Dr. David C. Munson, Jr.: Hello, RIT alumni and friends. This is President Dave Munson here once again and this time it's great to be in the Windy City of Chicago, here on my next leg of the Alumni Tiger Tour. Tonight, I'm chatting 1981 alumna Gale Gand. Gale is a celebrity chef and restaurateur. You may have seen Gale on her Food Network series titled Sweet Dreams, the first nationally televised dessert show, or on her appearances on shows like Oprah, The Today Show, Good Morning America, The Dr. Oz Show, and many more. She also served as a celebrity judge on Food Network Challenge, Last Cake Standing, Top Chef, and Top Chef: Just Desserts.

Gale has founded many high-end Chicago restaurants, most notably Tru, which earned two Michelin stars. It was also named Chicago's best restaurant by Chicago Magazine. In addition to her television appearances and food operations, Gale is a cookbook author with eight titles to her credit, including her most recent Gale Gand's Lunch!, released in April of 2014. Gale has also been recognized as Outstanding Pastry Chef of the Year by the James Beard Foundation and Bon Appetit magazine and in 2014 was inducted into the Chicago Chef’s Hall of Fame. Gale, it's a real treat to have you here with me today and welcome to the podcast.

Gand: Thank you so much for having me on. Can you, can you see my blushing? Can you feel me blush?


Gand: That sounds like a lot of stuff.

Munson: You're so good.

Gand: I'm so lucky is what it is.

Munson: As usual, I've got a whole set of questions and I just want to launch into those and really looking forward to hearing your answers. So first, when you graduated from RIT, you left with a BFA degree in metal crafts and jewelry from the College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
and now you’re a world renowned pastry chef. So here’s the question, how did the transition from working with gold and silver to sugar and flour even come about?

**Gand:** You can't see that straight line. Huh?

**Munson:** No. I don't understand.

**Gand:** It's a wiggly line. Actually, I mean, if you ever have set 50, 10-point diamonds in a ring, it's a lot like making 50 petit fours.

**Munson:** Oh boy.

**Gand:** So the fine motor skills that you need for pastry is the same as what you need for metalsmithing.

**Munson:** But, the recipes have to be very different?

**Gand:** They do. But it's funny, I don't know if people realize how fluid metal is. It's really, you know, a quite malleable sort of material and when I got into working with a little bit more fluid stuff, like butter, sugar, flour, and eggs, you know, there's a lot of chemistry involved, there's a lot of physics involved. The thing about it is it's much more immediate and you make a lot more friends because you're working with chocolate, so, but the transition actually was quite natural for me and it was my afterschool job while I went to RIT.

**Munson:** Oh, so tell us about that.

**Gand:** I actually worked at the University Club in Rochester and I did desserts at night and I did all the hors d'oeuvres for their parties, and so I was working on these really precise, repetitive...I was making like a thousand hand hors d'oeuvres with olives on them.

**Munson:** Beautiful small desserts and hors d'oeuvres. Yeah.

**Gand:** Exactly. They were very jewel like.
Munson: Okay.

Gand: It was just that one was edible and wouldn't be here in three days and one wasn't, and I had to keep it until I found a home for it.

Munson: Okay. I'm a believer now.

Gand: Okay.

Munson: You've convinced me you're the same person on either side of this fence.

Gand: It's practically the same skills.

Munson: Yeah. So Gale, next question is even though you diverged from what you pursued at RIT academically, what about your time at the university do you think may have helped prepare you for your successes?

Gand: I always attribute my art school background to why I got sort of separated out of the pack. There's a lot of great chefs in Chicago. There's a lot of great chefs everywhere, but because I approach the plate differently, because I had design training, I had, you know, training in color and shape and line and how your eye follows things, that really made my food look different. And it was a different approach and so it seemed to sort of separate me from the rest of my guys who just went to culinary school.

Munson: Well, now that you explained it that makes lots of sense how what you produce really would be visually different. RIT has a lot of really notable faculty and I read that you were originally enrolled in another university, but then you left for RIT after hearing a lecture by Albert Paley, an artist who has left his mark quite literally on RIT. Could share a little more about that story and did you actually get to work with him?

Gand: He came to the college I was at, which was the Cleveland Institute of Art, so CIA.

Munson: Yes.
Gand: Not the Culinary Institute of Art.

Munson: Right, right.

Gand: I would say I went to CIA, but it doesn't mean the culinary school. Albert came there, if I remember right, he came for a week.

Munson: Okay. So, he was in residence.

Gand: Yeah. In the sculpture studio and it was like if you had time, you could go hang out and watch him work or help him. Not only did I find some time, I found a lot of time and I found him really charismatic and interesting and contemporary and those were things I was not getting at my present school.

Munson: Okay, at your institution at that time. Yeah.

Gand: He spent a lot of time talking to me and he wasn't teaching at RIT at the time. He was teaching at Brockport, I think, but he chatted up RIT and Gary Griffin and Hans as well and sort of the freer thinking, in terms of design, in the department and the more contemporary materials that were being used there. It was a lot of plastics and plexiglass and there was iron work and it was just a broader metals program than what we had in Cleveland.

Munson: And so after you arrived, did you encounter Albert?

Gand: I saw him periodically. I can't think at what events or what it was. But, one of my friends actually worked for Albert...

Munson: I see...

Gand: ...As one of his apprentices or, you know, assistants, so I...

Munson: Yeah. He's got a whole crew. Sure.
Gand: Yeah. I think was even at the studio sometime and I met his wife and she worked in the metals department as well at nighttime. So yeah.

Munson: Okay, okay. Well neat

Gand: He was the guy that hooked me and I followed him.

Munson: Yeah, well, he's an inspirational figure. That's for sure.

Gand: Yeah.

Munson: So switching gears, you've been able to build a really impressive and hugely rewarding career, but besides the restaurants, the television shows, and the cookbooks I mentioned, you also teach a variety of cooking classes and you even have your own root beer brand. So, the question is, how do you juggle it all? Plus I think you've got a family you may want to comment on.

Gand: I do. I have a husband and I have three kids and they still like me and they still remember me. One of the ways that I'm able to handle it all is my husband is a stay-at-home dad, so I'm the one that's sort of out working or traveling or, you know, we sort of support my career so I can go do...

Munson: Yeah. Well, good for him.

Gand: Yeah. What I get invited to do, so that's part of it. But, part of it's just I'm a list maker.

Munson: Okay. Organized.

Gand: I took the Franklin Covey class you know, “How to Prioritize.” As a restaurateur or a chef, you're a juggler. That's a big part of what you do.

Munson: Sure.
Gand: Things are changing moment by moment. Parties are going up by 20, the wine delivery didn't arrive. You're just coping with...

Munson: You're adjusting.

Gand: ...And putting out fires all the time, so it's just sort of the nature of the business and I think I must be suitable for that sort of chaos.

Munson: Now amidst all that chaos, is there one part of your career that you enjoy the most?

Gand: There is and it's what I do most now. You know, I've been in this 40 years now, practically. I think I started working in restaurants when I was 19 and I'm 61 now.

Munson: You don't look old enough for all of this, so okay.

Gand: Yeah. What I found I love doing is teaching and I'm good at it. I'm good at communicating and sort of passing on knowledge to other people and empowering them with skills...

Munson: Terrific.

Gand: ...Either they didn't think they had or they didn't know they could have. I do a pie camp class where you learn how to make pie. People come in there saying, "I can't make pie crust, I always wreck it." and I'm like I'm going to fix that.

Munson: It's going to happen.

Gand: It's like therapy. I'm like I can fix that for you and they leave the class literally crying saying like, "I can't believe I can do this." So, it gives them a skill. I mean they really go home and make this stuff and then they come back and tell me and send me pictures. And I just love passing on knowledge.

Munson: Not too many people would've thought about empowerment through pie making...
Gand: Right.

Munson: ...But you've done it. Congratulations.

Gand: Empowerment through pie.

Munson: So, you are constantly coming up with new recipes that are both delicious and visually stunning. How do you sustain that level of creativity? Where do the ideas come from?

Gand: You know, I'm thinking about when is it that I'm doing this creative work and I do it, sort of, as I'm falling asleep at night. So I find that in the shower and as I'm falling asleep is a good time to start, you know, ideas brewing. How do I sustain it? You know, I kind of get inspiration from everywhere. I can go look at a shelf of penny candy and then use that as a jumping off point, but I can also look at, you know, the coastline here of Lake Michigan and get some inspiration from that. So it's kind of everywhere if you open up your eyes. I also think it's really important to be comfortable in your...It's not comfortable in yourself, but wear comfortable shoes, I always say.

Munson: Okay.

Gand: If your feet hurt, you're not going to be able to think straight.

Munson: Yeah.

Gand: Just dress comfortably.

Munson: Let it come to you, I guess.

Gand: Yeah. When I'm writing, I actually have a certain outfit I put on when I write. I have my writing pants that I put on.

Gand: Yes.

Munson: Yeah. Okay. I get it. I get it. Among all these things that you've dreamed up, is there any particular recipe that you would think about as your biggest success or something you're particularly fond of or there are just too many to even address that question?

Gand: People ask all the time “What's your favorite recipe?” and I say that like asking me which of my kids is my favorite kid.

Munson: Okay. I'm sorry I asked.

Gand: No. It's usually I'll just answer whatever I made yesterday. It's like the most recent one...


Gand: ...Kind of love the one you're with.

Munson: Yeah.

Gand: But, the most exciting experience and favorite experience I've had in this amazing, you know, 40-year career so far was the fact that I got to contribute to a baking book with Julia Child.

Munson: Okay.

Gand: It's called Baking With Julia.

Munson: Wow.

Gand: I'm the “with” part.

Munson: Yeah.
**Gand:** I got to be on her PBS show. I got to tape two episodes with her and I've done a ton of television.

**Munson:** Yeah.

**Gand:** It was probably some of my first and earliest television, so I wasn't media trained at the time. It's kind of cute if anyone wants to look it up, but cooking with Julia Child was just an experience I'll never forget.

**Munson:** Obviously with a legend. Yeah. That's neat. That's really just terrific. As you look to the future, do you think there is anything left for you to conquer in the kitchen? Basically, what's on the horizon for you, Gale? What might come next? Any idea?

**Gand:** I don't know. And, you know, when you go to a job interview and they say to you “What's your five year plan or what's your 10 year goals?” What I've decided is if you actually, I hope you don't get mad that I'm telling the students this...

**Munson:** It's okay.

**Gand:** ... But, if you set a goal or make a five year plan, you can never dream as big as it will actually turn out. Like If I had said to you, I want to have eight cookbooks and a TV show on Food Network for 10 years, I wouldn't have the...I don't think I could've thought that big and I certainly wouldn't have thought that would come to me.

**Munson:** But yet, it still happened.

**Gand:** I almost feel like those kinds of things limit you because, you know, you can only set goals for as big as you can think and I have found that so much just comes into my world through my website or through an email or meeting someone. And so my motto is just return all your phone calls and answer all your emails and always say “thank you” and that kind of leads you to the next thing.

**Munson:** Then, let it happen.
Gand: Yeah.

Munson: Okay. Neat. Neat. My last question is what is your favorite memory from RIT?

Gand: One of my favorites was when I came back after I graduated. Does that count?

Munson: So was this five years ago or something?

Gand: Yeah. I think it was about five or six years ago and I came back not to talk to the metalsmithing students, but to talk to the hospitality students.

Munson: Oh okay.

Gand: So now, those are my peeps. I came back to give a talk to them and I had an interpreter at the front of the room with me.

Munson: Sure. Because we have so many deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Gand: Right. And I actually went to NTID for my gym class when I was there. I took ballet, so I can only sign ballet moves, but… So, to have a signer with me while I spoke was so interesting and I just really enjoyed seeing how she was able to translate, you know, some of what I talk about are, sort of, sounds, or, you know, creating, you know, kind of trying to create what the environment was like in the chaos in the kitchen and she had a way to sign that.

Munson: A way to express that. Yeah.

Gand: Yeah. I loved that. That was really great.

Munson: Well, I too am very impressed with our signers and interpreters on campus. It adds magic to the place for sure.

Gand: I think I learned how to swear too in sign…
**Munson:** This is a podcast, thank heaven, so our listeners won't be able to see that.

**Gand:** I was sort of testing out. I'd say a word and then I'd see what it was translated because you need that language in the kitchen sometimes.

**Munson:** No doubt, you're creative. Yes. Well, Gale, thanks so much for being with us today. I hope we'll be able to see you back in Rochester some time very soon. And once again, thanks to our listeners for tuning in. As always, go Tigers.

**Gand:** Go Tigers.