

A photograph of Alex Campbell, founder of SavorWe, smiling warmly. He is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and is seated at a table. In front of him is a wooden cutting board with a red apple, a knife, and some green vegetables. The background is a softly blurred kitchen setting.

GRAB YOUR PLATE!

Alex Campbell is the founder of SavorWe, a new, affordable way to entertain by bringing top chefs to your home for elegantly prepared meals by using a mobile app.

By **LISA STAMOS** | Photography by **LINDA M. BARRETT**

Alex Campbell is the founder of SavorWe.

Chef Ana Haux sautés gnocchi in butter for a SavorWe meal. Haux worked at Spiaggia with former Executive Chef Joe Flamm, who won Bravo's "Top Chef" in March 2018. She later worked for Stephanie Izard, Chicago-based chef and TV personality who was the first female to win "Top Chef".



Alex Campbell has followed his passion and instincts to create an exciting new entertaining and dining experience. Campbell grew up in Barrington, attending Saint Anne Parish School and Saint Viator High School. After graduating from Marquette University, he landed a job at Accenture. Soon after, something he read about morphed into what might be the idea of his lifetime.

"I believe we are onto something truly unique here," Campbell said. "When I speak with customers and investors alike, they all are excited about this novel, well-developed idea for in-home, personalized dining. Don't take my word for it. Download the app, book your first experience and see for yourself. It is so wonderfully simple. Your Kitchen—Our Chef!"

We caught up with Alex to learn about how he created his company, and how he plans to make it sustainable.

You mentioned that your mom is a wonderful cook. What did you learn from her that is still with you today, and possibly influences your new venture?

My mother is an AMAZING cook! I learned how to be patiently persistent when it comes to creating something new. The first time you create a new dish it might not turn out exactly how you envisioned it in your mind. However, you learn a few things and then can try again until you get what you envisioned down on the plate. Plus, you can incorporate the things you learned from the failures that occur along the way, and most of the time the outcome is even better than you can imagine. I hold a lot of this close to me as I go through this process of building a company from the ground up. If you don't get it right the first time, just remember to be patient and keep on trying. Every day there are new challenges, and that motto helps me.

Did she teach you molecular gastronomy?

I'm self-taught for these techniques. Molecular gastronomy focuses on the mechanisms of transformation that occur during the culinary processes. In other words, it is the incorporation of science and new techniques in the preparation, transformation, and artistic presentation of food. A good example of this would be something that looks like a strawberry on your plate, but tastes like a roasted tomato.



Chef Ana Haux sautés scallops in butter which will be the centerpiece of a salad with Brussels sprouts, apples, and a cauliflower purée.



Chef Ana Haux creates a Surf and Turf entrée.

You were studying for dual majors at Marquette University in Milwaukee, in entrepreneurship and finance. Did you plan to one day have a business of your own?

Yes, starting a business of my own has always been the end goal. Ever since I was little, I was always thinking of new ideas to create. At Marquette, I started a company my senior year called CliquePic. We were recreating events within a virtual 3D view with pictures from FB albums that were stitched together based on time and location. Users could view different perspectives and times of a party or event they attended and relive those moments. Think of Google Earth street view, but instead of cars and buildings, it was an actual party you were at.

SavorWe launched in December 2020. Did your business vision start with your in-home cooking for friends?

My business vision started on a trip home from Thailand in 2018. I read an article about a guy doing dinner parties in New York and realized there was a market for an app to connect customers with these underground supper clubs. I decided to leave my job at Accenture after returning to Chicago to run with that idea. That eventually evolved into in-home cooking classes, which I taught for friends out of my apartment. From there people asked me to cook dinner for them and that's where I had the "ah ha" moment to create this platform that connects customers with local chefs in their city to create unique in-home dining experiences.

What role did the 1871 incubator program play in your approach to building SavorWe?

1871 has provided valuable resources that I have been able to leverage into

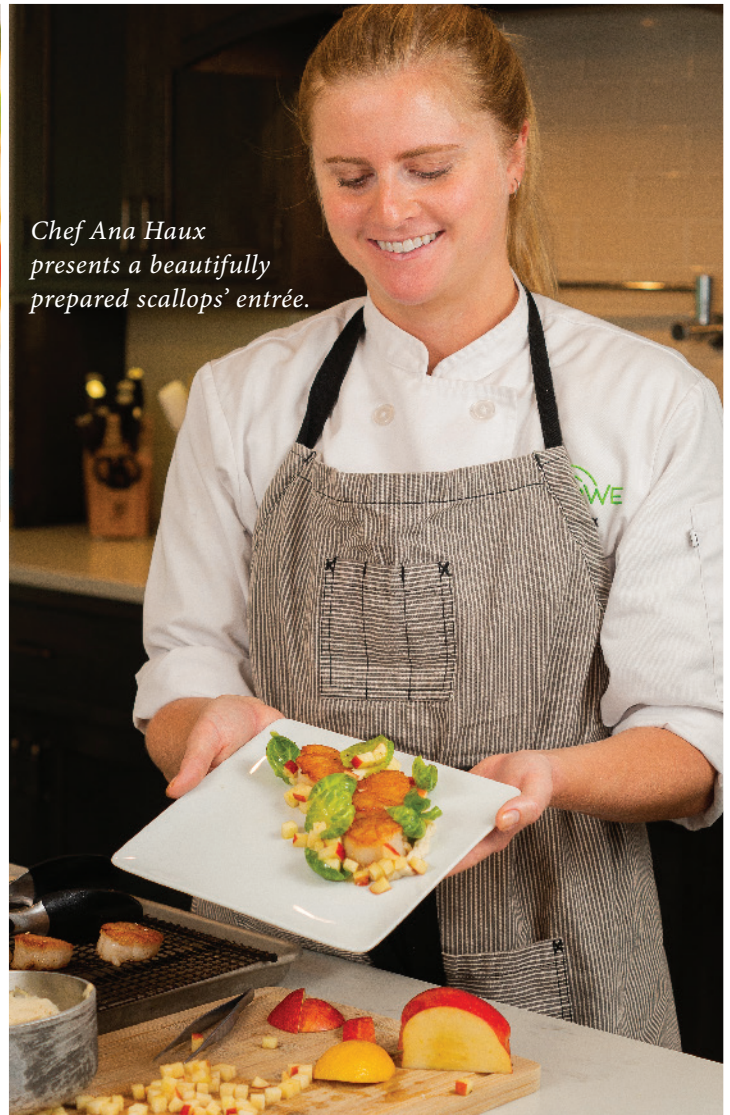
building SavorWe. It is a great community with like-minded individuals, so you are always feeding off that energy.

How did you gain traction and what tools did you use to start automating this process?

We have gained traction through our marketing efforts of SavorWe. We ran TV ads in Chicago and have done a lot of digital, social, and out of home marketing. Originally, we were running this company off email, and I found a great development shop out in Rolling Meadows called iCodice to automate the whole process. My background from Accenture helped me understand the development and rollout process.

Tell us about how FoodBytes got started and how it will help your business and customer service?

FoodBytes is a 'recommendation technology' like the cutting-edge recommendation engines in use at Amazon, Netflix, and others. We can basically take a list of ingredients from a menu and based on personal customer preferences, provide our customers menu choices that accentuate the things they most like in a meal. We also can create entirely new menus based upon an artificial intelligence (AI) engine we are currently finalizing. We continue to hone this engine to allow customers a chance to "venture out" and perhaps pick a menu they might have not ever tried, but based upon our analytics engine, we believe they would thoroughly enjoy. Our goal of this engine is to be able to insert menu ingredients, the way the menu is prepared, and be able to predict the actual "tastes" in the menu without a human ever making the recipes. This will allow us to truly customize meals for our customers in a way that has never been possible before. We are in the process of gaining patent protection on FoodBytes.



Chef Ana Haux presents a beautifully prepared scallops' entrée.

Can you talk about the PaaS model for the Chicago restaurant industry?

Our current business model and focus is a direct-to-consumer model, but we have also been developing a PaaS (Platform as a Service) model for the restaurant industry. The idea behind the PaaS model is that we would be able to allow restaurants a way to extend their brand into the home. Basically, a known restaurant brand such as Gibsons could offer an in-home experience with one of their restaurant trained chefs or ours. It allows restaurants to capture another reservation, and not have their customer's food arrive to their home in take-out containers.

What do you see as the epitome of excellent customer service for your clientele as well as your large group of chefs?

Excellent customer service is when our chefs create a wonderful meal in your home while being extremely friendly and hospitable to the group. We also make sure that your kitchen is cleaner than how we found it. Ideally, we want you to enjoy your meal so much that you recommend SavorWe to family and friends.

What skills or abilities do you look for in your chefs?

Our chefs are held to a high standard regardless of how they learned how to cook. Our chefs must have strong social skills, the ability and passion to cook amazing meals, be able to teach any menu to a customer that they prepare, and most importantly, create an experience that allows people to come together at the table.

Do your chefs make the menus?

Every chef creates their own menus for the app. Each menu is reviewed and approved by me before they make it onto the app.

You mentioned that COVID helped to drive people back into their homes for meals. Do you think this trend will stick in the years ahead?

I do. COVID is a tailwind for this company and for the future of dining. Restaurants will always be around, but you saw a huge spike in home renovations because that is where people started spending most of their time. Dinner parties are back and SavorWe is the new way to host them.

Where do you see your business in the future?

I see our business as the platform you go to for any culinary experience that you need in the home. Whether it is a dinner party, meal prep, long-term private chef, or a chef for a boat, we will be go-to platform.

How does your app work?

Our process is simple—download our app, browse our menus, choose your menu, add the number of guests and your desired date and time, list any allergies or dietary restrictions, and pay to complete your booking. Voila! Within minutes, you have booked a one-of-a-kind, customized culinary experience.

What is your advice for other entrepreneurs who are thinking of starting a business?

There is a quote that my father put on a plaque for me before I went to college. It reads, "What would you do if you knew you could not fail?" The answer that I always have when I read that is "anything." You can do anything you put your mind to. All you need to do is jump into the deep end. I promise you will be able to swim.

What is your favorite SavorWe chef's meal?

I absolutely love Chef Ana's four-course Surf and Turf, Chef Mea's French Fusion, and Chef Alex's Hearty Asian Feast. U

To learn more about SavorWe, visit savorwe.com.

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