## Brae Foust:

Hello and welcome back to the I Am WT podcast, where we discover the stories behind some of West Texas A&M University's donors, alums, faculty, staff, and students. My name is Brae Foust, and I am here with my co-host Tearanee' Lockhart. How you doing today?

### Tearanee' Lockhart:

Hello, guys. I'm doing pretty good. We are here joined with Jimmy Lackey. How are you today?

### Jimmy Lackey:

I am happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me.

### Brae Foust:

You are absolutely welcomed here, the CEO of Kids Incorporated, which was a huge part of my childhood, a great place for youth to play any kind of sport, football, track, baseball. Before we dive into the meat of the podcast, I want to know what's your favorite sport of all time?

### Jimmy Lackey:

Well, of all the programs that we do, track's my favorite, but it's probably for a different reason than most people would think. A football coach doesn't need my help, basketball coach doesn't need my help, but somebody's got to organize those track meets. That is mass chaos. So our staff works each Saturday during those track meets, and I'm usually out at the fifth and sixth grade meet, usually the starter at it. It's the time I get to be around the kids and have a little fun with them and a little one-to-one that typically in most of the sports I don't get to do because I'd just be in the way if I was out there all the time. Track for that reason.

Growing up, I was a coach's kid, and so all the sports were fun for me. Told y'all off air, I got my eye put out with a BB gun when I was 10 years old, and that changed some things for me as I got a little older. But football, baseball, I couldn't get enough of when I was a kid. Anything about sports in general, I'm pretty much a fan.

### Brae Foust:

You were discussing earlier when we would come to Kids Inc. track, I remember we used to run on the grass fields, on all those clumpy grass fields. You said earlier that that's about to change?

# Jimmy Lackey:

Well, we're planning on it changing. We're in the middle of a capital campaign. I tell everybody around here, I come up swinging every morning. WT's in the middle of this \$125 million capital campaign. Amarillo College has got a \$50 million capital campaign. But yeah, we're in the middle of a \$30 million capital campaign. We're about 10 months deep into it. We've raised right about \$17 million to this point.

Tearanee' Lockhart:

Wow.

Jimmy Lackey:

We've got a \$30 million project. We've been given 90 acres of land. If you know where the Hollywood Theater is as you go into town, all of that land behind there, between there and the par three course, all the way back south down to the transmission lines, and then L around all the way over to Coulter, has been given to us by Rockrose Development to put in a state-of-the-art athletic complex for this region.

It's long overdue. We've tried through many bond issues through the city over the years, and they just haven't passed. I'm not getting any younger, and if we're going to get anything done ... I brought a group of people in a couple of years ago January and said, "Hey, everybody leave their egos at the door, and let's talk about this." Because I had people that were competitors from one another in the room. I said, "The key in this deal is we've got to put egos outside the walls, and we've got to talk about, A, what's best for kids, B, what's going to be an economic engine for this area? And two, what also provides some outdoor space and indoor space for adults? What other collaborations can we bring to the table in the deal?" So that's what we've done.

Amarillo College is going to have a practice field for their baseball team out there. We've invited their intermural programs to play out there. Should they ever add additional sports, soccer or softball, there'll be a space for them to have a field there. They don't have to build anything.

Then phase two, once we finish this outdoor project, we'll start immediately on the indoor project, which will be north of the outdoor complex. It'll have a 300-meter indoor track that we're working with Michael McBroom here at WT, and hopefully WT will have an indoor track before too long.

So yeah, it's a big project, and that complex will have a couple of 200 meter turf tracks. Everything'll be synthetic turf so the kids won't have the clumps. They won't have those clumps in the middle of the grass anymore to fall in. We're really excited. You just got to be patient. It's a lot of money. If you just watch The Panhandle Gives this week, we finished with \$8.8 million in it, and the goal was \$5.2 million. That just tells you the benevolence of this area, and we're very fortunate to live in a region where people are so giving. I have no doubt we'll get this done. WT will finish theirs up. Amarillo College will be successful, and everybody in this area will benefit from it.

# Tearanee' Lockhart:

Yeah. Why is an indoor complex so important for this region?

# Jimmy Lackey:

Well, number one, for Kids Inc., there's a desperate need for additional basketball and volleyball courts, which this facility will have. We run into gym issues occasionally, but we know from an economic standpoint, there's a lot of club teams. We're not in the club business, but we have a lot of club teams that need practice space. We have a lot of club teams that would like to host more tournaments in this area. That's where the economics come in when you start talking about bringing other club programs to town and the hotel tax and the sales tax that that generates. We know that because we have an office in Elk City, Oklahoma. Their city hired us in 2015 to run all their programs over there. We also have an office in Hereford. We run Hereford Sports & Wellness. Then we just signed on to take over a brand new activity center in Dalhart.

We're experienced in other communities. We spent \$5.5 million dollars turfing two really nice baseball and softball complexes in Elk City that paid for themselves in two years during a pandemic through hotel tax and sales tax in a town of 12,000. So if you can recover \$5.5 million dollars in two years in a town of 12,000, can you imagine with us hosting and giving these club programs an opportunity to have these tournaments in Amarillo, the amount of dollars that can generate economically for our region and for the city, it benefits everybody. It's a win-win for everyone.

The thing about our project this go-around is this isn't coming out of the taxpayer's pocket. We're raising all of this privately. There can't be any complaining about that. Everybody's been very kind and very on board to us and it's been nice. There's not been any pushback because it's our project. At the end of the day, Kids Inc. will own and operate this facility, and there's going to be a whole lot of other people are going to get to use it.

# Brae Foust:

That's awesome. We've been talking about all the great work that you've been doing, but let's talk about you yourself, Jimmy. So tell us about where you grew up, where you come from, and how you came to be part of the WT program.

### Jimmy Lackey:

Well, anybody that knows me knows that's the least of my favorite subjects is talk about me. I grew up in Dumas, Texas. My dad was a coach; my mom was a school nurse, everyday folks. My mom told me at a young age, the group of people that I was in class with was a special class. I graduated from high school in 1980 in Dumas. Some of those folks to this day, some of them are my very best friends. I can't stress enough what a close class we were and still are.

That group and growing up in Dumas, growing up around the coaching staff that my dad worked with really shaped and molded who I am today because I grew up with some great men that not only me, but all my buddies were around. Those coaches were, they were a different kind of breed than what we have today. Not putting any coaching staff down today, but it was just different times. I knew that any one of those coaches could bust my hind end anywhere I was any day of the week, and there weren't going to be any questions asked. That's what I'm talking about. Now, you got to account for everything you do when you look at a kiddo. Back then, they had permission to take care of me if I got out of line, and so I tried to walk the straight and narrow most of the time. But I grew up in a really good environment and around great folks.

When I got my eye put out, I played golf. My dad ran the pool in the summertimes out where the golf course was. I started playing golf, and it became something that I really enjoyed and I got pretty good at and had some opportunities to go play golf elsewhere. My dad really wanted me to come to WT. He went and played football at LSU, and he got his shoulder hurt his junior year, couldn't play anymore, and he came back home and got a geology degree from WT back in the late '50s. He had a great experience and he just really ... He knew me way better than I knew me at that time and just said, "You really need to give this a shot. I'm not telling you what you have to do, but I'm thinking you ought to give this a place."

We came down in the summer, and ironically the gentleman that gave me my tour of the dorm, which is right across the street, Guenther Hall, was one of my groomsmen in my wedding. Right there, the first guy I meet on campus ends up being one of my groomsmen in my wedding. It just went from there.

My nextdoor neighbor our freshman year got an opportunity to serve as director of residential living at a very young age. I worked in residence halls for Doug, and Doug was one of my groomsmen. That's how it worked.

The best thing from WT is this is where I met my wife. The summer I finished was the summer she was starting, so I cradle-robbed that group of freshmen and took her under my wing as best I could. Somehow 34 years later, I've managed to hang onto her.

But this place is so much more to me than I could ever explain. I got a great education here. I wasn't the best student. Gay Ham, if you're out there listening, she was one of my math teachers. Gay will tell you

that I was the only student she ever had in college that had a parent-teacher conference. I might not have been going to class very often at one point in time. I guess my parents came down. Dr. Townsend, I could probably name them all, they all got visits from my parents. Then I got visits with all of them, and that took care of that. Sleeping in wasn't an option anymore. Better get up and go to class. Great experiences here. I could go on and on about it.

Tearanee' Lockhart:

Yeah. Then it seems like you ended up working here, right?

Jimmy Lackey:

I did.

### Tearanee' Lockhart:

Then now your kids go here, or your kids went here. So WT really is in your blood.

### Jimmy Lackey:

Yeah. Back in the day, I was an education major, and the last semester of your schooling you did eight weeks of methods classes in classroom. Then you did the last eight weeks student teaching at a school. On Thursday, I was scheduled to go on Monday to start my student teaching at Caprock High School. I got a job offer in residential living, and that changed the course. So I took that opportunity to take the job at WT and did not do my student teaching, took a last minute class to finish my degree. Actually, my Bachelor's says general studies because I didn't finish it in education. My Master's degree is in educational administration. Took that job in residential living, worked there for six years, and then had an opportunity to be the executive director of the Alumni Association a few years later. I served in that position for almost seven years, and then I went to Kids Inc. in '95.

I worked with some great people here. There's not many of them around anymore. That's showing my age. There were some great folks. I worked for some great leaders. Barry Thompson became our president in 1991, probably one of the most charismatic leaders I ever worked around. He was fun to watch do his thing. He wasn't here long, but he was fun to watch. He and I really clicked.

Dr. Long did a great job when he was here. I didn't work with Dr. Long very long after he became president, but I admired him and respect him and the years that he put in here.

Dr. Wendler and I have a wonderful relationship. We're very close friends, and I like kidding around with him. He's a lot of fun. I really appreciate all that he's done to reach out to the Panhandle.

Just had an opportunity to be involved in a lot of things around here that are important to me and important to this region. Anything I can do to help promote it, I'll do it.

# Brae Foust:

Absolutely. Could you possibly tell us maybe a story that a lot of people might not know that you experienced at your time working for WT, something that you might find funny or something that no one knows about or that you'd like to maybe share?

Jimmy Lackey: Well, I've got lots of those. Brae Foust:

How about just one?

## Jimmy Lackey:

Let me tell you about this one. I'm going to take you back to a time that y'all would not remember, but there was a time when things weren't so rosy around here. Dr. Roach was our president. Dr. Roach treated me like a king. I was not a threat to him, but he and the faculty didn't get along. I'm just putting it on the line. He and the faculty did not get along. They actually had a vote of no confidence in the president at the time, and I'm running the Alumni Office at this time. So it's tough.

We are getting ready to join the A&M system. WT had its own Board of Regents at the time. So we're at our very last Board of Regents meeting in August of '90, and this will be the last meeting before we transfer governance over to the A&M system.

Boone Pickens was our board chairman, Dr. Bird, who was our psychology professor here and another good friend of mine, was the faculty senate president. He gave his final report to the Board of Regents. It wasn't the most favorable to them, but talking about the excitement of joining the A&M system. Boone Pickens had those glasses of his sitting down top of his nose. Dr. Bird finished his report, and he said, "Well, Dr. Bird, there's a lot of things I'm going to miss about coming to campus, but one of them sure isn't listening to your report. Now, we'll hear from Jimmy Lackey, director of the Alumni Association." I'm like, "Oh, my gosh."

Brae Foust:

Oh, no.

# Jimmy Lackey:

I'm sitting there going, okay, it's my turn. My boss, Bruce Grimes, he was like, "Jimmy, bullet points and get off the stage." I got up there, and I know all these regents. I know every one of them, Eddie Scott, Hazel Kelly-Wilson, Becky Dodson, John Chandler. I know every one of them. I got up there and I said, "Well, did anybody see the Rangers game last night?" I look over, and my boss is giving himself CPR. Eddie Scott said, "Yeah, dad gum Tony Peña hit that ball out in the eighth and beat us two to one." I reached in my pocket, and I pulled that baseball out. I said, "I was the one that caught the ball on the outfield-

Tearanee' Lockhart:

Wow.

Brae Foust:

Oh, wow.

Jimmy Lackey:

... and I drove all night long to get back to see y'all today." It just broke the ice in the room. I was probably 28 or 29 years old at the time. But those people needed a little levity. They needed to back off and realize what we're there to do. I gave them a lesson. They appreciated it at the end of the day. I took a chance.

[inaudible 00:13:59] Barnett and Katherine Winsett were two ladies that really supported the university back in the day. I had been sitting over there by them, and I went back and took my seat. They go, "Kid, that was awesome." What do you do? You got to break the ice sometimes.

Brae Foust:

That's for sure.

### Jimmy Lackey:

That's one that I will never forget. But that's a true story. I caught that ball in the outfield, and we drove all night home. My buddy drove me back and my wife, so I could be at that Regents meeting the next morning. So that's a true story.

### Brae Foust:

I like that a lot. Well, Jimmy, I can't wait to talk to you some more about WT and the One West campaign. But right now, we are going to take a little break. We will be right back in 30 seconds.

### Speaker 4:

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### Brae Foust:

Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen, to I Am WT. We are here with Jimmy Lackey, the CEO of Kids Incorporated, father of three girls. Is that what it says on our talking point?

Jimmy Lackey: That's a fact. I got three daughters.

Brae Foust:

Three daughters. Yeah. Tell us about them.

### Jimmy Lackey:

They're the best. I would hope that any parent would say that about their kids. Jayla came to WT, had a great experience here, left her last semester to go do an internship for Mac Thornberry in Washington DC in March. He offered her a full-time job. So she actually went to work for him and worked for him for almost four years right up until the time he got ready to retire from Congress. Then came back home, and now she's the grant writer in the Development Office here at WT.

Kennedy, our middle daughter, one of my best friends brainwashed her as a child and felt like she needed to go to Oklahoma State. He played football there, and so she grew up wanting to go to Oklahoma State. That's what she did. She went over there and finished in three years. She got a degree in speech communications and disorders. Went to Tech and got her Master's there in speech and language disorders. She's a speech therapist now at Northwest Texas Hospital in Amarillo. They were in Allen, Texas. She and Luke were in Allen. She was in a school district down there at Richardson ISD. But Luke was an engineer at Texas Instruments and got a job at Pantex in May. So we got them back home.

# Then Hallie, our youngest, she'll graduate here in about a week and a half from WT.

Tearanee' Lockhart:

Yay!

Brae Foust:

Let's go.

Tearanee' Lockhart: So exciting.

# Jimmy Lackey:

Yeah, we'll find out what her role it is. She's a business major, and she works over in the Student Center in one of those offices over there. I never can remember what the title of it is. It's some big long title, student engagement or something over there in that corner. It wasn't there when I was there. That was where the president's office was when I was in school here. But yeah, she's been working over in that office for a good year and a half, and the world's her oyster here in about a week and a half. We'll see what she does, but she'll do good things. One thing Hallie knows how to do is make money. That's all she's ever been interested in. She has three jobs right now. She's a hard worker and really commits to the things that she's involved in.

Kim and I are really proud of our kiddos. They've done really, really well. They work hard, and they're low maintenance as far as being a dad.

# Tearanee' Lockhart:

Oh, that's always really great to have just kids that make it easy and make the parent [inaudible 00:17:19].

# Jimmy Lackey:

I hope I did that for my parents, but I can surely tell you my kids did that for me. They're easy. They're very opinionated, and they're girls. They got a mama and whatever goes. It's just, "Yes, ma'am," around my house, but the boys are changing the world. I got two son-in-laws. Hallie's got a boyfriend a couple years. I got two grandsons and another grandson on the way. So the boys are taking over around our place. That's been a fun little dynamic change.

### Tearanee' Lockhart:

Yeah. Well, moving on a little bit. I know we were just talking about how you worked at WT. How did working at WT and being a student at WT prepare you for when you went to Kids Inc.?

### Jimmy Lackey:

Well, truth be told, I wasn't looking for a job when this deal at Kids Inc. came about. A friend of mine was the director of United Way and really encouraged me to look into this deal. So I sat down with the search committee, and there were six of them. When I walked in for that meeting, there was four of them that I knew really well, so we were able to have a very serious conversation about what they were looking for. I really, honestly, all I ever wanted to do was be in sports. I wanted Bill Craddick's job. He ran

intermurals. Or I wanted to be the athletic director or work in athletics. The timing wasn't right in either of those opportunities here at WT.

This deal came about, and I used to tell my dad ... He asked me when I was 18 years old, he said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm going to be an athletic director." He said, "My God, have I not taught you anything?" I just didn't know it was going to be for four year olds up through sixth graders. That's what we do. We provide sporting opportunities for kiddos pretty much age four up through six, some eighth graders. But everything that I did at WT prepared me for what I'm doing now, mainly my network of people and resources that I could lean on early in my tenure there.

Think about this. I left WT in '95, got to Kids Inc. We didn't have email. Think about that. Cell phones were rare. Not many people had a cell phone. So communicating with thousands upon thousands of parents at that time was all done on paper. Fax machines weren't in every office at that time. That wasn't that long ago. Think about where we are today and all the communication sources that you have today. We had a lot of catching up to do when I got there. There was only two little computers in the office, and they really didn't do anything. We had to get databases in place. We had to get phone systems in place. Fortunately, I had done that. I'd been part of those type things.

The girl that worked with me at the alumni office eight months later came to work with me at Kids Inc. Really, she was my operations director and was able to take over some things there so I could spend my time doing big picture items off the task list that the board had laid in front of me at that time. But everything that I was able to get in there and get done early on is from experiences that I had at WT and the opportunities that were given to me at a very young age.

I go back and tell everybody this. Dr. Roach didn't have to hire me as the director of the Alumni Association when he did. I think I was 26 or 27 years old. He took a chance on me, and I took advantage of it. I worked hard at that job, and I made relationships that carried forward with me to Kids Inc. and carry forward with me to this day. I took advantage of the opportunities that were given to me to work hard, get my feet on the ground. I wanted to learn. I was just like a sponge. Anything that somebody could teach me new, I wanted to know how to do it. I spent time in all the different disciplines around campus. Something new on campus popped up, I wanted to go over and sit down with the professor or the dean or whoever it was and have them show me what it was that we were getting to do, that something was new. We'd put it in the alumni newsletter and those type things.

Just being hands-on and being a part of those things gave me the tools to do what we do today. Hopefully, I've tried to pass those on to my staff over the years. I've got a great staff. I've got staff that average close to 20 years apiece with me. So we've got a very tenured staff. They're the best at what we do in the youth sports industry. There's not another group out there that does any better than what my staff does. So, yeah, I try to give them all the props in the world because they're great to work with. They're people that I care about and love, but most importantly, they're there to do what's best for kids every day. That's what I ask of them. That's their number one charge is just come to work and do what's best for kids.

# Brae Foust:

It's worked out. You've been there since '95, and it's been growing and growing ever since.

### Jimmy Lackey:

Yeah, November 16th started year 28 for me.

Brae Foust:

## That's awesome.

### Jimmy Lackey:

I'm a dinosaur. There's not many people stay in positions that long anymore. Usually, people are looking for the next best thing, but sometimes you find your calling and Kids Inc. was my calling and I just didn't know it. That's one of those things. There's a plan for everybody out there. You just got to let it happen. Sometimes it's not on your watch or on your timeline.

But I also, I go back, I'm old school. You got to work hard, too. That's one thing that we do around our place. We work hard, and we take our job serious.

### Brae Foust:

That's excellent. I totally agree that hard work is essential in any industry.

Now, we've discussed some about the One West campaign. We won't go into detail. If you want more information, I direct you visit to wtamu.edu/onewest. But I wanted to get your opinion, Jimmy, about the success of the One West campaign.

### Jimmy Lackey:

Well, first off, it's like no other campaign in this area. It's groundbreaking for this region to have a campaign of that magnitude. Dr. Wendler and I sat down in his office one day and discussed it as it was getting started, had him explain to me, "This is big. Talk to me about the different pieces of it." We talked about it. It all starts at the top. You got to have a leader that's willing to go out and promote. In this case, you got to have a very strong development team. When I worked here, we had one development officer and she had a secretary, and that was it. Betty Howell, I tell everybody, I went to the school of development from Betty Howell. She was outstanding in the world of development and really did a lot of good things for us back then.

But Dr. Asbury and Leslie and that whole team over there, their major gift officers, Matt and Molly and Keith. Keith and I go way back. They've got some of the very best over there in that department who are great ambassadors for the university, going out and making those relationships. It all comes down to cultivating, nurturing, and developing relationships. Those folks over in that office really do a good job of that. I think they understand that people can pick fake apart real fast around here. You got to be genuine. You got to really care. Those people can go sell WT in their sleep. That's critical. It can't be something that just comes across as being fake. When your blood's maroon and you go out and you show people that and they get an opportunity to experience some of the inner workings and come to campus and see what's going on here now ... I've got so many friends that have been back in the last year or so that hadn't been back to campus in 30 years, and they're blown away. They're just blown away. That makes the dad proud in me because my kids got to experience that, the things that are new that weren't here when I was here. Well, that's great. That's what you want. You want things better for your kids than they were when you were a kid.

This campaign is ... I probably can't put an adjective on it, how important it is in the big picture, 30 to 50 years down the road. That's what it's doing is it's setting the groundwork for the next 25 to 50 years for this university. It's just unbelievable what they've been able to do. Dr. Wendler was the right guy at the right time to be here to get it underway. Then the people that have stepped up. You talk about the Schaffers and the Englers and the Peels and the Bains. The list goes on and on, Dyke and Terry Rogers. Look at the things in those gifts that have led to other gifts that people like me can't give in those means, but we want to do something at our own mean level. It's encouraged others to get involved at

whatever level they can. It takes leadership, and those folks that stepped up to be a part of this campaign have done this university a tremendous justice over the next 25, 50 years.

### Tearanee' Lockhart:

Yeah. I guess our last question, because I can tell by just the way you've spoken about WT, but what does WT mean to you?

#### Jimmy Lackey:

Everything. Got me choked up on that one. I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today if I hadn't come to school here fall of 1980. That's a fact. The people that I met. Dad gum, you got me on that one. I can't explain the opportunities that came to me at a young age. I took advantage of them. When somebody gave me an opportunity to step into a role that I felt like, I don't know if I'm the right guy, but I want to try it, I did. I wasn't in the cool crowd in high school, but I was friends with everybody. But once I got here, I felt like I had a little oomph in me for the first time. I thought I can step out of my little shy shadow and do some things that are out of my comfort zone.

Everybody's just looking for leadership. That sounds corny, and a lot of people don't take to that real well. But in the end of the day, people, they're just looking for somebody to show them the way and show them how, and then teach them how so that they can do it, too. That's what I got out of this deal. People gave me an opportunity to learn things, and I got an opportunity to go experience them, learn how to do them myself, and then teach others how to do them. It's a cycle. It's that circle of life thing. Like I said, I met my wife here. That's the number one thing at the end of the day. The list goes on and on from there.

But again, I told you, you can't fake things. I hope by me sitting here, y'all figured out none of this is fake with me. This campus is real. This institution is real to me. The best part, what I get to do is I get to be an ambassador for them. I'm not on the payroll. Nobody's paying me to be here. Nobody's paying me to say these things. That's probably the best non-fake advertisement I can give for folks because I'm not getting paid to do any of this. But I love this university as much today as I did the day I worked here and sold it every day. That's probably the best part for me.

### Brae Foust:

Well, you got me choked up, Jimmy. Geez.

### Tearanee' Lockhart:

It's really great to hear your words and just how much you love WT because people like you have made WT possible for students like us who are getting to do it right now, experiencing the things that you were talking about. Because WT really is a spirit in being here. It's always going to be something that unites Buffs from today and Buffs from the '90s.

### Brae Foust:

It absolutely helps out with things like your contributions. Who knew that we would have something like this podcast suite without people like you that would just ... We can't thank you enough for-

Jimmy Lackey: Whoa. This transcript was exported on Feb 22, 2023 - view latest version here.

# Brae Foust:

... all your help and support that you've done.

Jimmy Lackey:

Well, I'm a pimple on a bull's butt in the picture of this thing, but I'm glad to be a pimple. That's a redneck way of saying things around here. But dad gum, what this place has meant to me, I can't put into words. It's been good to me. It's been good to my family, and that's probably the best way to leave it.

Brae Foust:

CEO of Kids Inc., father of three, alum here at West Texas A&M University, Jimmy, we can't thank you enough for your time. We absolutely had a blast talking to you.

Jimmy Lackey:

Well, other than that last part, y'all getting to me, I think I enjoyed the rest of it, too.

Tearanee' Lockhart:

That was a great podcast. So thank you again so much.

Jimmy Lackey:

My pleasure.

Brae Foust: [inaudible 00:28:51].

Jimmy Lackey:

My pleasure.

Brae Foust:

We thank you all. Thank you so much for listening. We will see you next time on the next episode of I Am WT.