

# GASTON ALIVE

MAGAZINE

HOME | GARDEN

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## Meet Leeth Davis Artist, Pilot, Family Man

p6

Glenn's Stuffed Pork Tenderloin p10

Gastonia's Lavender Farm p12



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# FROM THE PUBLISHER

Years ago after finding myself newly single, I was looking to furnish my tiny apartment with the necessities. I was talking to my mom about this, and asked her where she bought bed linens and towels. She said that you buy sheets and towels at J. C. Pennys. And so I did.

But now it seems that Pennys is going away, in Gastonia at least. Sears was the first to go- they even sold their hallmark tool line Craftsman to Stanley Black & Decker. Notwithstanding Amazons' recent purchase of Whole Foods, it seems that old line retailers are struggling, even as online retailers expand.

Countering this is the growth in craft and artisanal cheeses, beers, (and lavender, see page 12), local boutiques and restaurants, and the fact that brick and mortar retail still accounts for the lion's share of consumer purchases.

After television was introduced, radio and books didn't go away. And with the advent of Amazon and the like, specialty retail and restaurants aren't going away either. Often one can actually complement the other. Please continue to support your local retailers and restaurants- they instill and sense of community and vibrancy that makes Gaston County a great place to live.

Happy fall!

David

featured this month

06

ARTIST, PILOT, FAMILY MAN



10

GLENN'S STUFFED PORK TENDERLOIN



12

CAROLINA LAVENDER



HOME | GARDEN | STYLE | FUN | FOOD | HAPPENINGS

# on the cover



Featured this month is Gaston Day graduate and Gastonia resident Leeth Davis. Leeth is a helicopter pilot, artist, craftsman, family man, and all around cool guy. For more see page 6. Cover shot taken on location by Rick Haithcox, cover graphic design by David James.

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GA|9|17

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# MEET LEETH DAVIS ARTIST, PILOT, FAMILY MAN

By David Hamrick

**GA: Leeth, let's start with family, school, etc.- are you from Gastonia?**

**Leeth:** Born and raised in Gastonia, I went to Gaston Day pre-k -12th, Then to Lees McRae for college. I studied art and design there. After college I moved to Portland OR for flight school. My wife and I lived there for about 5 years before moving back to Gastonia to start our family. I have an amazing wife, Emily and two beautiful children, Beckett and Josephine.

**GA: I know your "day job" is as a helicopter pilot-how did that come about?**

**Leeth:** I work a 12/12 day schedule flying, so it's a job, but not my "day job" I give each an equal amount of attention and pride. When im home on my 12 off I focus on my art and business, when im on the road on my 12 on, I focus on being a pilot. Gotta keep the balance ya know?

I knew from a young age that an office job was not going to suit me. I remember always wanting to fly helicopters, just not having a solid direction on how to make it a reality. (that was before google and the internet) While working as a volunteer fireman in Banner Elk while in college, I had the opportunity to work directly with the medical helicopter out of Johnson City, TN. After talking with one of the pilots there the fire was lit and I was on my way. The rest is history.

**GA: Do you consider yourself an artist or a craftsman, or both?**

**Leeth:** I'm always reluctant to call myself anything. I enjoy creating things that I am able to put my own style and expression into. Each process of the creation deserves attention and detail. The ride is as important as the destination. Enjoy the ride.



**GA: How did you get started as an artist/craftsman?**

**Leeth:** When I was 13 or so I started working for my dad in the family construction business. There was an old junk stick welder in the shop there that I taught myself to weld with. I started repairing equipment, building ramps for trailers, basic fabrication, things like that. After becoming interested in art in high school the two kind of came together. Since then I have tried to learn and apply as much as I can about creating things.

**GA: Have any local artists been influential in your development?**

**Leeth:** I was lucky enough, (although I wish I was mature enough to appreciate it more back then), to have Curt Butler as an art teacher in high school. He was and still is very supportive and motivating. The guy has forgotten more about art than Ill ever learn, but it's nice to have him as a friend and try to learn as much as he is willing to offer.



Chris Boone is a local Chef and owner/operator of Luna Hombre in Belmont. He was one of the first people to commission me to do work. I made him some custom tap handles and signs to display beer offerings in his restaurant. He has since commissioned several more pieces and has been super supportive along the way. The way he holds the quality and standards of his work in such high regard motivates me to do the same. There is a reason why you will never have a bad meal or experience there.



**GA: What is your favorite media to work with?**

**Leeth:** Metal, for sure. Wood is a close second.

**GA: Tell us about an interesting upcoming project...**

**Leeth:** I have a few exciting things in the works here. I am in the process now of making tap handles for York Chester Brewery's distribution beers. If you haven't tried their beer, do yourself a favor. I have a couple of large dining tables for client commissions in different stages of progress now. I should have them wrapped up by fall. I usually keep a sculpture or two going and just work on it (them) when I have the time. Not a whole lot of spare time here lately. Not a bad thing though.

**GA: Do you accept commissions?**

**Leeth:** Yes. That accounts for about 90% of my work. I like to create things for others based on their wishes and input while still being able to put my own style and detail into the piece. It's a really fun process. Once I make something in that way, unless the same client wants another one, its done for good. I wont recreate commission pieces for others. Although I will create something in the same spirit if there is a piece in my portfolio that a client likes.

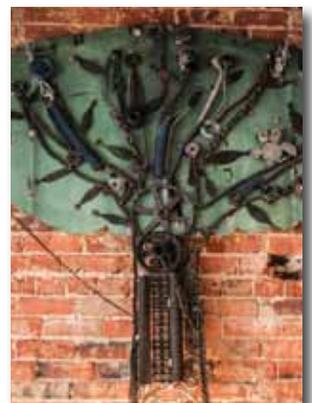


**GA: Tell us about the wood and resin tap handles-how were they made?**

**Leeth:** I was approached by York Chester about creating tap handles for them. They wanted something that would stand out and be unique without being obnoxious and big. I first ran the idea by them to use those materials and they were all for it. So it was a lot of trial and error to get to the point of a finished product that I was happy with. Once I came up with a process that worked, I made some molds, cast the ingredients in polyester resin, and had some nameplates cut out of stainless steel. I cut and polished the rough casting into the finished handle, installed the nameplate and a threaded insert on the bottom, and called it done.

**GA: Tell us about the tree sculpture at Luna Hombre in Belmont?**

**Leeth:** Chris asked me if I could make a piece that would replace a painting of his in his old restaurant The South Fork Deli. So the space that I had to work with was somewhat defined but a blank canvas nonetheless. He gave me 100% design freedom. That level of trust is pretty cool. For some reason that inspired me to make a tree out of old car and motorcycle parts. The body of the tree is old motorcycle chain with the links individually welded. The canopy is a hood from a '68 Chevelle original paint and all. That was a really fun build.



*>> Article continued online: [www.gastonalive.com](http://www.gastonalive.com)*

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# COOKING WITH GLENN

## SPINACH AND FETA STUFFED PORK

The odd weather of August has put me in the mood for fall. Well, actually I'm always ready for fall; I'm ready for soups, hot cider, pumpkins, jackets and comfort food. Even raking leaves is something I anticipate all year simply because of the beauty of the trees and the crisp in the air. Which leads me to this month's recipe, it's a bit more complicated than just grilling the pork loin but well worth the extra effort. Besides, who is going to grill when it's cold outside.

First, pork is the other white meat it pairs with lighter red wines or even nice a nice rose. It is a lean meat so you have to add fats to pork roasts. Cooked correctly pork is juicy and blending sage with it creates the flavors of fall.

So it may be a September recipe, but it could just as easily be a nice dinner through the rest of the year and even through winter. The balance of the salty feta cheese with the spinach offset by the sage and garlic is the key to this dish.

### INGREDIENTS:

- Pork Loin, I typically pick the one with two small loins in one pack and it would feed 4-6 people
- Feta cheese, ½ a cup per pound of pork
- Spinach, chopped 1 cup per pound of pork
- Fresh Sage, chiffonade 2 leaves per pound of pork
- Fresh Garlic, finely minced 1 clove per pound of pork
- One egg
- Salt & Pepper to taste
- Butcher twine

### Method:

Most people will think butterflying the pork is the hard part. It's actually straight forward; lay the pork on the cutting board, start a horizontal slice with a sharp knife about ½ inch from the bottom. Roll the tenderloin back and continue the slice creating a ½ thick pork 'steak'. If you're a visual learner there are several great video's online. At this point you can pound it some to flatten it if your cuts are a bit uneven. Lay a piece of plastic over the butterflied tenderloin so you don't splatter.

Mix the rest of the ingredients in a bowl then spread on the butterflied loin. With the two pack of tenderloins I butterfly both then lay the second over the first creating a sandwich of the filling. Roll the loin as tightly as you can, then use the twine to tie it every two inches starting a half inch in from the end / ending a half inch in from the other end to seal the filling inside the pork.

I cook the pork in a pan large enough to add some carrots, onions and potatoes, at 350 degrees for 20-30 min per pound. I cover it for the first half of the cooking time, then uncover it to brown for the second half. If you drain out any drippings from this pan it can make a great sauce to put over the pork. Don't over cook, internal temperature should be 145 degrees.

Slice the pork, and serve over the veggies as a single dish meal.

Options on this recipe, replace the spinach with apple, use goat cheese vs. feta.

Till next time, Make it Your Own.  
Glenn



### IS IT DONE?

The biggest problem with pork is people generally over cook it. Over done pork is dry, tough, unappealing, in-edible balsa wood. Most people think you need to cook pork to prevent being infection from Trichina worms, but the fact is there are only 20 cases of Trichinosis per year in the U.S. By comparison 30 people die from lightning strikes per year in the U.S. (and that represents only 10% of the people struck)

Some fear of pork stems back to religious beliefs and others general bias against pigs simply being unclean. If you do research, or grow up on a farm you find out pigs are one of the cleanest farm animals. As well as one of the leanest meats we can eat.

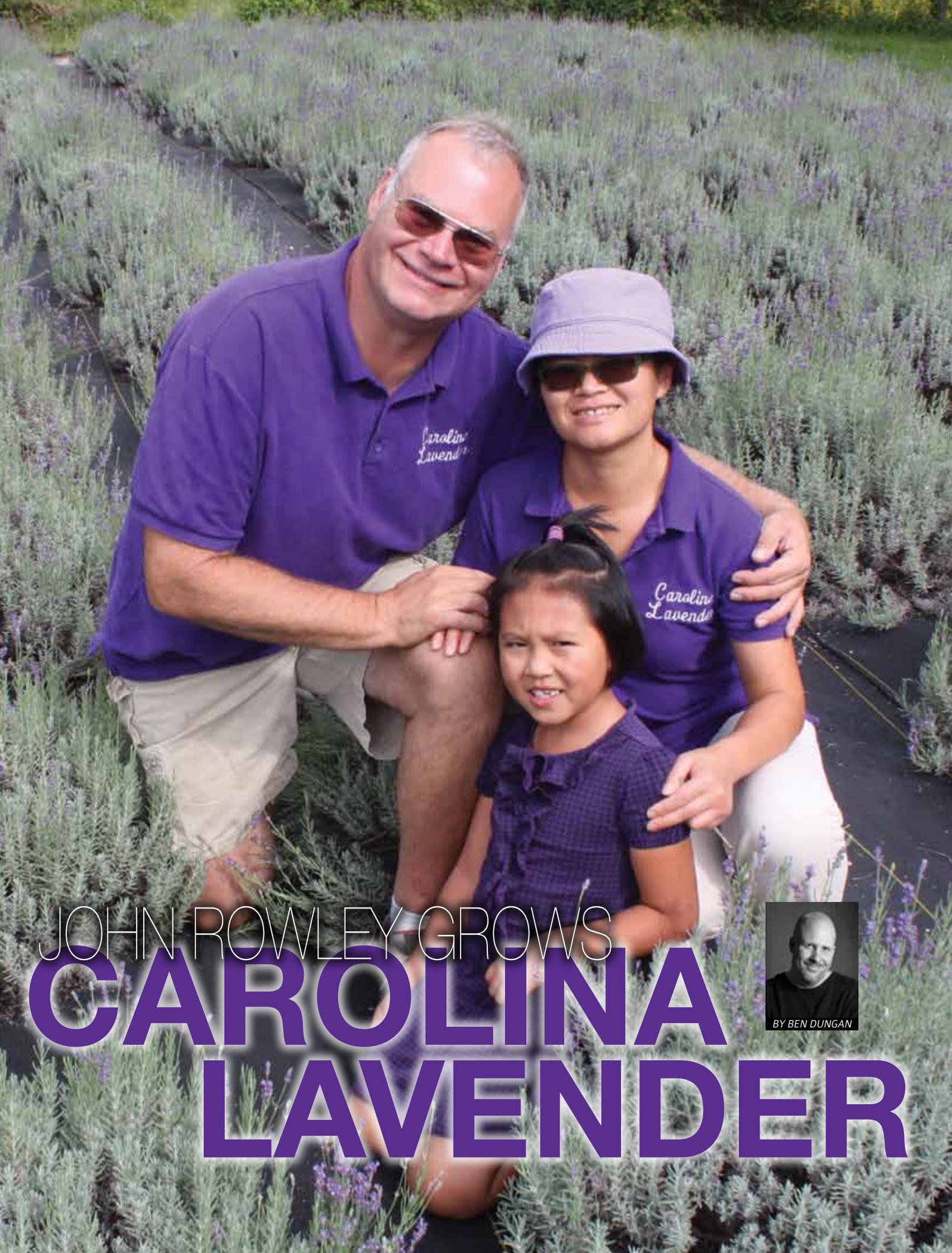
The right way to cook pork is to a lovey very light pink color, it should be cooked to 145 degrees according to USDA guidelines then allowed to rest for three minutes.

The rule of thumb is treat pork just as you would a great steak or roast, cook it to a nice medium rare.

Follow me on Facebook to continue the culinary adventure.



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JOHN ROWLEY GROWS  
**CAROLINA  
LAVENDER**



BY BEN DUNGAN



Ask any kid what they want to be when they grow up, and you'll hear a common set of responses - police officer, teacher, doctor and lawyer - just to name a few.

What about a farmer? Farming sounds great at 9-years-old. It's like Dwight D. Eisenhower said many years ago: "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the

corn fields." When the bugs are biting, and the summer heat and humidity have worn you down, that doesn't sound mighty easy at all.

As kids, we are good at the what. We aren't so great at the why. At least not yet. That comes much later on, as life experience is acquired.

I wonder how a 9-year-old John Rowley would have answered that question. Would he have said farmer? Would he have ever thought he would one day be an actual farmer? That grows lavender?

Life is funny that way. The life we imagine in our heads rarely matches up with the one we end up with. And that's not a bad thing - it's just how it is.



One thing leads to another and the next thing you know, you're 59 years old and you own a lavender farm.

If I didn't know any better, I'd say John is passionate about farming. But more importantly, John is passionate about lavender. Not just about growing the plant, but about offering the best lavender-based products he can.

But this isn't a one-man show. John has enlisted his all-star team: his girlfriend, Sue, and her daughter, Joy. Collectively, they make up what is now known as Carolina Lavender.

Located in South Gastonia, the Carolina Lavender operation has been underway a little over a year. They currently grow five different varieties of lavender, some of which are grown for their oil production, while others are bred more for their ornamental or culinary qualities.

One thing you'll learn from John pretty quickly is that he embraces a good challenge. He's never owned a farm before. In fact, he had never driven a tractor before - that is, until he bought one. His time in the corporate world called for a lot of things, but I doubt it required tractor-driving skills.

Look up the words 'due diligence' in the dictionary, and a picture of John will be right beside it. He began looking into the idea of growing lavender in early 2015. After a solid year and a half of research, it was time to plant.

It's one thing to be passionate about what you do, but more importantly, I think it helps to not be afraid to make mistakes along the way. Many people

would find this venture quite daunting - maybe even impossible. Not to John and Sue. They didn't let inexperience and fear get in the way of achieving their dreams.

As a result, they've all become experts. They've had to - it's just the three of them. They are a true-to-life startup, making the most of what they have.

John refers to Sue as the "harvester-expert", while he thrives on those meticulous details that goes into operating a farm. Little Joy jumps in with both feet, soaking up everything she can while still lending a hand where needed.

The first full growing season is coming to an end, and they'll be making their second and final harvest of the season any day now. The hard work never ends. That's the one thing that caught John by surprise.

But it's truly a labor of love for John and Sue. It only takes one visit with them to realize this. Their satisfaction comes from not only making the best products they can, but interacting and connecting with their customers.

Those products can be found most Saturdays at the Charlotte Farmers Market. That's where you'll find their essential lavender oil, dried flowers, lavender-infused honey, and more. You can even grab a cup of refreshing lavender lemonade or lavender cranberry punch to quench your thirst.

Our nine-year-old selves aren't very good at predicting the future. But I do bet that today's 59-year-old John Rowley is doing what the nine-year-old John Rowley loved to do - and that's making a connection with people.

It just so happens that the people he connects with these days the most are the folks that are interested in all the beneficial things you can do with this little plant called lavender.

Whether it's on the farm, or at his booth at the Charlotte Farmers Market, John is passionate about spreading his love and passion for lavender. And it shows.

Some may say, that's his 'why'.



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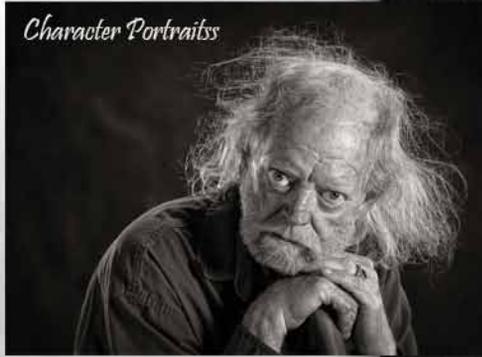
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2017 BEST OF GASTON "INVESTMENT FIRM" AWARD



## RETIRE(MEANT)<sup>TM</sup> FOR LIVING



Joseph Roop, Founder & Chief Investment Strategist

### From Founder & Chief Investment Officer Joe Pat Roop:

At Belmont Capital Advisors, we believe everyone deserves a retirement filled with health, wealth, and happiness – a **Retire(meant) for Living**. It is our mission to make this a reality for the community of Belmont and beyond. Of course, we can't do it alone.

That's why we'd like to thank our amazing clients. Without you, we wouldn't have been able to move into our new location at 123 N. Main Street. Without you, we wouldn't have been named the Best Investment Firm in Gaston. And without you, we wouldn't be able to serve this amazing community that we're so proud to call home. We know you had a number of choices when it came to choosing a financial advisor, and we are grateful you chose us.

Thanks again!

CALL US TODAY TO SCHEDULE A COMPLIMENTARY, NO-OBLIGATION CONSULTATION: 704.825.1560

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