

Randy Ray: Welcome to 2019 everybody. Welcome back to episode number, reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas panhandle. My name is Randy Ray. I am once again honored to be sitting in the same room with the 11th president of West Texas A&M, Doctor Walter Wendler.

Dr. Wendler: Thanks Randy. Pleasure to be here, as always.

Randy Ray: Always fun to do these things.

Dr. Wendler: Yes sir.

Randy Ray: 2019 is here. I'm excited about it. I'm excited about what 2019 is gonna do for WT, and what WT's gonna do for 2019. What do you think?

Dr. Wendler: Well, I like that and I like the two-way street. We're gonna help each other. We're gonna help 2019, and 2019's gonna help us. We continue to make progress. As we closed out 2018, we had the groundbreaking for the new VERO Center, which is the veterinarian, education, research, and outreach on the west Texas A&M University campus out by the new AG facility. We're excited about that. We produce a lot of pre-veterinary medicine students, who go onto to Texas A&M, to take a DVM, a Doctor of veterinary medicine. We're proud of that relationship. It's enhanced by the fact that we're part of the Texas A&M University system.

Dr. Wendler: As a matter of fact, we are the largest provider of students into the DVM program at Texas A&M after Texas A&M and that includes a lot of good universities. The University of Texas, Texas Tech, University of Houston, universities from out of state, Oklahoma State, Oklahoma. We are providing a good firm foundation for students to study veterinary medicine at Texas A&M University, which by the way is one of the top three DVM programs in the nation and I think number six or seven on the planet. It is absolutely a great vet school. Our relationship to them, through our AG programs and our general academic programs, we produce good students here. They're the best, some of the best undergraduate coursework with high intensity interaction between faculty and students creates good professional school students. This is proof of that.

Dr. Wendler: That groundbreaking ... Also included in that groundbreaking back in December was the new Texas Medical Veterinary Diagnostic Lab. I say that slowly. We refer to it as the TVMDL. There's just too many syllables in that title to say easily. We're proud to have them on the campus. The TVMDL, the VERO center, the AG school, we all work together in addressing the needs of agriculture in the top 26 counties of Texas. As you know that's our focus. That was a big conclusion in my mind to the end of the year.

Randy Ray: When do you think that building will be finished?

Dr. Wendler: 2020.

Randy Ray: 2020.

Dr. Wendler: They both should be ready by 2020. They've already started construction. If you drive by there, you won't see too much yet, but it's gonna happen. It will happen quickly, just like the football stadium.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Just a massive AG complex out there.

Dr. Wendler: It is. It is. You know, we're working, work continues on ... We're with TxDot, the Texas Department of Transportation. Russel Long Boulevard is being transferred from TxDot supervision and responsibility to the city of Canyon, who were very excited about that. That may not seem like much. It seems like bureaucracy, but what happens is, when Canyon takes possession of that road, we will have the opportunity to do different kind of edge treatments, curbing sidewalks, that kind of thing. It's gonna change the nature of that road. It's a spur now. It looks like a spur. So much going on out there.

Dr. Wendler: It looks like, kind of, a mess right now, cause there's so much traffic. It's just getting beat up. When we're done with all the construction, TxDot is gonna repave it to our specifications basically, and then transfer to the city of Canyon. Gary Hinders, the mayor and the city council have all worked very diligently to come up with some ideas about how they'll treat that road, so that it serves both the city and the campus community in the best possible way. They'll be bike paths, there's gonna be pedestrian access along. It's gonna [crosstalk 00:05:07] transform itself. Yeah, we're excited about it.

Randy Ray: It seems to me that WT in the city of Canyon are working closely these days and better than ever, than have ever before.

Dr. Wendler: Well, I would like to ... I hope that's the truth. We work diligently to reach out, actually not just to Canyon, but also to Amarillo and so on. We wanna be good partners, because good universities need to be good partners. I've seen them ... I've seen it when it's not the case. I've seen it when it is the case. I will tell you that the latter is always better. When we make strong partners, it's kind of, a marriage. These sort of ... Some people refer to it as town-gown relationships. I think they're pretty good here right now.

Randy Ray: I don't think it's always been that way. I think it is now.

Dr. Wendler: Well, I appreciate that. We are working diligently at it. We're trying to be involved. You know, I went out and visited all the schools in the top 26 counties. That included all the schools in Canyon and Amarillo also, in a sense to extend the right-handed fellowship. I go to school board meetings in both communities, at least once a year. I go to city council meetings at least once a year, to talk about what we're doing here on the campus. When this campus prospers and

does a better job of educating students, well the whole region ... Randall and Potter counties prosper. That prosperity leaks out into the top 26 counties of Texas. That's my goal to serve them.

Dr. Wendler: I believe our university should always put the needs of the people in the top 26 counties absolutely in the front row. Don't worry about the other major metropolitan areas in Texas. Those things will take care of themselves. What we need to do is serve locally first, and serve well. I'm thankful for that. I'm thankful for the very fine working relationship that we have with Mayor Hinders in Canyon and Mayor Nelson in Amarillo. Those relationships are powerful. I think they're good for the institution.

Randy Ray: In serving the Texas panhandle, I'm excited about some things that you mentioned to me earlier about some possible new degrees that we're gonna work on a little.

Dr. Wendler: Right. One in particular ... You know, we have a longstanding PhD program in AG. That's been very fine. We are, in January, next ... I don't know when the example in the school starts, but we will welcome our first Cohort of students in the Doctor of Education program. This program is very special. It's absolutely unique, because it's a program that will help produce leaders, managers, and administrators, for small school districts. The first one's of course will largely be the ones in the Texas Panhandle. There are a lot of 'em. Leading and managing a small school district is different than a major urban district.

Dr. Wendler: The Texas higher education coordinating board sent a review team to our campus, to look at our proposal from an outside perspective. The gentleman from Vanderbilt University in Nashville said that he has never seen a [inaudible 00:08:38]. That's a very fine college of education there at Vanderbilt, said he has never seen a program focus like this one is on small communities. He thinks it's gonna be a very effective program. The proof, is in the pudding.

Dr. Wendler: Here's the pudding. We were gonna take 15 students to start. We got over 50 applications that were completed, and over 40 students I think met all of our criteria in every way. We ended up not taking 15 students in the first cohort, but taking 30 students in the first cohort. We have already exceeded our own expectations. I'm very excited about it. I think that this attention to service in the top 26 counties, even to the naysayers, is, "Well, it's a small population up there. You're gonna run out of people."

Dr. Wendler: Well, the fact of the matter is, the United States population is still about 20% of rural. There are regions around the US that, in many ways are like the Texas panhandle, constellations of small communities without access to a major metropolitan areas. 20% of the population. If we find ways to, in a sense crack the nut of service to these small school systems, they'll have applications in other small school systems all around the nation. That's 20% of America. Interestingly it's 40% of China.

Dr. Wendler: In my mind, I can see us serving the small communities in the Texas panhandle in our top 26 counties, this place that we call home, and I can see that going overseas to China. Languages are different. Culture is different, but small schools are small schools. People have a different relation to 'em. I had that. The superintendent at Channing tell me that he had been in every household of every student in the K-12 school that was a superintendent.

Randy Ray: Wow.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. That's exactly the right answer. People at the University of Houston, if they started now and didn't sleep, they wouldn't be able to get to those. In 10 years, he's been to every one. He knows the families. He's almost more like a pastor than a school superintendent. It's a different kind of relationship with different kinds of skills. That's what we're about right here, is really paying attention to people in smaller communities.

Randy Ray: Very, very exciting and very interesting too. We are going to take a break. When we come back, we're gonna talk to a student at WT. We're gonna talk about student leadership on campus. We'll be back in about 60 seconds.

Speaker 3: West Texas A&M University is proud to call the Texas Panhandle home. Providing the top 26 counties with opportunity and qualified graduates, is an important WT mission. From their first experience on campus, to graduation, 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: 60 seconds. Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of Texas Panhandle. For this part, this section of the podcast, we're gonna be talking to Miguel Soto, who is the transfer and family coordinator on campus. He's gonna graduate in five days. First of all, welcome and congratulations.

Miguel Soto: Thank you. I'm definitely glad to be here. It's always good to come back and just really talk about the student experience. I'm glad to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Randy Ray: Miguel I have seen you around campus a lot. You bleed maroon. You're a WT guy, right?

Miguel Soto: Yes sir. I'd like to think so.

Randy Ray: Yeah, and you're a buffalo. One of the things that you're passionate about and I am too is, things like student organizations and students getting involved on campus. Talk a little, bit about that.

Miguel Soto: I think, just to kind of backtrack a little, bit. I think from my personal experience, not knowing really what the college experience was like, not really knowing what to expect, there were a lot of things that I was involved with, that really helped, kind of ground my experience for what the next six years would look like. I think overall, the involvement for student is crucial. Those are the things that you've learned outside of the classroom.

Miguel Soto: You sit in about 15 hours a week, worth of class, but everything else outside of wor ... I mean, outside of the class really kind of teaches you what you need to learn as a student, but will, also you need to learn as a professional going into the career, being a citizen, in our community. There's a lot of skills outside of the classroom that are crucial. Those skills are really what I feel helps build the student to be that future leader that we hope.

Randy Ray: I totally agree. My Students get tired of hearing me say it. I say it all the time. You have got to dig in. By that I mean, you have to get involved with stuff outside of the classroom. I'm like you. I believe that you learn every bit as much outside the classroom as you do in it. You've got to get involved. That's where we change as people, I think, when we get involved with other organizations and get to work with other people. Talk a little, bit about organizations on campus. How important are they?

Miguel Soto: You know, there's about 120 on campus organizations. They run from religious organizations to Greek life affiliations, service organizations, leadership organizations, academics. There's a range of organizations on campus that really, students can choose from. I like to think that there's essentially one office for the umbrella, but students really get to pick where they want to go, and really focus on different areas throughout their academics.

Miguel Soto: When it comes to student organizations, I always encourage students to just pick and choose where they really want to invest their time in. You know, there's a saying, you can do everything, but you can do one thing well. When it comes to student organizations, I always tell students, "Pick one that you feel like you can truly invest in, the one that you know is gonna help you grow. Truly invest in all of that and put your heart into that." As much as you're gonna pour into that, that organization is gonna pour into you. It comes to reflect in the skills that you gain, the experiences that you're able to have, and really the opportunities in the future that one organization could open up for you.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I think that's very wise. I've known students in the past that get overly involved with too much. I think their grades start to suffer. I think that's part of the college process. I think it's part of growing, is knowing, how to balance that kind of stuff and knowing how involved and how many, organization to be involved with. I encourage my students to be involved with an organization within our department, and an organization outside, be it religious organization or some kind of club or something. I think by doing that kind of stuff, it just makes us better balanced to people.

Miguel Soto: Yeah, definitely. I think one of the things that I tell my students is just really, and for me personally as well as ... It's okay to step back. It's okay to be involved in something and realize that it's really either one, not where you wanna be, or two, it's not what you thought it was gonna be, but also it may be one of those things that they are too committed too. It's been too consuming, until they do have to take a step back.

Miguel Soto: I think for college students, nowadays there's a lot of pressure to take a step back in the things that they're involved with. It's either gonna ... They could either look at it as a sense of failure, they've let someone else down. I feel like there's a lot of pressure on college students to really just hold that onto themselves. When it comes to being involved, I always tell them, "If you think it's too much, it's okay to step back" Obviously do it with some grace.

Miguel Soto: I think once they realize that and recognize that, the student involvement becomes a lot more exciting. They're a lot more willing to become involved, because there's not so much on their plate. When it comes to involvement, I just think that there's a lot of pressure, both good and bad, to grow their skills, but also to really focus on, just a small number of things, instead of having to do a lot.

Randy Ray: I agree. Miguel, you have been ... Is it four years, you've been at WT now?

Miguel Soto: Six years, yeah.

Randy Ray: Six years.

Miguel Soto: Yeah, with my undergrad and grad work. Seemed a little old.

Randy Ray: What is your favorite thing about this university?

Miguel Soto: I think, in terms of the student experience, there's numerous opportunities from the grad, from the undergrad level to the grad level. You know, just because you graduate from your undergraduate experience, doesn't necessarily mean your experience ends. I feel like I came late into the game with it. As a grad student, first your ... No, second year grad student, I was able to jump onto the cheer team. That for me was exciting.

Miguel Soto: All throughout my undergrad experience, I never thought that, that was a possibility. I never tried to pursue it. My graduate experience, you know, I kind of just jumped on it. The opportunity came. I walked through that door. I think the overall idea of continuing the experience for me is what really excites me. There's just so much out there. Really allows the students to choose and pave their own way. Choosing the opportunity to grow and to allow yourself to experience that new growth, I think is what I feel ...

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Miguel Soto: I've been recruited from.

Randy Ray: All right. I like to throw curve balls. I'm gonna throw you both a curve ball. You ready? We're gonna start doing this every podcast. I'm gonna throw you guys a curve ball.

Dr. Wendler: Go ahead. Try.

Miguel Soto: I mean, it's here, right?

Randy Ray: You guys are ready?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, we're ready.

Randy Ray: I would like to hear from each of you, both of you, what is your favorite sound on campus. I hear silence right now.

Dr. Wendler: I like silence once in a while.

Randy Ray: It's not a [crosstalk 00:18:55] bad thing.

Dr. Wendler: No, no. I'll tell you what. Mine is ... You wanna go first Miguel, or you want me to go first?

Miguel Soto: You go ahead.

Dr. Wendler: This may surprise people. I have in my office, or outside my office, a balcony that I can step out on to. In the nice weather I do, to take a breath and just kind of be. When I do, I hear the fountain, the Buffalo fountain, which is right behind my office. That sound of that rushing water is good to me. I grew up basically on the Long Island sound, no pun intended. I was used to waves. I was used to nautical sounds. There's not many of 'em up here in west Texas. I still love west Texas. The bottom line is, my favorite sound is probably the rushing water of the Buffalo Fountain.

Miguel Soto: I think one of the things that I've enjoyed and now that I've had the opportunity to think about, it's really just the background noise that the student population brings to campus. Work in the JVK, which is considered the student center, or the heart of WT, when it comes to the student population. In that student center, there's just so many students gathered around. It becomes that noise that I kind of push to the back of my head whenever I'm sitting in my office.

Miguel Soto: Whenever I step outside and I see and I hear all of these students, it kind of just brings things to life. That is a perfect example of when the Christmas holidays come, when the Thanksgiving holidays come and even summer break where all of those students are gone. It's just so quiet. Whenever we talk about it in our office, we talked a lot about how the students truly bring life to campus.

Miguel Soto: I never really recognized that until here recently, where I've just started to learn how to embrace that noise whenever I'm in my office and still hear it. And then, whenever you open the doors to walk outside of my office, it's just so loud. Whenever you finally have the opportunity to hear the noise and to really embrace it, it truly does show that students do bring life to campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah. One of my favorite sounds on campus is the sound of construction. Some people complain about it. You know, it's noises. It just makes me feel like we have something going on here. It's life.

Dr. Wendler: You out to be real happy right now. We've got a lot of it going on.

Randy Ray: Lot of noise going on.

Dr. Wendler: Going on. It's a lot of noise. Randy, if I may, I just wanna make observation. As I was listening to Miguel, kind of give his story, his WT story, it's interesting to me that Miguel got involved in the very, I'll say important ... I think all extra curricular activities, the productive ones are important for students experience. He got involved in cheer as a graduate student. I think Miguel, sometimes ... You're with students all the time. I think some students think, "Well, this kind of extra curricular stuff is for a freshman or sophomores to get 'em into the community." I don't think it ever stops. I think a graduate student that gets involved in ... He just said it, how important it was to him and what he said was, "I walk through that door ..." I think that's important.

Dr. Wendler: I'll tell you a group that concerns me, cause I'm so energized about trying to be attractive to transfer students. Somehow to look past, or overlook the opportunities for engagement and what they might be for transfer students to get engaged, in the student life, the things that makes the campus hum and breathe and be vital to people. I think those things are really critical. I'm proud that Miguel didn't say to himself, "Gee. I might wanna do this, but it's too late for me." It's not too late for him.

Dr. Wendler: I mean, it's never too late for any of us to get engaged in something, try something new. I think if the university doesn't teach that somehow by its actions, by opportunities and that kind of thing, we might as well shut the door. We might as well shut the door. I think it's for everybody, where they can find avenues to engage and be part of something that's larger than themselves. Miguel is doing it. I've known him basically since I've been here. I appreciate that, that he was so transparent, and in sharing that. I think it's important.

Randy Ray: I so much believe, that the university's not just about education students about a certain discipline, it's teaching them how to be better citizens. I wanna say how much I've enjoyed talking to both of you today. I am looking forward to our next podcast. I wanna wish everyone out there a happy 2019 from West Texas A&M University. Please join us again next time for Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle.

Dr. Wendler: Thank you Randy.