Dr. David C. Munson, Jr.: Hello, RIT alumni and friends. This, again, is President Dave Munson, and it is great to be here in Los Angeles this evening as I continue on my alumni Tiger Tour. Tonight, I'm chatting with 2010 alumna Sophie Schillaci, a host, producer, and writer for ET online. In this role, Sophie appears on Entertainment Tonight as a contributing correspondent, attends red carpet events, and writes daily news articles for her original columns, “Certified Country” and “Interviews Under the Influence.”

Before joining Entertainment Tonight in 2014, she was an on-air cohost for AfterBuzz TV where she cohosted live after-show podcast about television shows including HBO’s Silicon Valley and Freeform’s Young and Hungry. Prior to this position, Sophie was an entertainment reporter for MTV News, a staff editor for The Hollywood Reporter, and a contributing editor of zap2it.com. She began her career at Nike as a field reporter correspondent where she wrote blogs for nikewomen.com and conducted on-camera interviews with Olympic athletes.

Thank you so much for joining me this evening, Sophie, and for agreeing to be on the other side of the mic.

Sophie Schillaci: Thanks for having me.

Munson: Yeah. This is going to be fun. So I've got a bunch of questions for you.

Schillaci: All right.

Munson: You have already built such a unique career for yourself in a very short amount of time considering that you are such a recent alumna. What about your RIT experience and liberal arts degree in advertising and public relations helped prepare you for developing such a presence within the entertainment industry?

Schillaci: What I think was interesting about my RIT experience was that when I first came in, the journalism program didn't exist yet. That was what I was looking for. My mom worked for RIT, so that was kind of what—
Munson: I'll be darned. I did not know this.

Schillaci: She did. So that was kind of what led me in that direction. I'm a Rochester native. I was really intrigued by RIT SportsZone. From high school, I would see it on television, and I started to get interested in journalism through high school, and I knew that RIT had a television program run through EPSN2, and so that really peaked my interest. Even though I knew my curriculum in advertising and public relations wasn't necessarily going to fit it exactly—

Munson: Yes.

Schillaci: I knew that it would be close enough, and I got a lot of experience, a lot of hands-on experience very, very quickly in working for RIT SportsZone.

Munson: You are not our only alumna who was captivated by RIT SportsZone so—

Schillaci: Yeah, yeah.

Munson: ...that's becoming a theme in my time here at RIT.

Schillaci: I bet it is.

Munson: I think it's safe to say that you are passionate about your career. How did you discover the passion that you have, and how do you continue to cultivate it? You must have a pretty demanding schedule.

Schillaci: It is demanding. Like I said, in high school, I kind of started taking classes on journalism and mass media and started getting interested. Growing up, I wanted to be Britney Spears. I had that—

Dave Munson: Oh my golly.

Schillaci: Pop star goal. I realized that I was not talented enough in the singing or dancing or acting realm—
Munson: Oh.

Schillaci: ...but—

Munson: Only those three.

Schillaci: Only those three. I found that I was really passionate about storytelling, and telling nonfiction stories was more interesting to me than making things up. So I got my start in sports, obviously, through SportsZone, and then when I was a junior, I applied for an internship at Access Hollywood. And I came out to Los Angeles for about six months on a co-op and got my foot in the door that way, and it's all about who you know.

Munson: Wow. Yeah, yeah.

Schillaci: But yeah, and since then, it really has been a whirlwind that I've been here.

Munson: Yeah, it's such a competitive industry. You really just have to be at the right place at the right time with the right people and—

Schillaci: Absolutely.

Munson: ...get a foothold.

Schillaci: I always tell people it's about luck, but being prepared for luck—

Munson: Yeah, being prepared for luck.

Schillaci: ...being the best version you can be so that when luck strikes, you're ready for it.

Munson: That sounds like great advice. Well, I've had the chance to speak with some of your fellow alumni who are also in the entertainment industry, and they have expressed how challenging an environment it can be. This is kind of a general question, but I'm sure you encounter challenges or obstacles. How do you overcome them?
Schillaci: Oh, yeah. I didn't really have a backup plan. I can't imagine myself doing anything else, and it's a rollercoaster. I tell people all the time, my job is a lot like any other job in that there are great parts of it and that there are not-so-great parts of it. There are things that I don't love about it, but there are things that make it all the more worthwhile.

Munson: This might be a surprise to our listeners because they probably imagine the whole thing is entirely glamorous.

Schillaci: Oh, yeah. No, no. You can ask my husband. There's plenty of days I come home feeling it, feeling the challenge.

Munson: We're going to some of those things secret, I think, but what would you say have been some of the biggest highlights so far in your career?

Schillaci: Well, this past year, I had the opportunity to build my own digital franchise, which was really exciting. It's called Certified Country, and it is a weekly program that is on Entertainment Tonight's Facebook and YouTube channels.

Munson: Oh, great.

Schillaci: Yeah, and through that, what I call the perfect storm is when I'm able to book an interview for that, and it goes really well, and then ET broadcast will pick it up, and they'll run some of it, and it'll find its way to all the platforms. And this past November, I had the opportunity to cohost Entertainment Tonight broadcast with Nancy O'Dell and Keltie Knight, and that was really, really exciting.

Munson: Okay, well, that does sound exciting.

Schillaci: Yeah.

Munson: In speaking of excitement, you have sat down with and maybe even shared cocktails with some of today's biggest stars, especially in country music. Is there anyone that even you get star struck by?
Schillaci: I don't get star struck that often, and the cocktails help. Another one of my original series that I launched called *Interviews Under the Influence*, the premise is that I will do the interview, and if the person wants to plead the fifth, they can take a drink instead—

Munson: Oh, okay.

Schillaci: ...or if they do answer the question, then I'll take a drink. It just makes for a fun environment really relaxed.

I will tell you, the first time I did ever get star struck, I was really surprised by it. I was working for The Hollywood Reporter, and I was covering the Sundance Film Festival in Park City. And I knew he was coming in, but it still caught me off-guard, Daniel Radcliffe from Harry Potter. I think because he's the same age as I am. We grew up together. As soon I saw him in person, it was like I hit a wall. I was like, "Oh my god—"

Munson: Oh. Oh my goodness.

Schillaci: "...that's Harry Potter."

Munson: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Schillaci: It freaked me out.

Munson: That's a great story. As we start a new year, we're just beginning 2018, what do you think might be some of the bigger stories that could come along, or I don't know if there are any scoops you can give us, or is there anything to watch for. What should we keep our eyes on?

Schillaci: Well, I don't know if I have any scoops to give you, but I do think, especially with the Golden Globes fresh in our minds off this past weekend, this Me Too and the Time's Up initiatives are going to continue to be really, really big in Hollywood. We're going to keep seeing, I think, women sharing their stories and demanding equality and equal representation and all of that stuff. I think that is definitely going to be something that continues.

Munson: Well, and personally, I think that's a very positive movement, and probably long overdue.
Schillaci: Absolutely.

Munson: It's good to see. A different question is what advice would you have for our students who might like to follow you into the entertainment industry after graduation. I guess part of this is, it's partly about luck, but be prepared. Is there anything else—

Schillaci: Absolutely.

Munson: ...you'd want to say on that score?

Schillaci: Absolutely. That's a huge piece of it. Have thick skin. If you are sensitive or insecure, this is a very challenging thing to be a part of, and yeah, just work to be the best that you can be and know that it's not always about being the most talented or the—

Munson: Yes, it's—

Schillaci: ...hardest working.

Munson: Right, right.

Schillaci: It's about having the right opportunities presented to you.

Munson: Well, if we think about your fellow alums, do you have any advice on how they might best stay connected to RIT? You're from Rochester, and so you probably would feel connection naturally because you're right in the city, but—

Schillaci: Sure.

Munson: ...what about for the alums in general?

Schillaci: I think it really starts with what you put in while you're there. For me, being a part of Zeta Tau Alpha while I was in school was a huge part of my life and something that I'm still very involved in, and I'm still very, very close with all my sisters. And, you know, I keep tabs on those
girls at the campus. I think that it starts with making those connections while you’re on campus, and they’ll stick with you.

**Munson:** I love that answer. It really has to do with what you put into it, and then you get something back—

**Schillaci:** Absolutely.

**Munson:** ...when that happens. One last question, Sophie, and maybe there’s not just one answer, but I’m going to ask the question as if there is one. What is your favorite RIT memory?

**Schillaci:** Oh gosh. That’s a tough one. I have two that popped into my mind. Going off of the Zeta Tau Alpha, Mud Tug was always a really—

**Munson:** Oh, boy.

**Schillaci:** ...really—

**Munson:** I love Mud Tug.

**Schillaci:** It’s so fun.

**Munson:** I’ve only been at RIT for six months. I already love Mud Tug.

**Schillaci:** Yeah, you have to. It’s just so much fun and so unique and something that I think is really great that they continue to do. And then in my time at SportsZone, my senior year, we won a college Emmy. We got to come out to Los Angeles—

**Munson:** Oh, boy.

**Schillaci:** ...so in 2010, that was really, really special.
Munson: Wow. Well, I'll say. I'll say. Well, thanks so much for your time this evening, Sophie. It's been a great thrill and privilege to speak with you. I hope we'll be able to see each other some time back in Rochester on campus. And I want to thank our listeners for tuning in. And once again, go Tigers.