

Reflections from WT with Gary Hinders and Joe Price

Randy Ray: All right. Welcome to episode number 38 of Reflections from WT. I'm Randy Ray, joined again by my co-host Dr. Walter Wendler, the 11th president of West Texas A&M. And I'm excited about today. Everyone in the room, I really, really have a good relationship with, I really enjoy talking to. Today, Dr. Wendler and I are joined by the city of Canyon, Texas mayor, Gary Hinders, and city manager Joe Price. So I'm glad you guys are here.

Gary Hinders: Good to be here.

Joe Price: Yes, thank you.

Randy Ray: Before we get started, I'm going to ask you guys, if you've ever heard of the Battle of Saint Scholastica. Anyone ever heard of that?

Gary Hinders: Not I.

Randy Ray: Well, let me tell you about that. That happened back in February of 1355 in Oxford. There was an argument in a Tavern that escalated into a three day battle in which the local citizens, armed with bows and arrows attack, the university killing and maiming scores of scholars and professors. So that's kind of where that phrase town and gown came from that I want to talk about. Let's just hope that the Battle of Saint Scholastica never happens in Canyon, Texas.

President Wendler: I don't think so.

Randy Ray: I don't think it will though. Do you?

President Wendler: No, I don't think so. We are so fortunate to have a very positive working relationship, Randy, with the city of Canyon and Randall county too, but just our region. Our region I'm going to say appreciates us. And I mentioned this yesterday in this setting. I've been to a number of different universities, and this relationship between city leadership and campus leadership is stronger here than any place I've ever seen it. It's not perfect. It never is. But it really is strong. Mayor Hinders will tell you that their view in the city is when the city ... when the WT elevates itself or prospers, the city prospers. And I'll tell you, when the city of Canyon elevates itself, then WT prospers. So, I mean, it's just a very special relationship that I don't take for granted at all.

Randy Ray: Yeah. I totally agree. Let me ask both of you. Tell me about your connection with WT first. Mayor Hinders, you go first.

Gary Hinders: Well, WT is where both my wife and I graduated. We met here, so our heartstrings are, are for WT and we love being a part, even to the extent that looking how we can give back in even small part scholarships and all too, because our heart is here at WT. And WT is the local university of the panhandle of Texas. And if you look at where our teachers come from, I've worked for a bank, where do most of those employees come from? It's West Texas A&M.

President Wendler: Mayor, if I could ask you just for a second, you and your wife, Linda, two very fine people, you all didn't get married in the campus chapel, did you? Did you get married in Hill Memorial Chapel?

Gary Hinders: No we didn't, but we met over at the student union building and I was ...

Randy Ray: The old one.

Gary Hinders: The old one. And I made a big impression. I was trying to look cool because there was the Phi Del on one side and the Chi Omegas walking down the hall and I was trying to look cool and I was eating breakfast and I dumped it in the floor and I tried to be funny. But I really wasn't cool or funny or ... but somehow I got the girl. Yeah. Somehow I got the girl.

Randy Ray: Joe, let me ask you tell me about your background and your relationship with WT.

Joe Price: I've got two college degrees from West Texas A&M, a bachelor's and a master's in political science. So I'm one of the few probably that has that degree that actually went into their field. I met my wife, Stephanie. She's a Zeta Tau Alpha, and I'm also a Phi Del, like Gary, and several others in our community. Really enjoyed my time there, was involved in Young Conservatives of Texas and we did all we could. I was student body, chief justice, was in student government my whole time. So I've done all that.

Randy Ray: Yeah. And you have family ties too?

Joe Price: I do. My wife now works the museum. She's the marketing and communications director. She's been there at least eight plus years. My dad's now just retiring. He had his second career here at West Texas A&M. He's a PhD in criminal justice and sociology, and he's had 19 year career after his 30 year stint with Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

President Wendler: Where did he work, Joe? And I think I know the answer, but I'm going to ask you, where did he work when he was with the Department of Criminal Justice?

Joe Price: We moved about every four years. So when I was born, we were down in the Houston area by Angleton. That was the Darrington unit. It was pretty ... he actually made one of the prolific magazines in the 80's about how dangerous that prison was. From there, we moved out to Livingston, Texas. At that time, that was a Terrell unit. We were the only house out there. So I lived in a field with just one house. Now that prison is actually death row unit, so they house all the death row inmates.

Then we moved from Livingston to Palestine, Texas out to Tennessee Colony. Tennessee Colony's about 15 minutes outside to the Cofield unit. It's the largest prison in Texas, I believe. And then from there, we moved up to the Clements unit here in Amarillo and my parents always wanted to retire up here. They've always loved it up here. And then my dad retired in 2003 from there, got his 30 years. He was senior prison warden and he had his PhD in his 20s. So he had his PhD all the way through his tenure as working with TDCJ.

Randy Ray: Definitely qualified to be a professor. Mayor Hinders, let me ask you this. Would you tell me about what's Canyon like now? What's the state of Canyon, Texas?

Gary Hinders: What I really love, Randy, is Canyon is a growing, thriving community. And that's huge. I wish more of the panhandle was that way, but it is wonderful to be here with a growing university, with the city that is really booming right now with development.

But with that too I think is just a focus on quality of life, too. Love the fact that we're in the middle of studying the downtown area, which has really come back to life, but there's so much more we can do there. And Randy, I know you as a commissioner in the middle of that and in that downtown master plan committee, but really what we can do ... and I think we're just on the cusp of what we can do and see changes in the future, both in opportunities, but also ... I mean, we love our city to look good and just the aesthetics and all too. So I think we're on the cusp of a lot of that too.

So another small one, I don't know that a lot of folks know, but textiles are coming in, redoing 23rd street going south with new sidewalks and just back aesthetics again, too. That makes a difference to us. We take a lot of pride in our community.

Randy Ray: Joe, what do you think? What's the state of Canyon right now?

Joe Price: Well, in order to know where we're at today, you got to look at the past. So I have personally gone back all the way to the seventies. The last significant growth has been mentioned many times from people that I've been around was in the seventies. What we're in right now is historic, unprecedented in all areas.

The city is in an unusual state, and so the commission hears that from me regularly. I'm like, "Listen, everything we're doing right now is uncharted water. We've never been in this shape. We've never been in this position, so they have difficult decisions to make that no commissions before you are going to have to decide on."

While at the same time we're developing and growing, we're also developing and growing the city of Canyon organization, kind of what Gary was saying. Downtown master plan, we've got several other master plans we're working on. But we're growing organizationally, but also housing market we're growing significantly. But everything is at a historic mark right now. And that is a significant, significant blessing. People want to be here, and I can't blame them. I love living here. I know everybody else in this podcast loves living here. It's a great town to be in. How can you blame someone wanting to move to our wonderful community?

Randy Ray: Yeah. Gary alluded to it a little bit ago. Canyon is booming, but the rest of the panhandle, not as much. Why is that? Dr. Wendler, why do you think that is?

President Wendler: Well this constellation of communities, apart from what I call the twin stars of Amarillo and Canyon, and I know there's some size differential and so on and so forth, but those are in the sense that I call them twin stars of the total panhandle. And there are many other fine communities, but most of them are smaller communities without a lot of economic base in them. And it's a wrestling match. Now I'm not obviously involved in civic government or civic leadership, but I think to the extent that Canyon and Amarillo serve the whole panhandle, they serve themselves well also.

And I think that's one of the reasons ... some of the people, I don't know, and Joe may even know the answer to this, but we have people moving to canyon from other parts of the panhandle. They come here. Joe himself has ... he was in a great community up there in Borger. And that's an excellent community. That's home of Frank Phillips College, there's a big refinery there. It's a great community and economically I think very stable.

But again, there are a whole series of communities that are tiny and don't have the economic opportunity that some of these smaller communities do. It's one of the reasons that one of our WT 125 goals is to investigate and encourage economic development through entrepreneurship and innovation in the Texas panhandle. Joe's right. Canyon is unprecedented. You can't look at history and know what kind of ... how to deal with what comes next in the city of canyon. Well, in these small communities, things are going to change.

The internet has obviously changed the world and people can operate businesses out of a place like Booker if they wanted to live there. And I don't know why they wouldn't. Booker's a nice little community, but there's not much there. A lot of the town now is in a sense boarded up. It's small, there's people ... it's just not a lot. But somebody that likes what Booker has to offer can actually get up there and start a business online. And I think there's some very special opportunities. It's outside of my field of expertise, but just in my heart, believe there's some very special opportunities that exist in these smaller communities, because there's so many of them are family-oriented.

When you go to these small communities like I did to visit the high schools, a lot of times people from the community come out just to listen in. I mean, they even did it in Canyon. First time I spoke at Canyon High School, Gary Hinders was there. He wasn't the mayor or anything at the time. He just came. He's from Canyon. He graduated WT. He came to find out what was going on at the university.

So I just think there's a high level of interest, and our growth here, because of our centrality and because of the university and so on and so forth, I think ... and of course, Amarillo, Pine community, and so on, we're all growing together. I just think it's very positive. A lot of those smaller communities out there, rural communities, that's not so much they need help, but we can provide something that other universities may not provide.

Randy Ray: All right, well, we're going to take a break. We're going to come back in about 30 seconds. And when we come back, I want to talk about what the future of our relationship's going to look like.

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Randy Ray: All right. Welcome back to Reflections from WT episode number 38. I want to ask you all this. What does the future of our relationship between West Texas A&M and Canyon look like? As a former student of West Texas A&M back in the eighties, I can tell you this, and I'm speaking from experience, there was a big, big disconnect between the city and the university. And I think it was like that for a long time. But I think like you mentioned, Dr. Wendler, it's better than it's ever been before, and it's better than most town and gown situations. Why is it that way, and what's the future of our relationship going to look like?

Gary Hinders: I think there's a couple of things there and I'm completely with you. I've been on city commission when we really didn't even have discussions with the university.

We didn't sit down. We'd go years without visiting, and just realize that's a mistake. I mean, we are the two big entities and population centers here in Canyon, Texas.

And so completely honest, I would give a lot of the credit to Dr. Wendler, his leadership abilities, but also personality and his willingness to be in dialogue with the city of Canyon. So I think that's been a huge piece. And yeah, I think there's a heart here. Joe's background with WT and mine as well, there's a heart there too. But I think we also realize just the importance and what we can do together.

And one thing I'll throw out too, I think just looking towards the future is that we get it now too. We've seen both, and now we see what we can do together and work on some projects, and whether that's some mobility things with bicycle lanes or traffic or working on dedicated streets together, there's a lot of things that we can do and make our community better when we work together. And so there will be a day coming, hopefully it's a lot of years from now, that Dr. Wendler retires and I won't be in this spot. But I really think we have some younger folks with Joe Price and some of the ones on the commission now and university too that see it and get it. And so I'm really hopeful that we've got a dedication to that in future years, too.

Randy Ray:

Joe, what do you think?

Joe Price:

I think we just continue to collaborate with our relationship. The directive given to me as city manager from the entire unanimous body of the city commission is to have quality intergovernmental relationships with West Texas A&M and our county government. And we work really hard at those relationships, but it's like anything else. It takes ... it works both ways. It's like a marriage.

But we have numerous projects being held with WT. We're purchasing some land from them on Monday at our commission meeting. We've got some other properties we need to acquire from them. We're going to try to redo WTAMU drive probably in the next two to three years and have a cost share agreement with that. We work together on our upgrading of the outdoor warning sirens. We put a new warning siren on top of the classroom center.

I can't tell you how many things we've done together since I've personally been here. I meet with VP of business and finance, Randy Reichel, and their facilities manager, Sam Peña. I meet with them every three months. We have an agenda of items. We go through everything. On the projects, the capital projects, we really try to make sure those are on the city's CIP list, but they're also on WT's master plan. And so we have a lot of correlation with that. But we have headaches every once in a while, like any marriage, but we're working with

them on the hotel, trying to get the hotel going and moving and moving forward quickly to get that up. I can go on and on of all the projects we're working on. But it's been a great relationship because each organization's puts the relationship first to work together.

President Wendler: Yeah. I agree with everything that's been said, and it's going to sound like sort of mutual praise or whatever, but the bottom line is I think Gary has been central ... and this end, Joe too, but I knew Gary first, in wanting to make sure that what we do benefits both all the time, the rising tide lifts all boats. And that doesn't always happen in these relationships, and I think it's exceedingly important. A recent example as one, we have these new scooters on the campus. Whether these ... I know, I know, you saw me on Facebook on one.

Randy Ray: Yeah. You rode one not too long ago.

President Wendler: But anyway, I had to try that. And I didn't have the courage to go all the way downtown, but you can go from the campus ... and this is the example of cooperation ... to downtown, to the square in Canyon where there's restaurants and retail outlets and so on. And it's getting nicer and nicer all the time. And we try to stay local as much as we can. And when I say stay local, I mean, staying in Canyon to eat, to go out to eat, and so on and so forth. And we frequent this ... I don't want to start naming names because I'll leave some out, but with gift buying and stuff, we try to do it in Canyon.

And we can. You can do it. It's not the same selection you get in New York City. But so what? What difference does it make? It's just been a very ... I'm thankful for it. And that scooter deal, it took some cooperation between the city and the university, and plus this Bird company that has the arrangement with this scooters, but our students can ride downtown from the campus, and they do because I see the scooters down there.

Randy Ray: Mayor, have you rode one yet?

Gary Hinders: I have not.

Randy Ray: Oh, I'm disappointed in you.

President Wendler: I am too, actually. I want to see what he looks like on one. I even did a trip.

Gary Hinders: I think the two of you should have a race, is what'd I'd like.

President Wendler: That's what I'd like to do.

Gary Hinders: Well, the other thing there, Randy, and you all should know, this is that Gary Hinders is a little bit on the tight side. And so those things ...

President Wendler: Oh really? Let's not give in to understatement.

Gary Hinders: Those things cost money. And my wife has said the story of how Palo Duro got there and really is that Gary Hinders lost a dime and he kept digging until he found it. So those do cost money. Yeah.

Randy Ray: All right. Well, I'm going to ... I don't know if you guys have heard, but every time we do a podcast, we wrap it up by me throwing a curve ball. And I'm going to throw you guys a curve ball now. So this has nothing to do with the university or the city. I'm going to ask each one of you to think for just a second. And if they wrote a biography about your life, what would the title be? What would the title of your biography be? Joe, I see the wheels turning right there. Yeah.

Joe Price: I'd say A Life of Selfless Service. That's what I really thrive on. My ethos is just ...

Randy Ray: I were to guess, I'd say, it'd be My Living Hell with the City Commission. Is that not it?

Joe Price: There might be a sub chapter in the biography of ... I mean, even at my young age, I'm telling you, I could write a memoir of some of the stuff I've seen in city government these days. And maybe it should be, What Did You Not Realize Was Actually Going On?

President Wendler: Keep it to yourself, Joe.

Randy Ray: Mayor, what would the title of your biography be?

Gary Hinders: Well, this might be self-serving, but I would love for it to be Servant Leader. And love our community, love our city. And I really don't mind. We were on a project here and with the church here a month back and cleaned up the creek. And that was a nasty deal. I have talked to Joe. We've planted trees. I've been out there in the middle of it. Talked to Joe, one of these days, we're going to be working on brick reeds. And I may be out there on my knees with knee pads too, helping get it done. So love being in the middle and making a difference.

Randy Ray: Dr. Wendler, what would the title of your biography be?

President Wendler: Oh, it's really hard. I would say that He Did His Best Every Day to Serve Those that Were in His Charge, and maybe Servant Leadership. Yeah. I don't mean to sound immodest about that, but that's what I do try to do. And it's not always perceived that way, but that is what I try to do.

Randy Ray: Well, let me tell you something that I admire about each and every one of you. Every one of you mention service and giving to others. So I appreciate that about each and every one of you. And I'm proud to serve each one of you in a different way.

President Wendler: Now I've got a curve ball for you and I've never done this before.

Randy Ray: Now I'm nervous.

President Wendler: Yeah. You are both a city commissioner in Canyon and an employee here at WT in your role with the radio and television communications program, mass com. How do you see those two things that ... how do you see sort of how those two things work together?

Randy Ray: I don't want to toot my own horn either, but I think it is about service. And I love both institutions. I really do. And I was living in Tennessee when I got the call from WT to come back. And for the longest time, I never thought that I would come back to the panhandle, but if there was one place that I would come back, it's Canyon, Texas, and WT. That's the only place I'd ever come back to. And I thought back to when I went to school here, and like I mentioned earlier, there was a big disconnect between the two. And I always thought Canyon could be such a cool university town. You've heard about college towns. And I think we're closer to that than we've ever been before. And I think the students love canyon and I think Canyon loves the students. So I hope I've had a little bit to do with that.

President Wendler: Yeah. And I would say you have.

Joe Price: Oh, I'll say one thing. On numerous publications, Canyon is always in the top 10 for university towns in Texas and in the United States. And I think that's because of this relationship. Constantly voted top in the state college towns.

Randy Ray: Well, I am honored to be a part of both. And I thank you guys for being here today. I think it's a good one. Thank you for joining us. Please join us again next time for episode number 39. We will see you then.