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Plated

*Celebrating 20 years
in the CCD kitchens*

2024 MARKS CERTIFIED MASTER CHEF BRIAN BELAND'S REMARKABLE 20-YEAR ANNIVERSARY AT COUNTRY CLUB OF DETROIT.

To celebrate, we sat down with the culinary maestro himself to reflect on his journey, his enduring passion for the culinary arts, and the lasting mark he has left on the Club's dining experiences. Join us as we delve into Chef Beland's legacy, his most cherished memories, and the secrets behind his enduring success.

How did you find your way to Country Club of Detroit?

In the late winter of 1999, I was 19 and seeking my second internship while studying Hospitality Business at Michigan State University. I was unique for the MSU program because I enjoyed kitchens, but not so much the front-of-house side of the business. While my peers were seeking management experience, I sought time in the kitchen. I had no immediate connections in Detroit's great kitchens, but through a family friend, I introduced myself to Chef Ray Hollingsworth at the newly renovated Sterling Inn and Loon River Café. Although he did not have an open position, Chef Hollingsworth offered contacts for three chefs and establishments that he felt would be a strong fit for my goals— Grosse Pointe Yacht Club, Fox and Hounds in Bloomfield Hills, and Country Club of Detroit.

I took those contacts, made three phone calls, and left three voice mails—and Chef Doug Ganhs, CEC at Country Club of Detroit, returned my call. We set up an interview. I remember it vividly: dressed in my Gap khaki cargo pants, a white button-up shirt, and my favorite blue plaid Gap tie, I arrived at the Club anxious and nervous.

That year, the Club's kitchen was under renovation, so we met in the snack bar, which doubled as dry storage. At that time, Chef Ganhs was working to build a kitchen of chefs and young culinarians, most of whom were in culinary school. Now, I didn't have the experience he was looking for. When asked what I could bring to his team, my response was genuine: "I'll work as hard as I can, and you'll have to kick me out each day." For some reason, he believed in me and responded, "I don't have a position for you, but we'll create something for the summer."

Chef Beland holds the Certified Master Chef designation—the only American Master Chef certification in the U.S. recognized by the Department of Labor. It is designed to identify chefs who have demonstrated mastery of culinary competence and expertise through education, experience, knowledge and skills.

I returned to MSU and wrapped up my last few weeks of the semester. During that period, CCD completed its kitchen renovation, and I was able to report for duty on the Friday of Mother's Day weekend. I held my promise, working three long shifts that first weekend—12 to 15 hours each! My mind and heart were set. I had never seen or experienced a kitchen like I did that weekend at CCD.

Chef Doug became a great friend and mentor to me, a role he continues to this day. He helped set my path, introducing me to refined cuisine. He taught me how to carve ice. He introduced me to the American Culinary Federation for competitions and certification. He brought me to Germany as an apprentice to the Culinary Olympics and introduced me to the Culinary Institute of America and the Certified Master Chef program. In October 2001, Chef Ganhs and I took a trip to the CIA to observe the CMC exam in Manhattan and tour the college in Hyde Park. This was a particularly somber event, as it was only a few weeks after the attacks of September 11, 2001. That trip gave me focus and guidance on what I wanted to achieve on so many levels.

In December, after our trip, I graduated from MSU and reported back to work at CCD. I had decided to continue my education at the CIA and would be starting the following October. This was the second step in a decade-long goal to attempt the Certified Master Chef exam by age 30—a goal that I expected would likely never be met. But I was focused and determined and knew the CIA would help me become a better cook and refine the experiences I gained in the production kitchens of Country Club of Detroit, City Club of Lansing, Shaker Heights Country Club, Olive Garden, the Kellogg Center at MSU, and Chez Robert restaurant in St. Clair Shores where it all started.

When October arrived, my girlfriend Colleen—now my amazing wife and mother of our three children— and I packed a Ryder truck and moved to New York. We were both jobless and had no idea how we would make it, but we did.

While at the CIA, I was required to complete an 18-week externship, and I was determined to work under a Certified Master Chef. My sights were set on Certified Master Chef Laurence McFad-



den, who was at the Ritz Carlton-Naples and was quickly moving up through the corporate ranks, setting new standards for their culinary program. But, like always, Colleen found an alternative solution inspired by a culinary magazine that arrived at our apartment. The cover highlighted that Certified Master Chef Edward Leonard—American Culinary Federation President, Team Manager, and Captain of the U.S. Culinary Team—had left Chicago and taken the position of Executive Chef at the famed Westchester Country Club. And that was only a 70-minute commute from our apartment!

Colleen told me *that* was where I needed to go—mostly because I was not

to leave her in New York alone! But first, I needed a connection with Chef Leonard. Again, Chef Ganhs came to the rescue.

I was carving ice with Chef Ganhs at the Port Huron Ice Festival in the winter of 2003. One of his closest chef friends from the CIA, Chef Don Doubeck also came to carve at this event. We began discussing my externship, and it turned out that Chef Doubeck knew Chef Leonard from Chicago and was willing to make an introduction. I interviewed with Chef Leonard on a wet, snowy early spring day at the CIA on what was also Day 10 of that year's Certified Master Chef Exam. The interview was quick. I was told I had the externship position by reference alone, but in return, he needed me to teach at least one of his chefs the craft of carving ice. The deal was sealed: I would stay in New York and commute to Westchester. Chef Leonard, like Chef Ganhs, became my mentor and exceptionally close friend from that day.

When the spring of 2004 arrived, I received a phone call from CCD's then-General Manager, Ed Linebaugh, who inquired about my plans following graduation from the CIA at the end of that May.

He offered an executive sous chef position under Chef Scott O'Farrell with the potential for a succession plan to executive chef as Chef O'Farrell would soon be taking an instructor position at Macomb Community College. Ultimately, this was meant to be a working interview—and an enormous undertaking for a young chef.

On June 4, 2004, I returned to CCD for full-time employment. Now, 20 years later, I am still working hard each day to build and improve our culinary program.

What have been some of your most memorable moments at CCD?

There have been plenty! That first summer, CCD hosted the MICSA finals and the Arnold Palmer Turning Point Invita-



In addition to his executive role at CCD, Chef Beland serves as Department Chair and Chef Instructor at Schoolcraft College.

gether, we built and opened remarkable new facilities, began offering new services, and increased Member activity.

What is your vision for CCD?

We strive to always make CCD our Members' first choice in dining. To do that, we need

a team that values the same vision and responsibility—individuals who seek real opportunity. We see the CCD kitchen as a place for professional growth, a program where someone can come in with little or no experience but an open mind for hard work, refinement, and setting self-standards to improve each day.

We are a kitchen that still cooks fresh foods—one that embodies new techniques while embracing the traditional fundamentals of good cooking, and sprinkling in flavors and ingredients from across the globe. We are a kitchen where the respect for making a good grilled cheese is no different than respect for preparing luxury ingredients like truffles, foie gras, or caviar.

I was fortunate to come up in tough but fair kitchens where hard work earned you the opportunity for more work. That opened more opportunities for development, growth, and professional connections. I want us to offer the same for those who pass through our program.

You are Department Chair and a Chef Instructor at Schoolcraft College; what does that bring to CCD?

In January 2014, I began full-time instruction at Schoolcraft College, which has long been viewed as one of the country's best culinary programs. I believe the decade of teaching while maintaining my position as Executive Chef at CCD has greatly improved me as a chef and leader; I've gained increased patience and un-

derstand the challenges facing young culinary professionals. All too often, as we gain experience, we forget or lose touch with how much we have grown through our experiences. Operating Schoolcraft's public restaurant with a new group of students every five weeks helps to ground my perspective and reminds me how far I've come.

The partnership between CCD and Schoolcraft is also mutually beneficial. My first-hand work with students can almost serve as an interview process, which aids our effort to recruit and build the Club's team. Every season, it takes about 20 cooks to operate the Poolside Grille, in addition to the 30 cooks that staff the Main Kitchen and Grille Room. Several of our team are currently Schoolcraft students or recent graduates.

What do you see in CCD's future?

The best parts of the Club are the same as they were 20 years ago: we continue to push for excellence to provide Members with a premier culinary experience. We also continue providing culinarians a path for growth and professional success. However, many operational aspects are different from when I first started.

Although we are no longer a less-than-two-million-dollar food and beverage program—we are pushing toward six million—our primary physical spaces are still the same. We are working to adapt these areas to match Members' expectations by improving equipment and technologies, creatively increasing production spaces, and looking for new opportunities to increase food storage areas.

Any final thoughts?

It is a true pleasure to have been a part of this property for so many years. CCD has always supported me in anything I asked for: personal and professional growth, educational experiences, and team expansion. The Club has provided an opportunity for me to grow from a young cook to an experienced chef who continues to learn each day.

I have appreciated the past 20 years and look forward to many more. Thank you, Country Club of Detroit! ■

tional. Several years later, I was present for a second MICSA finals, the USGA 66th U.S. Senior Amateur Championship, and the Club's 125th anniversary celebration. There are so many other events and services that it's hard to name them all.

Were there any challenging times?

Of course, but there were great learning moments through all of the challenges

Looking back, I can see three distinct phases of growth. In the beginning, I was dedicated to developing my style of cuisine; I call these my *self-centered* years. I was keenly focused on myself, my goals, and what I wanted to achieve. I was not a good chef then—a chef is so much more. Shortly after passing the CMC exam in October 2010, I recognized that I needed to become a better chef, team leader, and mentor. The last 15 years provided plenty of opportunities to refine myself in this way.

Managing a team through the Great Recession was one of my most challenging professional experiences. I would also note the challenges of growth that CCD experienced as the Club committed to the successful Phase I and II projects.

I credit Messrs Roney, Ottaway, and Cutler as professional mentors outside the kitchen. I've learned so much about business development, project management, the importance of details, and presenting to professionals; I've been challenged daily to dive into our vision, mission, and operational standards. To-