

Reflections from WT with Ronnie Hall and Isaiah Tanner

- Randy Ray: Well, hello everyone. You're listening to Reflections from WT. This is episode number 42. My name is Randy Ray and I'm joined today with my boss, the President of West Texas A&M. I really like our topic today. I love the fall and I just love the feel of the campus this time of year, and I especially love homecoming, don't you?
- President Wendler: Yeah, it's nice. As a matter of fact, we were just talking outside before we got into the studio, that this is the first year some of our families won't be here. Most years, it's been both families, but their kids now... My grandkids are at an age where they have homecoming activities this very weekend in one of the families and the other family's just got a bunch of sports stuff.
- Randy Ray: It's a busy time of year.
- President Wendler: It is a busy time of year.
- Randy Ray: Well, I'm glad you mentioned family, because I want to welcome a new member of our podcasting family. Want to welcome Dane Glenn, our new engineer, and say good luck to Johnny Story, our past engineer who's now working over in the Provost office.
- President Wendler: Yeah, we're going to miss Johnny, but I went to see him yesterday. He's just two doors down the hall from me. He's moving on up, I guess.
- Randy Ray: He's moving on up, but I'm still going to pull him down with us every once in a while.
- President Wendler: Yeah, you need to. Keep him honest.
- Randy Ray: So, let's talk about homecoming. Today our guest is Ronnie Hall. Ronnie, you are the Alumni Association Director. I'm glad you're here.
- Ronnie Hall: All right, thank you.
- Randy Ray: You have a long history with WT, don't you?
- Ronnie Hall: I do have a long history with WT, yes.
- Randy Ray: Tell me about that.
- Ronnie Hall: All right. Well, I started as a freshman in 1990, here at WT, and I started getting involved with the campus, with the residence halls, and I fell in love with WT. So, graduated in '95. I was not ready to move on, so I became a residence hall

director and stayed in that position all the way until 2020. Then I moved over to the Alumni Association.

Randy Ray: How's that going for you?

Ronnie Hall: Love it. I love working with alumni. It's reconnected me with some alumni from my earlier years at WT and I've got to meet a lot of new alumni, so it's been great.

President Wendler: I have to tell a little story, and I'm sure Ronnie knows I'm going to tell it, but when he first got the job, I was a little hesitant, because he'd been living in a dormitory. When he first got the job, I said to him... We call them residence halls now, it's a better way to refer to them. But he was getting ready to move out and I said, "Well, what's the biggest challenge for your new role?" He said, "I have to move out of the residence hall, so I've got to go buy furniture," which I thought was so funny and I still think it's funny, but anyway, he knows the campus.

Randy Ray: Well, who better to run the Alumni Association than someone that just doesn't want to leave?

President Wendler: That's exactly right. Many of the people that are now growing up in the Alumni Association have known Ronnie as somebody that's involved with residential life on campus, and it's not to say that people who don't live on campus don't have the same kind of strength of affinity and all for WT, but fact of the matter is, it's special when they live on campus, because they live with people and you get to know them. And it's different.

Randy Ray: I'm going to ask you both, why is an alumni association important? Why is that important to university?

Ronnie Hall: One, we want to keep people connected to the university. We want to keep them in love with the university. We want to showcase all of the great things that we're doing here at WT. It is a very special, unique university and we try to reach out and show that to our alumni, and so we just want to keep them connected and in love with WT.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr Wendler, why do you think it's important?

President Wendler: Ronnie said it, and I think that's it. I will say this though, one of the things that I think is important is that even after a student graduates from WT, they could be 10, 20, 30 years out, if WT continues to improve the quality of our offerings, academic offerings, the extracurricular life, just the things that make the university a university, if we continue to improve those things, the value of a degree that was granted 20 years ago escalates. It's a little bit like a stock certificate. And the alumni are the people that keep the value of the stock up. If they're out saying, "I went to WT, had a very good experience there, it was cost

effective. I met a lot of hardworking people that were just really good to be around," that helps the value of our degree, and as the value of the degree goes up, well, so goes the university, it continues. It's not a given.

Randy Ray: Ronnie, do you know who the oldest alumni that you have contacted and what year they graduated? That's probably a tough question.

Ronnie Hall: That is a tough question. I've met some that were in their hundreds.

Randy Ray: Really?

Ronnie Hall: Yeah, two years ago we had a lady that, it was her 102nd birthday, and so we advertised. We wanted to get her a lot of cards. A hundred two I think, was one of the top ones.

Randy Ray: Yeah, so she was back when West Texas Normal College.

Ronnie Hall: Yeah, you're right.

Randy Ray: Was she a teacher?

Ronnie Hall: No. Well, yeah. She was a teacher, but not at WT, but yes, she taught in the public schools.

Randy Ray: Well that sounded like a fun thing you get to do. Another fun thing that you get to do, Ronnie, is plan Homecoming.

Ronnie Hall: That's right.

Randy Ray: Let's talk about homecoming.

Ronnie Hall: All right. Well, Homecoming truly is a special time of year for the WT students, for alumni, faculty, staff, and the community of Canyon. We've got a full slate of events planned for homecoming. Actually, there's 23 events listed on the calendar.

Randy Ray: So people are going to be busy that weekend.

Ronnie Hall: Yeah, people are busy. That weekend, 16 events alone on Friday and Saturday. So, there's lot of opportunity to get involved, to have fun things to do around campus.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, do you have to be involved in all of those?

President Wendler: I thought you might ask me that. No, and if anybody expects to see me at all 16 events, they're going to have to look for pieces and parts. There's no way I can cover all those. But one of the things I like, Mary and I both, appreciate the

community, people understand you can't do everything. And it's not an indication that you're not interested, it's just an indication of the limits of human capacity. You can only do so much, and I don't want to run myself silly with all these things. You have to rest and get things...

You pick and choose and try to do different things in different years and so on, but we make as many as we can. If Mary can't go for one reason or another, sometimes I'll go. We just do the best we can. But the community here... I mean the campus community, and indeed, the extended community, very understanding that we have a personal life, as well as a corporate life, here at the university.

Randy Ray: Don't you both think that the atmosphere of Homecoming, and really every game, has changed dramatically since we moved the stadium on campus?

Ronnie Hall: Yes, definitely. It's been something that the students, when you had to get out and get in your car and go out to the stadium, it was something that, there was just a separation from the campus. And so now being on campus, being on 26th Street for the Buffalo Block party, it brings a game day atmosphere to the university.

Randy Ray: Do you hang out at tailgate, Dr. Wendler?

Randy Ray: You have your own tailgate?

President Wendler: We have our own, the President's tailgate. We get hundred and more people that come into that. It's in the Isley Terrace, in the alumni, behind the Alumni Banquet Hall.

Randy Ray: And I'm still waiting on my invitation.

President Wendler: You have it right now, on air.

Randy Ray: Open invitation every week?

President Wendler: Yeah.

Ronnie Hall: There you go.

President Wendler: Every week. You can come anytime you want, Randy. Ronnie, you can come anytime.

Ronnie Hall: Thank you.

President Wendler: You come though?

Ronnie Hall: I do. Every now and then I get over there. We have our own alumni tailgate going on, and so yeah, we...

Randy Ray: It's crazy how much is going on.

Ronnie Hall: We try to sneak away.

Randy Ray: How much free food is out there for everyone. We were out there last Saturday and it was... Man, I ate too much.

President Wendler: I did too. I did too. I hurt myself. I started that. I went to the band parents, had a lunch, and this is the 105th anniversary of the WT Band.

Randy Ray: No, really? I didn't realize that.

President Wendler: And I pointed out to them that it was the 104th anniversary of the Aggie Marching band. So we're a year ahead of them, which is not easy to do to get ahead of those Aggies. But we did and had a nice lunch. Probably 300 people there, band members and their families and so on. It was very nice.

Randy Ray: It's always, Yeah, it's was fun. I had been to one. We had a good time there.

We're going to take a break. When we come back, I want to talk about some of those activities that's going to happen during homecoming, and one that's really special to me. We'll be back in 30 seconds.

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Randy Ray: We are back to reflections from WT, the podcast where we talk about everything WT. And this episode, we were talking about one of my favorite things that WT does, and that's homecoming. So Ronnie, tell me about some of the things that's going to go on. And then I want to talk to our other guests about one of the special things that's going on.

Ronnie Hall: We have a lot of student events happening. So we talked about next weekend, we have 16 different events going on, but starting this Friday, we have Paint the Town Maroon, where the student body goes out to different businesses and they'll paint up the storefronts. They'll do it around the university, make it really look maroon on around town.

And then next week, starting on Monday, our theme this year is WT through the decades. So every day, Monday through Thursday, we have tunes at Noon, Battle of the Decades karaoke in the JBK at the video wall. So if y'all want to go over there and do some karaoke, you can do that. And then throughout the

week, Student Government, the Residence Hall Association, the OSEL Office Student Engagement Office, they're putting on events for students like the weenie roast. They're doing different things like homecoming dodge ball tournament, and pancakes and karaoke. So for alumni, the first event that we have going on is the Phoenix, where we honor our distinguished alumni. That's Thursday.

Randy Ray: Do we know who that is yet?

Ronnie Hall: We do.

Randy Ray: But we're not telling it.

Ronnie Hall: I can tell you if you want to know.

Randy Ray: No, I don't want to spoil the surprise.

Ronnie Hall: All right. That night also, after the Phoenix, one of the fun events that's going on is pancakes and karaoke. And so that's for the student body. But alumni-

Randy Ray: That's a weird combination to me, pancakes and karaoke.

Ronnie Hall: It is.

Randy Ray: You're singing while you're eating pancakes.

Ronnie Hall: Right. This event will draw about six to 700 people to the event. And if you want to karaoke in front of 700 people, this is a good opportunity.

Randy Ray: While eating a pancake.

Ronnie Hall: While eating pancakes. Some are great, some are not so great. For the karaoke.

And then going into the weekend, we have the Homecoming Scholarship Golf Classic, the Rec Sports and Aramark puts that on. That's really, really special, because all people are playing golf. They're also raising money for scholarships for WT students. So that happens Friday. Celebration of color for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion has that going on. And we have several sporting events going on throughout the weekend. We have volleyball, we have men's and women's soccer, we also have football, and then we also have the WT Symphony Orchestra is doing an event.

Randy Ray: I didn't realize they were playing too.

Ronnie Hall: Yeah, yeah. They're doing an event. Don't bring me down concert, featuring flashback.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Some local rock musicians that are playing with the symphony, right?

Ronnie Hall: Yes. Yeah. Yeah, that is right.

Randy Ray: That would be interesting. Yeah.

Ronnie Hall: Yeah.

Randy Ray: So Dr. Wendler, let me ask you, and I think this is something you're pretty passionate about. How important is it for students to do things outside of the classroom?

President Wendler: Oh, I think it's very important. The classroom, if you're doing what you should be doing, and you're focused on the discussion, on the lecture, on the studio work, whatever it is you're doing, your focus is there. But it's outside of the classroom that you build those relationships with other people.

Randy Ray: I agree with you.

President Wendler: Yeah. That lasts sometimes a lifetime.

Randy Ray: I agree with you.

I've told this story before, but when I got married, three of the four groomsmen in my wedding, I had met at college outside of the classroom, and the other guy was my brother-in-law, and I had to have him there. But I mean, yeah, you're right. You make a lifelong friendships. And I think that's a big, huge part of college.

President Wendler: It is. And I think sometimes, especially with the advent of distance learning and digital instruction, digitally supported instruction, you can stay home and do those things, which is good for a lot of people who are working folks and so on and so forth. But for people who can and do it without borrowing too much money and all of those kinds of things, a college experience can be a really... It can be nice. It can be—it's not just a big party. I mean, it can be a growing experience and so on.

Randy Ray: I'm a different person. I became a different person in college. Do you know what I'm talking about?

President Wendler: Yeah. Happened to me too. Yeah. I started at community college, lived at home, I had five siblings. We do our homework around the dining room table, just like I did when I was high school. But I got on a plane one time at then Idlewild Airport. Now Kennedy. I got off the plane in Houston and took a bus up to College Station, and my life changed forever. I mean, I'd never been away from home. I'd never been west of New Jersey. I thought New Jersey was a wild west. I didn't know. And I'll tell you what, it was a different world.

Randy Ray: But it made you a better person.

President Wendler: Oh yeah. And it made an indelible mark on my life that I live with till this day. I mean, it's been something that's nearly as important to me as my faith and my family.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree with you. College and WT. One of the reasons I love working at WT is because it was a life changing place for me. And one of the things that helped do that for me was the campus radio station. KWTS is celebrating its 50th anniversary at Homecoming. And I am really excited about that. And I've asked to join us today, Isaiah Tanner. Isaiah is our program director for KWTS, our campus radio station. Welcome, Isaiah.

Isaiah Tanner: Thanks for having me. I'm surprised I got asked.

Randy Ray: We were too.

So Isaiah, tell us about the birthday party.

Isaiah Tanner: So we're in the middle of doing the format change, and so that's going to be going on.

Randy Ray: So we're changing formats. People, they don't know. For years, we've been College rock, which is indie rock, which is new music coming out. We're switching formats. And it's going to be launched on October 1st to...

Isaiah Tanner: Nineties.

Randy Ray: All nineties music. Yeah. So that's a big switch.

Isaiah Tanner: Yeah.

Randy Ray: Big switch for us. And I know you've put a lot of work into that, and so I appreciate that.

Isaiah Tanner: Thank you.

Randy Ray: So big reformat. Tell me about the party.

Isaiah Tanner: So we're going to invite all the past alumni that have been on the radio station. They're going to come by, we're going to have them on air doing interviews. Danny Morton, the voice of the station, she's going to be conducting those interviews if that hasn't changed.

Randy Ray: No, not till this day.

Isaiah Tanner: Okay. Yeah, we're going to invite them. We're going to have pictures out for them, and it's just going to be a fun time, I think.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Yeah. We have a lot of stuff to give away. We have... Going to be welcoming people from all over the country coming back. KWTS really has had a big impact on literally hundreds of people that have been on the air.

I'm going to ask you all, well, Ronnie, I don't know if you have an opinion on this, but is college radio, is a campus radio station, important to the culture of the campus? Dr. Wendler, what do you think?

President Wendler: Yeah, I think it is, because it can become a central voice to the campus that students and others listen to. And every campus I've been on has had a radio station. And those radio stations have had impact. I think it's a chance for... First of all, it gives the students chance to strut their stuff on whatever side of the mic they're on, and so on. They get a chance to actually put into practice things that they're learning. But it also is a valuable communication opportunity.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree with you. What do you think, Isaiah?

Isaiah Tanner: I think the same thing. I mean, I also think that it really connects students because, not to self-promote or nothing, but we air WT football games. And there's not really any place around here that airs those freely to students. And so I think that that helps bring them together, is "hey, they're caring something that we care about."

Randy Ray: Isaiah, I'm going to throw you a tough question right now.

Isaiah Tanner: Oh dear.

Randy Ray: Radio is at a crossroads right now.

Isaiah Tanner: Yeah.

Randy Ray: What do you think the future of radio is going to be like?

Isaiah Tanner: I think it'd have to be a lot more of just the live sports events. I think those are probably going to be okay for sure. But I think that doing talk radio, stuff like that, I think that's going to shift more over to being podcasts.

Randy Ray: Yeah, I agree with you. Radio's still trying to find its new legs, and I think more live stuff, definitely we need to think about more local stuff. I agree with you. I think radio still a viable medium. It just has to shift with changes in the media.

All right. Well it's time for the curve ball. Our traditional curve ball that comes with every episode. And this is a weird one, and I was thinking about this one, because Isaiah here is known around the facility, around the radio station, as

Cornbread. So that's his nickname. I want to ask him where he got his nickname. And I want to ask the other two of you, do you have a nickname? And if not, what would you like it to be?

Isaiah, you go first. Tell us where you got your nickname from.

Isaiah Tanner: So it all started because I smarted off.

Randy Ray: I get into that trouble a lot.

Isaiah Tanner: Yeah. We were working at Family Support Services for their Mardi Gras event. I was cleaning up tables and chairs and stuff, and I guess I was moving a little fast. And Johnny Story mentioned, "Hey Randy, look at this guy. Wonder what they feed those Perryton boys." And I said, "Cornbread and beans, sir." And then that's how that came about.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Dr. Wendler, have you ever had a nickname?

President Wendler: Yeah, I have.

Randy Ray: And will you admit it?

President Wendler: Yeah.

Well, I've got a couple actually. But the one that in high school was Bear. I don't know why.

Randy Ray: I think I remember you telling me that.

President Wendler: I was always a little bigger than most people, and they just called me Bear. I don't know why. Never thought much about it.

Randy Ray: Ronnie, do you have a nickname?

Ronnie Hall: I do have a nickname. So I was a residence hall director over at Jones Hall for 12 years. And so people started calling me Ronnie Jones Hall. And to this day, still, people still call me Ronnie Jones Hall. Which, funny thing about that, my mom's maiden name is Jones. So Ronnie Jones Hall kind of fits.

President Wendler: Isn't that cool?

Randy Ray: Well, I would tell you guys-

President Wendler: What about you, Randy?

Randy Ray: Well, I would tell you my nickname, but I think we'd be breaking some kind of FCC law, so I better not do that over the air.

President Wendler: I kind of figured that.

Actually before you mentioned the oldest alumni, and I was going to say "maybe Ronnie will say, 'Well, you are, Randy.'"

Randy Ray: Well, thank you for joining us today for this episode number, it was number 42 of Reflections from WT and it's always nice to have listeners join us. And we are asking you to join us again next time. We'll see you then.