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Meet Local Artist
Curt Butler
p10

The Glenns Improvise Lunch
p20

Evolving-The Mike Strauss Band
p15

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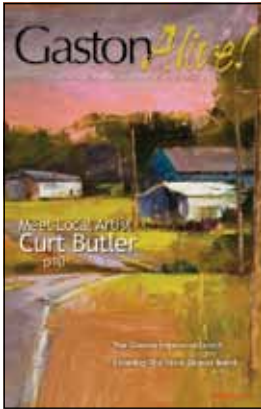
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about the cover



This month's cover is a detail of a painting called "Top Of The Hill" by local artist Curt Butler, see related story page 10. Curt is a local gallery owner, teacher, and working artist whose works are displayed in galleries all over the Southeast. Cover graphic design by David James.

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10



10
LOCAL ARTIST
CURT BUTLER

20



20
THE GLENN'S IMPROVISE
LUNCH

15



15
EVOLVING-THE MIKE
STRAUSS BAND



FROM THE PUBLISHER

About two years ago in this space I wrote about the importance of buying local. Many of you are already interested and involved in the 'eat local' movement which has to do with buying locally grown and produced foods. The benefits are many, but the biggest two may be fresher food for your family, and supporting your neighbors that grow and produce this food.

Closely aligned is the 'buy local' movement, which means buying from a local merchant, rather than a big box store. At Gaston Alive! we have had the pleasure of meeting hundreds of local entrepreneurs and business owners, and they are some of the most interesting, creative people you would ever hope to meet. But I have to admit, sometimes I get a blank stare when I talk about 'buy local' with some folks. Perhaps they never consciously considered doing business locally, or maybe they have a "cheaper at any cost" mentality, or they just like the convenience of big box stores. So what difference does where you shop actually make? To start with, it has been estimated that some 64 cents of every dollar spent at a locally owned business stays in the community compared with 43 cents of every dollar spent at a big-box or chain store. Want to improve the local economy? Spend your money with merchants that will in turn spend it here as well, rather than sending the profits back to corporate headquarters in Arkansas or New York.

Certainly we are not the originators of these ideas; there are many successful programs underway right here in North Carolina, one of which is the "Love Asheville, Buy Local" campaign, part of the (gotta love the name) Asheville Grown Business Alliance Unchained & Independent. Their mission is to support independently owned businesses in the community, to continue growing a vibrant local economy while preserving the unique character of Asheville, and to educate citizens on the critical importance of thinking locally first when considering the impact of national and global chains.

We are all consumers. None of us make all of our own clothes, grow our own food, or compound or own medicines. Buying local has to do with not only being a consumer, but doing it wisely and thoughtfully. Buying local asks you to think about how consumption affects the world around us, and choosing quality over quantity. Often cheaper at any price is just not worth the cost.

Help improve the economy right where you live, ensure the viability and variety of local small businesses, and make Gaston County a more interesting place to live, work and shop. Next time you go out to eat, go shopping for food, clothing, hardware or jewelry, I hope you'll consider buying local.

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David

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W

e're talking today with Curt Butler, celebrated North Carolina artist and owner of Butler Studio in downtown Gastonia.

GA!: Curt- tell us a little about yourself.

Curt: I am a full time artist and have a studio/gallery/master class facility in downtown Gastonia where my wife and I have lived for the last 12 years. I used to work in Charlotte and she worked in Shelby. We literally looked on a map and thought Gastonia seemed like a great midway point for both of us to commute to work. We fell in love with the people and have called this home even though we have both moved on from those original jobs.

GA!: What does it mean to be a full time artist and how does it work?

Curt: I think being a full time artist means that you are committed to producing work on a regular basis for various galleries, commissions and corporate clients. On average I would say I produce between 90 to 120 paintings a year with the above clients in mind. Galleries take a percentage of the total cost of the work which means that they represent you in trying to further your career. That percentage covers storage, PR, mailings, client lists and cost of regular shows at their gallery.

GA!: You have work in galleries all over the Southeast and beyond?

Curt: I currently have six galleries including my own mostly in the Southeast and one in Columbus Ohio. Most recently, the Wells Gallery in Charleston , SC.

GA!: With representation in Charleston how does Gastonia stack up?

Curt: I always tell fellow artists that Gastonia is a great place to work out of because you can produce your work in Gastonia at a low cost studio and drive it to Charlotte, Asheville, Charleston, Wilmington or Atlanta. All of those locations are within 3 to 4 hours away from Gastonia.

GA!: Tell me about classes and your gallery here in Gastonia. It seems like you have three areas of your business.

Curt: When I started Butler Studio in 2006, I wanted to have a gallery and have big shows at least four times a year as well as paint full time in the gallery. In 2008, I was fortunate enough to rent an additional 400 sq. ft down the hall and start adult oil painting classes. I teach five classes a week.

GA!: How did you find your current location in downtown Gastonia and how has it worked out for you there?

Curt: I think artists typically gravitate towards downtowns and particularly buildings that have character. The Merit building has beautiful original oak beams with plaster and brick walls. When I first walked in I thought, "Wow", a New York style loft in downtown Gastonia. In terms of development, downtown Gastonia is on the tipping point. I really believe when the recession is over, downtown Gastonia will become another Belmont or Greenville with multiple restaurants and cultural venues.



Artist At Work

By David Hamrick



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MUSIC



by Ben Dungan
bdungan@charter.net

MIKE STRAUSS BAND

I was first introduced to Mike Strauss back in the early part of the 2000s. Back then, he was the lead guitarist in a six-piece band called The Dickens. Mike wasn't a flashy player, nor was he supposed to be. In this musical configuration, he played his role perfectly.



Photo by Daniel Coston.

Around this same time, Mike began to take more of a leadership role in other bands in the Charlotte area. He formed a band called The Beat Dukes as well as also started playing

with two others in town performing under name Lilley, Strauss, and Schigoda.

But then in 2003, something changed - Mike went solo. He released his debut album, *Gone Electric*. As a result, his profile within the local music community was elevated. And as more people heard his album, he began to assert himself as a not just a role player in the Charlotte music scene, but as a major player in town.

And he hasn't slowed since that time. Mike has continued to write and record music. But in the last few years, Mike has really embraced the concept of a band again. In fact, his last two albums have been released under the banner of the Mike Strauss Band.

And as I write this today, Mike has a total of seven members in his band, including himself.

Songwriting can seem like a solitary process at times, but I get the sense that putting songs together with other like-minded individuals is where the magic happens. Why else would one add six members to his/her band?

Can you imagine the logistical and personality issues one would have to juggle with that many people working together? But for Mike, it works.

Mike has this innate ability to craft, create, and arrange the songs he writes. One listen to his latest release, *Crooked Road*, and you will hear horns, fiddles, and my favorite instrument, the lap steel guitar.

It seems Mike has all of the pieces in place for his band. And the funny thing is, he never set out to find a full band. It just happened organically.

Sometimes life hands us a wave we weren't planning to catch. Sounds like to me this is a wave Mike Strauss and the members of his band plan to ride as long as they can.



Photo by Daniel Coston.

The Mike Strauss Trio will be performing a free concert at the main branch of the Gaston County Public Library on Thursday, March 29 at 7:00 p.m. For more information on Mike Strauss and to hear audio samples of his music, visit him online at MikeStrauss.net.



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>>Article continued from page 10.

GA!: We know that ArtSpace is the largest non profit art organization in the country and they are interested in Gastonia. You have been active in bring ArtSpace to fruition...

Curt: Yes, from the start, I have told everyone who will listen that ArtSpace alone could be the tipping point that downtown Gastonia needs to reinvent our downtown. I have served on the ArtSpace Committee as well as both committees that have brought two public sculptures to Main St.

GA!: If ArtSpace were to come to Gastonia, what would that mean to you?

Curt: It would mean that I would have to consider having gallery shows once a month instead of four times a year. ArtSpace would add 50 plus artists to the downtown scene each with their own craft or medium. That alone would bring culture and a regular art crawl to our downtown. With most of the retail on Franklin, I believe that downtown could become an arts district with unique restaurants and speciality shops.

GA!: What is your highest accolade as an artist to date?

Curt: I just had a painting that was sold to the new Duke Cancer Center as part of their permanent collection. As an artist, that feels great to have that recognition, but also to know that your work will outlive you and be represented there for a long, long time.



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COOKING



Saturday Lunch Craving

This past Saturday I was at home (which is rare for me) for lunch. I was not feeling like eating the normal lunch items, and began rummaging through the pantry and refrigerator to find something to make. Lo and behold! All I needed was there! I was shocked, that there was no need to run out and buy any ingredients. The items I pulled out fit my craving for something fresh, a little healthy and that would fit with a nice glass of white wine, which was open in the refrigerator. This meal can be made for breakfast, lunch or brunch, and even a nice light dinner. It only feeds two, so if you want to serve more you should double this.

Recipe:

1 piece of Defrosted Puff Pastry (I had one in the freezer and used the microwave – I don't suggest that you do that)

2 Eggs Beaten with a Tablespoon of Milk

½ Cup Shredded Cheese (Choose your Favorite – I like Norwegian Jarlesburg)

½ Cup Pre-Cooked Vegetables (I had left over Broccoli and Spinach – Mushrooms would have been great also)

Feel free to add other items. If I had cooked bacon or some Prosciutto I would have added it. Like I said you can be as creative as you want, just think of those meats and vegetables that go well together.

Process

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Use a baking sheet and slightly roll out the defrosted Puff Pastry. Fold in the about ½ inch of the puff pastry to keep the ingredients from running out. Slightly prick the pastry so it does not puff up too much during baking. Pour in the egg mixture, sprinkle the vegetables, meat if using and cheese over top.

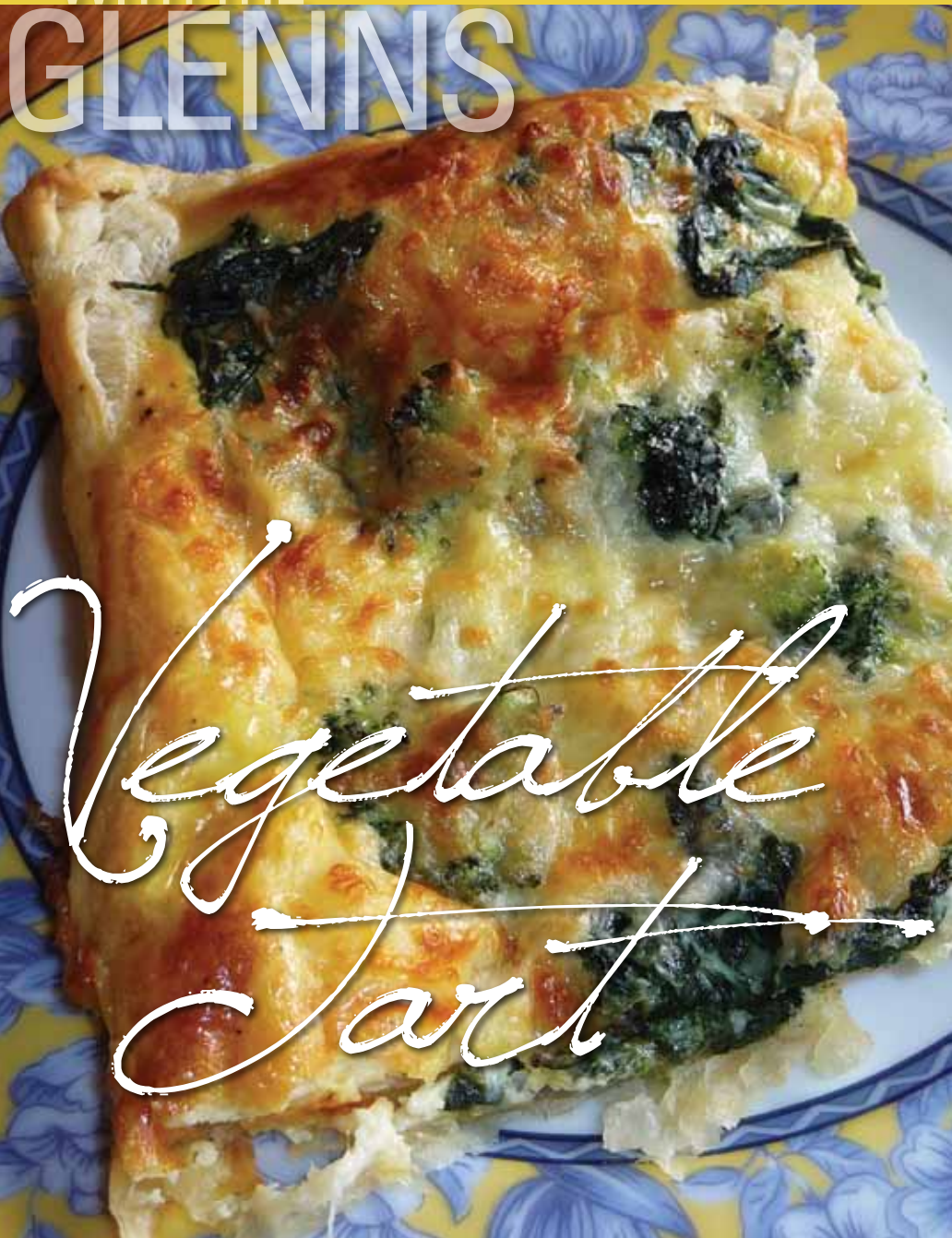
Place on the center rack. Keep an eye on your pastry if it starts to puff up too much and looks like the ingredients may run off, pop the air bubble. Bake for 15-20 minutes until pastry puffs and turns golden. Remove from oven (it will deflate).

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