

Reflections from WT-Dr. Paul Morley

- Randy Ray: Welcome to the October 2019, episode of Reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle. My name is Randy Ray, I'm the director of broadcast engineering and I am joined today by the 11th President of West Texas A & M, Dr. Walter Wendler.
- Dr. Wendler: Morning Randy.
- Randy Ray: Good morning. Today's going to be kind of crazy because I want to talk to an architect and I want to talk to a veterinarian. And I want to see how we're going to pull those two together. So Dr. Wendler I want to start with you. Your backgrounds in architecture, tell us a little bit about your educational background.
- Dr. Wendler: Okay. I started school at a community college in New York. Came from a family with six children and working parents, you know, working stiffs that my father would be say I'm a working stiff, that's what he would call himself. So we all went to community college, all six of us. And then I transferred from there. I studied construction technology, it was called and I transferred from there to Texas A & M into the pre- architecture program. Spent two years there, took a year off, worked for an architect and also for constructor in New York. And then went to graduate school, got married, went to graduate school at Berkeley for my professional degree, my Master of Architecture.
- And then after that went to LSU in Baton Rouge. Practiced and taught there and then back to College Station. Took a break after a few years to take a PhD at the University of Texas, then came back to work.
- Randy Ray: Is your PhD in architecture?
- Dr. Wendler: No, it's in education.
- Randy Ray: Oh it's in education. Had you always planned on teaching or did you want to go into architecture?
- Dr. Wendler: No, I always thought I want to be an architect. I come from a, mostly except for my dad, a family of tradespeople and a contractor that worked, did some fairly interesting work in New York for an architect named Philip Johnson. He's one of the great 20th century American architects. AT&T Building in New York and Pennzoil and Houston. I mean big time architect and he was the one that kind of got me interested in studying architecture so well.
- And I didn't think about...

Randy Ray: Yeah, I was walking across campus a couple of days ago and I had forgotten just how beautiful our campus is. It's like an Oasis to me in the middle of the Texas Panhandle. And it's not just the trees and the green grass, but it's also the buildings. I think we really have some cool buildings as an architect. Speak about some of your favorite buildings on campus.

Dr. Wendler: Well, we do have some, I think some very nice buildings. The, I think the Old Ed Building, if we get around to refurbishing that building, I think that's going to be a very important building. This is near the center of the campus and I think it's very nice.

Ag Sciences is a nice building and I may have told you this story before, but when I got here, and of course that was all done by previous administration, by Pat O'Brian and his group. And when I got here, I got here in time for the groundbreaking one month before the ground break. Well at the groundbreaking, I see these two guys and I recognize them, Steve Durham and Wes Good. And they were my students at A&M in 1984 and as a matter of fact, I told Chancellor Sharp, I said after I met him and we had all this kind of brouhaha about remembering old times and everything.

And then, and the Ag Science Building is a very nice building. It's going to win a prize. I don't know what kind, but it will eventually win a prize. And we call them awards, not prices, but same difference. I told Sharp that these two guys were my students. You see kind of nodded his head and said that's interesting. So he got up to make his comments and he said, you know, we're starting this construction today and if the building has screwed up, we know who to blame.

These architects are Wendler trained. So it was kind of funny, but it was a, it's always interesting as a, and I know Paul knows this too. It's interesting when you're a faculty member and you see students succeed and they do something that you think, gosh, that's pretty nice. And I looked at that work, you know, I've been watching it and now I walked through it and it's nice. They did a good job. I think a few things. I told them once when I saw not long ago that I'd probably ding them a few points on a couple of things. But by and large it's very good.

Randy Ray: When you and I took that trip to Nashville a couple of years ago when we were doing the partnership with Belmont, I met some of my old students that were actually working in the studios there. So that was kind of fun.

Dr. Wendler: It's always.. Here we are, all of us in professional disciplines that require registration and some kind of public work. I mean it's as much in some ways external as it is internal to the organization where you work in. It's always is gratifying to see these neophytes come alive and do the things that you talked about seeing them do. And I, it's just very satisfying. Very satisfying.

Randy Ray: Do you have a favorite building on campus?

Dr. Wendler: On campus, I'm going to tell you I probably after all that, probably like the Ag Sciences Building as much as any. I think it really is a nice facility and I'm of course thankful to Happy State Bank. They were very helpful in that process and I think these ones coming down the street to VERO and then TVMDL have a nice feel to them. They look like agriculture buildings. They look efficient in all that. They have that kind of feel. But they're also very modern in terms of technology and all that and I think they're great buildings and if we get, which is still a goal of mine to get the AgriLife Research Building between TVMDL and the watertower, there's one more building site on there that would fill up then Russell Long Boulevard on that side on the kind of on the north side.

I think we'll have a complex that would be hard to rival at any public institution, even any of the 50 land grants in the nation. It's just because everything is collected there that's related to the ag industry up here in the panhandle. So I would say Ag Sciences, Happy State Ag Sciences Building and the whole complex over there. Very nice.

Randy Ray: Don't you feel a college campus that's really dynamic pretty much always has construction going on? It seems like it to me.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah. It's evidence of things that are moving forward and I think it is. I think I have to be careful and not be consumed with it, especially because I'm an architect. I mean it's just, that's not why I'm here. I'm really here to provide educational opportunity for students. Help them meet their life aspirations, which is a little different than making buildings, but making buildings is part of it and it's the part that I happen to know a little bit about it and I enjoy...

It's important. By the way, I'm also very excited about the way the, all of the ag facilities, even the football stadium, the whole campus now, we have that walking path, you know that.

Randy Ray: That's really cool. Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: I don't know what it's called other than, it's not a sidewalk, it's a sidewalk on steroids, you know it's got lighting and seeing places where you can stop and plug your computer in. I mean there's, every one of those little pods has a computer power stations and it's nicely lit at night. They're getting all the sod in over there. It's like being in a park.

Randy Ray: I agree. And what I like, one thing I like is how excited you are about spreading the word about WT and things like the new Ag Building in our new stadium. So you've got a big tour coming up.

Dr. Wendler: Well, we've started already. We visited every high school in the top 26 counties of Texas and that was as much for me to understand the region and the geographic influences that push and pull as anything else. But it turned out to be very positive for me, but there was also this positive spin off of having people

out there recognize that WT is interested in them. And I've continued that tour we've started now down south. And for example, yesterday I was at, I have to think about it for a minute, but I was at, a number of different schools. I went to, started the day in, in Floyddata, went on to Lockney and then ended at Idalou High School yesterday. So I went to those three high schools, all different sizes...

Randy Ray: Pretty small.

Dr. Wendler: Pretty small. They're growing. And of course one of the things as they grow, they lose some of the small town. I consider it charm. There's a certain kind of grittiness in these small towns, the people are tough. Ag is a tough industry to be in. And whether you're raising animals or crop it's tough. It's a very unforgiving industry. And these towns, they are becoming a suburban in some ways because most of them, many of these were fairly close to Lubbock. So that becoming suburban communities and it changes the nature of the community. And I'm not sure always for the best. This is not like On Walden Pond or anything, but there is something about being in the ground out there that can be lost when you get urbanized and suburbanized so...

And I went to a Ropes. Well actually, probably New Home was the one that's close and it's more than double than the last year. This is a school that's more than doubled. They're very proud. They're going from 1A to 2A next year. Their population has grown so and the student population has doubled in five years. And they are concerned that they're going to lose some of that small town feel. And I share that. I think there's something very kind of valuable about serving these small communities. Of course WT 125- From the Panhandle to the World, that whole program, that view of the future for West Texas A & M University is biased or bent towards small communities. We want to serve all small communities first because it makes us distinctive. So that's what we're doing down there now. And I'm running ragged.

I've been to I think 14 schools.

Randy Ray: Well, I'm sure they appreciate it. I don't know if they've ever had a University President come to visit before.

Dr. Wendler: Well I don't think they have. Most of the ones that I've been to, some of them, at Wilson ISD, I say ISD is one building and it's everything. Okay. Pre K through 12 and they had, I think they had seven or eight seniors. And maybe twice that many juniors. And their lunch program consists of somebody running to a pizza place or a hamburger joint and getting the food and bringing it back to the campus. They have to go to Lubbock. I mean there's no place right there to do it, but they, they're small communities and they're very endearing to me and I find the students are thoughtful and respectful. They ask good questions. The teachers there and the superintendents, many of them WT, not as many as up here in the panhandle, but it is very affirming to me that what we're doing here is important to get out there and talk to people. I think, gosh, we're doing the right thing here.

Randy Ray: Those are the people we want at WT.

Dr. Wendler: Yes sir.

Randy Ray: We're going to take a break and when we come back, I'm going to talk, we're going to switch gears. We're going to switch gears from an architect and we're going to talk to a veterinarian and we're going to talk about some exciting new things that are going to happen right here on the WT Campus. We'll be back in 60 seconds.

Speaker 3: West Texas A & M University is proud to call the Texas Panhandle home, and providing the top 26 counties with opportunity and qualified graduates as an important WT mission. From their first experience on campus to graduation day, 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 information about West Texas A & M University visit our website at wtamu.edu.

Randy Ray: Welcome back to Reflections from WT, the heart and soul of the Texas Panhandle. Earlier, I was talking to an architect and now I'm going to talk to a veterinarian. Earlier, we were talking about all the construction that's going on on campus and one of those things is our new VERO Building. And I have the director of research for the VERO program with me, Dr. Paul Morley. Welcome.

Dr. Morley: Thank you very much.

Randy Ray: Thanks for being here.

Dr. Morley: Well, thank you.

Randy Ray: First of all, what does VERO stand for?

Dr. Morley: It stands for Veterinary, Education, Research and Outreach, and it's the three arms of the mission of our program that's a real partnership between WT and we are part of the faculty here, but we're also part of the faculty at the Texas A & M College of Veterinary Medicine.

Randy Ray: So did you come here specifically for that?

Dr. Morley: I did. I was in a faculty position, first faculty position was at Ohio State and then I spent 20 years at Colorado State and I thought I would retire there. And the folks from the College of Veterinary Medicine came and knocked on my door and started talking to me about this program and it really was an opportunity that I couldn't pass up. So very grateful to be here. It's a great opportunity.

Randy Ray: Well, I was talking to you this morning and you said that you've been in a Canyon since January, is it?

Dr. Morley: That's correct.

Randy Ray: And you were raised in Nevada?

Dr. Morley: That's correct.

Randy Ray: Is it similar at all?

Dr. Morley: It is actually. I was raised in a rural town in Northeastern Nevada called Elko. And much like a lot of places in Texas, there's a heavy emphasis on agriculture, and then there's also industry. And in there it's mining, but you know, and here a lot of petroleum and other types of industry, but very similar town of about 10,000 people.

Randy Ray: Terrain? Is the terrain similar?

Dr. Morley: That's different. That's high desert plateau with mountains that go up quite a ways. So yeah.

Randy Ray: We don't have mountains.

Dr. Morley: No. Well you had more rain than we did where I grew up. So how's that?

Randy Ray: That evens it out, I guess. So tell me about the two plus two program. What does that?

Dr. Morley: Well, that's a new initiative that was announced, formalized. We've been talking about it for 10 years, but it was formalized through announcements with Dr. Wendler and Dr. Green and President of Texas A & M, Dr. Young.

Dr. Green is the Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, and just two weeks ago, three weeks ago, made the public announcement about the fact that we're going to expand the training program for the College of Veterinary Medicine, where we'll actually have veterinary students that start their educational program here on the campus at WT. There'll be College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A & M students, but they all spend the first two years of that four year program here and then they'll return to College Station, to the mothership if you will, for a third year. And then they have opportunity to come back for as much as about half of their fourth year to come back out here.

Randy Ray: So is that the clinical rotation part?

Dr. Morley: The fourth year yes. Is a clinical experience based...

Randy Ray: So they're out working pretty much.

Dr. Morley: Yeah.

Randy Ray: It's like on the job training.

Dr. Morley: Yes. Under the supervision of veterinarians who are faculty at the College of Veterinary Medicine. It's an important distinction about the model that they're planning here compared to some other programs where they would pay veterinarians to effectively train students in their practice. We'll have what we are terming an embedded program where we will have faculty that are hired here. They're VERO faculty that are specialists in training as well as in veterinary medicine. And they will go with those students into the practices and out into the agriculture facilities in that for the training as opposed to depending on someone else.

Dr. Wendler: Well, let me ask you, I don't usually ask questions, but this program is so important to me and I'm curious how many vets do we have on campus now at West Texas A & M University that basically work for the College of Veterinary Medicine in College Station?

Dr. Morley: Dr. Wendler, we have a total of four veterinarians right now and then we're in the process of interviewing for a fifth position and we have because of funding generously provided by the legislature we're talking about another three or four additional veterinarians in addition into the faculty positions that would be a part of the Agriculture School, but we will partner again. So our faculty will be helping with the College of Agriculture teaching both in undergrad and graduate, and their faculty will be helping us provide the very best training.

Dr. Wendler: This, by the way, this is a remarkable university partnership. I've been around university. I started at LSU in 1975. I'm not a kid. And I've never seen quite the partnership that this is between an international research university at Texas A & M and a powerful regional research university that serves the needs of this region. And one of them primary needs is the large food animal industry and we produce a beef and pork and dairy. I mean there is a huge industry up here and this is something that Texas A & M University doesn't have. We're in the middle of all this. We're right smack dab in the middle of it. And that provides almost endless opportunities for us to work with producers, with growers, with people that are in the business. But can you say a word about that? I mean how that's how that fuels this program.

Dr. Morley: It is a huge strength. I mean this is truly one of the most prominent epicenters of agriculture, animal agriculture in particular, right here, within a hour and a half a drive from Canyon, staying within the borders of Texas. You know there's a two and a half million beef cattle that are being finished in addition to about 300,000 dairy cows. It's one of, it's part of one of the five most prominent pork producing areas as well. So that partnership is really critical. The people who

are, as part of those programs, they're very invested in what we're doing. You know the veterinary colleges really throughout the world, but let's talk about North America in particular. Many of them are, most of them are over a hundred years old, are about a hundred years old. Texas A & M is 103 years old. And when those colleges were started, they were placed where there were animal populations, large animal agriculture populations.

And as a hundred years has passed, most of those schools are not where the agricultural animals concentrated, or located. So it makes it difficult to train into those programs. So this isn't, this is a problem around the country and around the world. And I think Texas A & M's model for addressing this really is the best one that I've seen, and I'm very, I mean the fact that we're starting within the A & M system, so it's not trying to partner with somebody else or go out and build bricks and mortar in a field somewhere where there's nothing else located. We are already partnering with an established strong university. So being located as part of the program out here, it just so many strengths. It really is unique and I think it's going to be looked at by the world.

Randy Ray: It just makes sense. Makes common sense to me to put it here.

Dr. Wendler: People understand it.

Randy Ray: All right, well it's that time. Are you ready? It's time for the... Dr. Morley, We always do a curve ball. I always throw Dr. Wendler and our guest a curve ball. So here's the curve ball for today. If we were to make a movie about the new VERO program, what actor would you guys like to play you?

Dr. Wendler: Me?

Randy Ray: Yeah. What actors would you get to play Dr. Walter Wendler, Dr. Paul Morley.

Dr. Wendler: Oh my gosh. That is a real curve ball.

Randy Ray: I got ya.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, you did. Yeah, you did. I, well you go ahead first Paul, you're my guest. I'll be a gentlemen and let you go first.

Dr. Morley: There's very few people that can pull off my whole character, right?

Dr. Wendler: Yeah that's right.

Dr. Morley: Maybe Tom Hanks could do it.

Randy Ray: Tom Hanks.

Dr. Morley: He's intelligent his humor.

Randy Ray: You know he is playing Mr. Rogers so he could be Dr. Morley too. Yeah, there you go. Dr Wendler, we're waiting.

Dr. Wendler: Yeah, I know you are. I'll tell you the truth. I like Daniel Day-Lewis and a number of movies in particular, in Lincoln for some reason because I think he captured to me. How would I know? I don't know. I've read a number of books about Lincoln. I'm a little bit of a student of history, but I think he captured this sort of combination of grit and persistence and adherence to some ideas and principles that he owned.

Randy Ray: Yeah.

Dr. Wendler: I think Lewis captured that in, in Lincoln and I'd like to think I have a little bit of some of that and maybe he could do what didn't exist. He could kind of juice it up and manufacture it for him.

Randy Ray: He's a real method actor, so he would actually become Dr. Walter Wendler for a few months before he even shot the movie.

Dr. Wendler: That's a frightening thought right there. Anyway.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Somebody I was thinking about this. I think I'd like to get Denzel Washington to be me. I don't know how well that would work, but I think he's one of my favorite actors, so I don't know. I don't know if that.

Dr. Wendler: Sounds like a power team, you know, those three get all three in one movie and we'd have it made.

Randy Ray: Yeah. Yeah. Well, thank you guys for being here. I think it was a fun morning and I learned a lot and I'm excited about the VERO program and all the construction going on campus. It's very dynamic, very exciting time at WT and I appreciate both you being here. Please join us again next time for the November 2019 episode of Reflections from WT, The Heart and Soul of the Texas Panhandle.