about knowing the people of the panhandle and the South Plains. And I'm thankful for it. I can tell story after story, I won't do it, but we'd be here until sunset. And there's just so many interesting stories that you hear when you're out there.

Remington: Hello, Dr. Wendler. My name is Remington Ricketts. I'm a sophomore from Floydada High School, and expanding on WT 125, I wanted to ask, what do you hope the downtown WT campus will lead to for WT 125?

Dr. Wendler: Okay. So, the downtown WT campus, we refer to it as the Amarillo Center, and a number of other ways, but that campus extends the reach of our university into the downtown area of Amarillo. We think it's very important, and we're thankful for the opportunity to be there. Many of you may know, we're considering moving our nursing program in the last two years. The nursing program is split up into, basically, a two plus two program. The first two years, more general studies and basic sciences, than the last two, the professional courses in nursing, and we want the last two years down there nearer to the hospitals. And Dean Nelson, Dirk Nelson, of the College of Nursing is going to move his office down there, so he'll be there all the time.

Dr. Wendler: What's valuable about this, as opposed to past efforts, is we're putting programs down there, lock, stock, and barrel. The whole program will be there.

It used to be that we would offer courses one of the time or two at a time courses, but you couldn't take a whole program down there. Now, the faculty will be there, that's their home, and the leadership of the nursing school will be there, especially the professional program in nursing, the RN program. And I think that's very, very important. And I think it's good for downtown because we now have about 150 students and faculty down there. When we move the nursing program, we'll have nearly 500 faculty and students down there every day right in the heart of Amarillo.

Kinsey: My name is Kinsey Roberts. I'm from Amarillo, Texas, and I'm a senior this year. And I would like to ask you, looking at the goals set in WT 125, which goal are you most looking forward to accomplishing?

Dr. Wendler: That's a great question. The guiding principle in that plan, for me, is how do we create a regionally responsive research university? We think that's very important because there are problems in the Texas panhandle, challenges, that if we can solve them here, these solutions will be transportable to the larger world. We're working, for example, right now on water issues, which any of you from the panhandle will understand how important water and its conservation and utilization and extraction and all of that is to the panhandle. And we just received a pretty significant grant, a million dollar grant, to begin to focus on issues that tie together water engineering, how to irrigate, how to purify, how to take care of water, how to reuse, conserve, and agriculture, because it's ag that uses 90% of the water that's used in the Texas panhandle. Shortening your shower time or how long you wash your hands or putting a brick in the toilet. You guys didn't do that, but your parents did. You put a brick in the toilet, it uses less per flush. Now they charge extra for that. They just reduced it.

Dr. Wendler: But the bottom line is, that's, no pun intended, a drop in the bucket. The serious water savings and so on are going to come from a refreshed view of how the ag industry uses water, and between agriculture and engineering, we're going to address those problems. And here's the issue, that's not just a problem in the Texas panhandle, it's a problem in 20 other locations in America and hundreds of locations around the globe. It's a global problem. That's why the WT 125 says, the title, it's full title, WT 125 From the Panhandle to the World. We can solve those problems here, with very focused research agendas, and then transport those solutions to give a wider range of influence and impact for WT, by addressing the needs of the home folks first. And that's what I want to do.

Aaron: Hello, Dr. Wendler. My name is Aaron Chinda, I'm a junior. I was born in Africa but grew up in Fort Worth. This question is more about yourself. What kind of music do you like listening to?

Dr. Wendler: Thanks. Thanks, Aaron. I appreciate that. My favorite all time musician and singer and songwriter is Ralph Stanley. How many people know who I'm talking about? One other old man. Yeah. Randy is probably the only one. He writes and sings. He made himself well known in a certain kind of evangelical Christian community, and I say this here, it's painful to listen to. My wife can't stand that.

I have to put it on the radio, not on the radio, but on Pandora when she's not there. But I love it because it's music from the heart about something that means something to Mr. Stanley and his cohort, even though it's not the easiest stuff in the world to listen to. But you asked me, that's my favorite guy.

Lorenzo: Good evening, Dr. Wendler.

Dr. Wendler: Yes, sir.

Lorenzo: My name is Lorenzo Barnett, and I'm from Arlington, Texas. And I wanted to know what is something that you do every day that is for you and not for the university?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I do a couple of things. I try to exercise every day, but that doesn't always work. I know it's not going to work tonight, it's just not going to work. But that's how I end my waking day. I try to do that late in the day before I wind down for the evening. I open God's Word every morning. That's me, that's who I am, and that's what I do, and I do it for me. Hopefully, some of that bleeds out and has a positive impact on other people, but that's what I do and it's mine. It's all mine. Oh, is this a sidwinder? No, the curve ball. The curve ball.

Brandon: Hello, Dr. Wendler. My name is Brandon Miner, and I'm from Lubbock, Texas and I graduated from Lubbock Cooper High School. And I am a junior here at WT. And I have a question for you. It's a curve ball, for sure. If you were to start a band, what would the name of the band be, and what instrument would you want to play in the band?

Dr. Wendler: Gosh, that is a curve ball. I'm not quite sure.

Randy Ray: How about Dr. Wendler and the Administrators?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, yeah. Dr. Wendler and the Administrators. That'd be good. That'd be... What instrument would I play?... Well, I don't know about that. If I had to sing, I'd be the lead singer. If I was going to play an instrument, and don't ask me why, I've never touched one, I used to play the trumpet, I would play the saxophone. I like the saxophone. You can squeeze a lot of stuff out of that thing, right? At least the people that I've heard that play it well. Got a lot of emotion and I like it.

Randy Ray: Thank you for joining us for reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. Be sure to join us again next time.