

West Texas A&M University

Reflections from WT Podcast Series Episode 3

- Randy Ray: Welcome back to another episode of Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. My name is Randy Ray, I am the director of broadcast engineering on the campus of West Texas A&M. And I am once again, honored to welcome back the 11th president of West Texas A&M, Dr. Walter Wendler.
- Dr. Wendler: Thanks, Randy. It's good to be here, as always.
- Randy Ray: Well, we are winding down.
- Dr. Wendler: We are.
- Randy Ray: The semester is coming to a close. What are some highlights, you think, of this last semester?
- Dr. Wendler: Well, one of them to be certain, and I wouldn't always talk about this first, but the ending of our long-standing tradition at Kimbrough, is a big deal.
- Randy Ray: It's a big deal.
- Dr. Wendler: I think it's really important that as we move the football program onto the campus, I think people will be able to enjoy it a little bit more easily, and I think it's going to be a very important magnet on Saturdays.
- I can imagine the various colleges opening up one or two times during the fall to have open houses, and inviting alumni and so on. I know here in fine arts and humanities, with the marching band housed here. That's been an important part of the tradition of Kimbrough.
- I'm looking forward to next year. I don't know what it's going to be like, but I know this, it is going to be different.
- Randy Ray: It will be different. That was the thing I thought about at our last game out at Kimbrough. It was bittersweet to me. It was a sad time, and yet it's a happy time as well.
- Dr. Wendler: I think so too. And I've even had, for over a year, we looked at and studied and made sure that we understood the cost and benefits of moving from the off-campus stadium to on-campus. Because there was a lot of discussion and consternation over that.

And I believe when people see it, this new stadium, and experience a game or two there, they're gonna say, "We should've done this 10 years ago." Because it's gonna be such a different kind of experience.

My thankfulness in all of this was we have an excellent university here, with programs that are responsive to many forces, most important to me of those forces is the top 26 counties of Texas, and the people of the Texas panhandle, we never have to apologize for that. We've got an excellent university here, and I want people when they come for something like a football game, to be able to get a sense of what the rest of the campus is about. I'm very excited about that.

I met a fellow, I won't say who it is, but years ago, when I first got here almost three years ago now. And he told me, the challenge with the football program in the stadium out there at Kimbrough, he said, three, four thousand people drive down to Canyon from Amarillo to watch a football game. Then they get in their cars and they drive back to Amarillo.

Now there's a reason to come on campus. As a matter of fact, you can't watch a football game without coming on campus. And I just think that's gonna be a special experience. And it really is in the middle of the campus.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I totally agree. And I think we get a sense of that when we have the homecoming parade come through campus, just that feeling of the entire day is so exciting. And we're gonna be able to do that every game day.

Dr. Wendler: I agree.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I'm excited about that.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I had a person sit with me at the last game. And he told me he played football here, but he finished his career in '58, which is before they even moved to Kimbrough, so he remembers the on-campus. And he said, "I liked it. Even in that old stadium we had, that was not very nicely done, it was old and falling apart." Little bit like the edges of Kimbrough are now.

Randy Ray: Exactly.

Dr. Wendler: They need some attention. But I'm absolutely convinced that the Canyon Independent School District is gonna do a good job, because the bond issue, the attention to the increasing needs of the people of the city of Canyon, and in fact, Amarillo, because there's a lot of the people that attend Canyon schools that actually live in the city limits of Amarillo.

I just think it's all gonna be nicely worked out so that everybody wins.

Randy Ray: I agree. I want to shift gears a little bit here. I'm gonna throw a question at you. You might not be ready for it. You ready?

Dr. Wendler: I'm ready for anything. I dare you, try and catch me.

Randy Ray: Have you always wanted to be an administrator?

Dr. Wendler: No, not really. It happened along the way. I achieved a dream that started about 1985-6 while I was on the faculty at Texas A&M. I thought it might be nice to be the dean of the college of architecture there. I knew the dean and I worked closely with the various people in the college, and I thought that might be a nice thing to do.

And I never really focused on it. I focused on teaching, and I wanted to be a good teacher. And I don't mean to brag, but I was a good teacher, I've won a lot of awards and I wrote a lot about teaching and studio environments, tutorial teaching, the difference between that and didactic lecture teaching.

And then in '92 I became the dean and I thought, "Gosh, this is a dream come true for me." And in some ways, a life dream. I was a kid, that was 1992. It's now 2018. And I would've never at that time thought I would be a campus executive.

But in a lot of ways, it's a little bit like being an architect, which is my discipline in this sense. What architects do is try to project into the future and meet a set of needs that exist in a client, or a client's organization, and put all that together in a way that works to serve the client's aspirations.

University president does about the same thing. Except we're dealing with human capital rather than bricks and mortar. But I'm challenged by it every day. I thank God every day that I have the opportunity to do this, and the question that is really even more amazing to me is, did I always want to be an administrator in West Texas?

I'd been to West Texas a couple of times back in the late 90s when I was working in the system offices, because I was doing long-range planning. I'd come up and see [inaudible 00:06:58], I worked on a fairly regular basis with Barry Thompson. But I'd come up and see Russell Wong and I didn't think much of West Texas. I'd come in, do my little thing, and then go back to College Station.

And now, this is the best job I've ever had and the best place I've ever lived. And I would have never predicted it, ever.

Randy Ray: Well, the panhandle gets in your blood, I think.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. Didn't take long for me.

Randy Ray: You spoke about working for the A&M system. On September 1, 1990, West Texas State University, which is the college that I attended, became West Texas A&M University.

What do you think that has done for WT?

Dr. Wendler:

I think it's been very positive. And as I understand history, there was a move to try to get it associated with Texas Tech, but Texas Tech- I was told this- was not that interested back in '87 or '88, something like that, in the late 80s, I'll say.

And Boone Pickens was the board chair, I think at the time. Maybe not at the time, at the actual affiliation that was created. But Pickens I think thought it was a good idea, and many of the other people on the board thought it was a good idea.

As you know, I've traveled around and visited schools all over the top 26 counties of Texas. The superintendent at Sunray had a West Texas State University degree on the wall, and a West Texas A&M University, and I told him, "Man, that's really cool."

He said, "My wife graduated at the time of the change, and her degree says, West Texas State University and West Texas A&M University."

So they have three different kinds of degrees, all from within the period of time with the change.

I think it's a good change. I think that we provide opportunities to Texas A&M that they otherwise wouldn't have because they're located on this ground up here that is nearly holy to me because of the history of it and what it's done in the natural resource environment, petroleum industry, cattle industry.

As I tell people, you go to Houston, you might as well be in Los Angeles. It's an international city in many ways. But if you want to see what West Texas is about, and in fact what Texas is about, you need to go to Amarillo. That's where you go. Not Houston or Dallas. Those are world cities. This is a Texas city and it's still a Texas city.

I basically pray every day that it remains a Texas city. It's got all the best of what Texas is in it. And some of the shortcomings too. But it is Texas.

Randy Ray:

And they're saying it's the real Texas, Amarillo is the real Texas. And I agree with that.

Well, that's interesting. So we've talked about West Texas A&M, we've talked about West Texas State. Before that it was West Texas Normal College. And we had a very famous instructor here at that time. And after our break we're going to talk to someone that's gonna tell us a little bit more about that famous instructor. We'll be back right after this.

Speaker 3:

West Texas A&M University is a student body that learns by doing and is always seeking opportunity. Talented and accomplished faculty that teach both in and

out of the classroom. Programs that provide timeless information and meet the challenges of today's world. Facilities rich in technology as well as WT history. It's our alumni and donors that make the big difference and set us apart from other universities.

With your support, WT will continue to award scholarships to deserving students and strengthen our programs. Which means a better campus, more in-depth education, and a lasting cultural and economic impact on our region.

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

Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. We are continuing our conversation with Dr. Walter Wendler, and we have a special guest with us today, we are joined by Dr. Amy Von Lintel, who is an author, professor and has an interesting story to tell about some of her research.

So Amy, welcome.

Dr. Von Lintel: Yeah, thank you so much for having me. And you pronounced my name right, so kudos to you.

At the end of the last segment, you mentioned this famous instructor who worked here. And what we're talking about is O'Keefe, Georgia O'Keefe.

What's nice about- I think also in the last segment, you said something about the panhandle getting into your blood, and that has been so true for me.

I'm not from here. But when I moved here, I was studying things far afield from O'Keefe and the Panhandle, and ever since I started here in 2010, the projects have just presented themselves.

So I'm now fully a scholar of modern and contemporary art of the Texas Panhandle. And I tend to find the artists that made their way here for a short time, or a longer time, and work on them. And O'Keefe is one of them.

She worked here from 1916-1918. So not super long, but she did a lot of work when she was here.

I've published one book on her watercolors, because that's the medium she was working within when she worked at WT. She was also the head of the art department, but it was a department of one.

However, she was very proud to be a faculty member at that time. She was a single woman, she wasn't being supported by her family, and she moved here for the job, and did well here.

The book that I'm working on right now that I'm really excited about is about her writings. So she wrote prolifically but privately, and her letters from Canyon, there's several hundred of them. So I'm editing a volume on those letters, that overlaps with World War I. And we really get a sense of the home front in middle America during the war, from those letters, as well as many other things.

We learn about O'Keefe's life, but also about life on the campus, and what it was like for a young professor here, and how car culture started to pick up at that time. There's all kinds of stuff you can learn about that.

Randy Ray: Let me ask you this. When she lived in Canyon, she lived over on 5th Avenue in a home that was owned by Dr. Shirley.

She was not really accepted by the community, right?

Dr. Von Lintel: I think that's more of a myth. I think there were certain people who she was a bit scandalous for, but others like Dr. Shirley had her back. And the president of the university at the time had her back, Robert Bartow Cousins.

In her letters, we discover how many people were supporting her progressive ideas about teaching, and she wasn't teaching painting. She was teaching drawing and fashion design, which is interesting, because she was dressed in-

Randy Ray: All black most of the time, yeah.

Dr. Von Lintel: Progressive way at a time, women were still wearing corsets and she was wearing flat shoes and dresses, but still bringing in the modern woman to Canyon in the 1910s.

So yes, I think she ran cross-wise with a few people, but I don't think she was rejected at all, she was actually beloved by her students.

Randy Ray: Is it true that when she was living in Canyon, she mostly painted in watercolors?

Dr. Von Lintel: Yes. That is very true. She did a few oils. Panhandle Plains has one of her oils, and if you go over there and look at it. It's actually been converted into a three-dimensional, touchable image. I don't know if you'd call it an image. Object? For the visually impaired. So you can go over and feel it. But it is one of her lumpiest paintings, because she hadn't gotten the oil down yet. So it is something you can actually feel.

But for the most part, she did over 100 watercolors.

Randy Ray: Yeah, my favorite one that she did is in the Amarillo Museum of Art.

Dr. Von Lintel: Which one. The train?

Randy Ray: The train coming into town, yeah. I love that one.

Dr. Von Lintel: Yes. We still see the train coming into town. But here, there were a lot less things to block her vision, and she watched that train come in. And she would get on the train to go to Amarillo, or she'd get on the train to go back to New York. And the train was just a part of her life, and that is a very beautiful watercolor.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I think so too.

Dr. Von Lintel: One of the things about AMOA, Amarillo Museum of Art, that I'll plug, it's not always out, but they will always pull it out for anyone who wants to go see that work of art.

Randy Ray: Yeah. So we talked about Georgia O'Keefe, I'm gonna throw you a curve ball now.

Dr. Von Lintel: Oh good.

Randy Ray: You ready?

Dr. Von Lintel: Maybe.

Randy Ray: So I understand that you have written a little bit about Harry Potter.

Dr. Von Lintel: Yeah. Oh gosh, you looked that up. Totally, I'll talk about Harry Potter.

Randy Ray: So tell me about that.

Dr. Von Lintel: Okay.

Randy Ray: Are you a Harry Potter fan?

Dr. Von Lintel: I am a Harry Potter fan, but compared to the Harry Potter fans that I have gone to conferences with, I am very minimally a Harry Potter fan.

I've read the books, I've seen the movies. I find Harry Potter, and this is one thing I got really interested in after attending the Southwest Popular Culture Conference in Albuquerque, there's a Harry Potter section there, so all the fans congregate.

They don't dress up, yet. But yeah, it's a very interesting experience. But the leaders of that conference, their argument is that Harry Potter can be used pedagogically in really innovative ways.

So we can teach about identity politics. We can teach about- the chapter that I wrote with a woman that I met at that conference is about the power of vision and images. So you know how in Harry Potter, the images move?

So it was thinking about how that can be something that educates us about the power of images on screens. Our screens on our phone, or screens on computers.

One of the things I studied in graduate school is visual studies. Not just art objects, but any kinds of visual things, visual communications. So it gave me a way to write theory through Harry Potter that students at the undergraduate level can approach.

Randy Ray: Very interesting. You are the author of two books already? Is that right?

Dr. Von Lintel: I am co-author of a book on Robert Smithson in Texas. I am the author of the Georgia O'Keefe Watercolors book.

Randy Ray: And you're currently working on another one, is that right?

Dr. Von Lintel: I'm working on two more. One is the writings book on O'Keefe's writings in Texas that has to do with World War I. And the other one is another co-authored volume with Dr. Bonnie Roos of the English department. Like that Panhandle gets in your blood thing, back in Panhandle artists here.

So we've discovered that abstract expressionist artists from mid-century New York women were having trouble getting sales and gallery representation and work. And they hooked up with a dealer in this area who had a huge network of students. And they started coming here and teaching, and selling their art here.

So it's Elaine Dekuny and Louise Nevelson and Jean Renault. The third is lesser known, but the other two are pretty well-known among art circles.

So we're tracking their western experiences and their western markets. I'm just headed out on a road trip coming up, and we're going to go see some of the works in private collections that I have never seen the art published. And that's one of the things we're tracking.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I think people don't realize that art is really a big part of our culture here.

Dr. Von Lintel: A big part of our culture.

Randy Ray: When you look at modern artists like Jack Sorenson or Kenneth Wyatt, I think they're a big part of the Texas Panhandle. And I think when you look at the history of the Panhandle, it's bigger than what most people realize.

Dr. Von Lintel: What I think is interesting, you have western art that is predominant here. But then you also have aspects of modern and contemporary art that have touched the Panhandle that people haven't recognized it.

So in my field there's a number of famous artists who traveled through here and who were touched by this area, and built their whole career on an image that they saw here. So Ed Ruchet, a pop artist out of California, but he would travel on Route 66. And he saw one of our standard oil stations, that became the basis of his entire series on the standard oil stations and gas stations across the west.

So what my argument is, I'm always interested in how this area gets in your blood or imprints itself on these people, who might have spent a few sessions here, or a year here. You don't have to live here your whole life to really be affected by this area. So that's one of the things I'm really interested in.

So our argument basically, is that you gotta open up modern and contemporary art beyond the coasts. You have to look at middle America, you have to look at the transcontinental US to really get the big picture.

Randy Ray: You got to look at the Panhandle.

Dr. Von Lintel: You gotta look at that Panhandle, yeah. Put it on your radar.

Randy Ray: Yeah. So Dr. Wendler, we are winding up the semester. Do you have Christmas plans?

Dr. Wendler: Well, we don't have any firm plans right now, which is typically the case around Christmas. But it will be spent quietly. It will be spent reflectively. Mary and I and our families reflect on our faith in that season very deeply. I imagine at least one of the families will come, maybe both. So we'll be here on campus, and it's very quiet.

Randy Ray: Don't you agree with me that Christmas time is a great time to visit the campus?

Dr. Wendler: Yes I do. I just sit quiet. And that's one of the things that's nice about it. It is largely unpopulated. It's just quiet. And as an architect, for me I get a chance to see the campus, and its structure and form and so on, from the buildings and the trees and the landscape and everything.

I find it to be a very nice time. And much different than the summer or spring. It's just a much different place. It's one of the beauties of the Panhandle. There are four seasons here. And our campus shines in every one of them.

Randy Ray: We want all of our listeners to know that the campus is always open to visitors. So anytime anyone wants to come see us, we would welcome them.

Dr. Wendler: That's absolutely correct. And if they call early enough, and maybe their travel plans bring them through town, this is West Texas A&M University. If their travel plans bring them through town on December 29, my guess is we can find somebody to meet them and talk with them even on December 29.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I agree. Well, I want to thank you both for being with me today. Dr. Von Lintel, thank you for that very interesting reflection on Georgia O'Keefe and what you're doing for all of our students on campus. Thank you for what you do.

Dr. Von Lintel: Thanks for having me.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, I am excited about next time. Our next podcast, we're gonna ask a student to come in here, and talk to us. We'll get some reflections of what they think the semester is like.

Dr. Wendler: That's great. Sounds good to me, Randy.

Randy Ray: Well again, thank you all for joining us. Thank you for joining Reflections from WT, the Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. Please join us again next time, we'll see you then.