MOUNTAIN PROJECTS

# Newsletter

**Spring, 2025**

## A Fond and Grateful Farewell

*Dear Friends of Mountain Projects,*



*Patsy Davis*

After three and a half decades of service with Mountain Projects, I retire this summer, and I find myself reflecting with an **unsettled heart and a hopeful spirit** on the incredible strength and compassion of the communities we serve.

I've seen our mountain towns pull together time and again—**through floods, economic downturns, and everyday challenges**—to lift up those who need a hand.

**The future of many of the federally funded programs our community depends on is uncertain.** Right now, we don't know what lies ahead for Head Start, LIHEAP (Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program), Get Covered WNC, Section 8 housing, or the Healthy Opportunities Pilot. These are programs that help our neighbors keep their homes warm in the winter, find safe places to live, access food and health care, and give their children a strong start in life. **Without them, the safety net frays—and for some, it disappears entirely.**

**This uncertainty is real, but is not the entire story.**

**Here's what keeps me going: you.** When disaster struck and our community experienced historic floods, you gave. When neighbors faced eviction or couldn't afford medications, you gave. When a senior's only source of heat failed in the middle of winter, you gave. And because of your gifts—large and small—we met those needs. **Together, we've built bridges of hope that no funding threat can tear down.**

Your generosity has provided emergency shelter, replaced appliances, stocked food pantries, filled gas tanks, covered unexpected medical bills, and brought light to the darkest moments. **That's the Mountain Projects way: we care for each other.**

As I step away, I do so with faith in our staff (especially Si Simmons, my capable replacement), our board, our community—and in you. I ask that if you are able, please consider making a donation. **Your gift will help us continue responding to unmet needs, especially as funding sources hang in the balance.**

It's hard to say goodbye, but I know I leave this organization in good hands—with leaders who are smart, grounded, and deeply committed. **And I know the heart of this community is stronger than any policy change or funding gap.**

Thank you for allowing me to serve you for all these years. Thank you for your love, your belief in Mountain Projects, and your continued support.

Wishing you and your family abundance and joy,

Patsy A. Davis

*Executive Director*
*pdavis@mountainprojects.org*



## New Homes at Bethel Village

Self-help housing is a USDA program that includes homeowners in the construction process. Typically, the owners provide 65% of the labor required to build the homes.

Josh and Monica Matthews are owners of one of our three new Self Help houses in Bethel Village, off Jonathan Creek in Waynesville.

## A Note About Funding

Funding scenarios in the proposed budget in Washington, along with corresponding actions on the state level, are serious threats to many of our programs.

As you read through, please note dots associated with certain stories. A blue dot means the programs mentioned are underfunded, orange means threatened, and when you see a red dot, funds and/or programming have been eliminated.

Our donors may specify which programs they'd like to support.

- **Underfunded**
- **Threatened**
- **Defunded or cut**

# Housing Snapshots: Whatever the Circumstance, Mountain Projects Helps Clients Find Homes

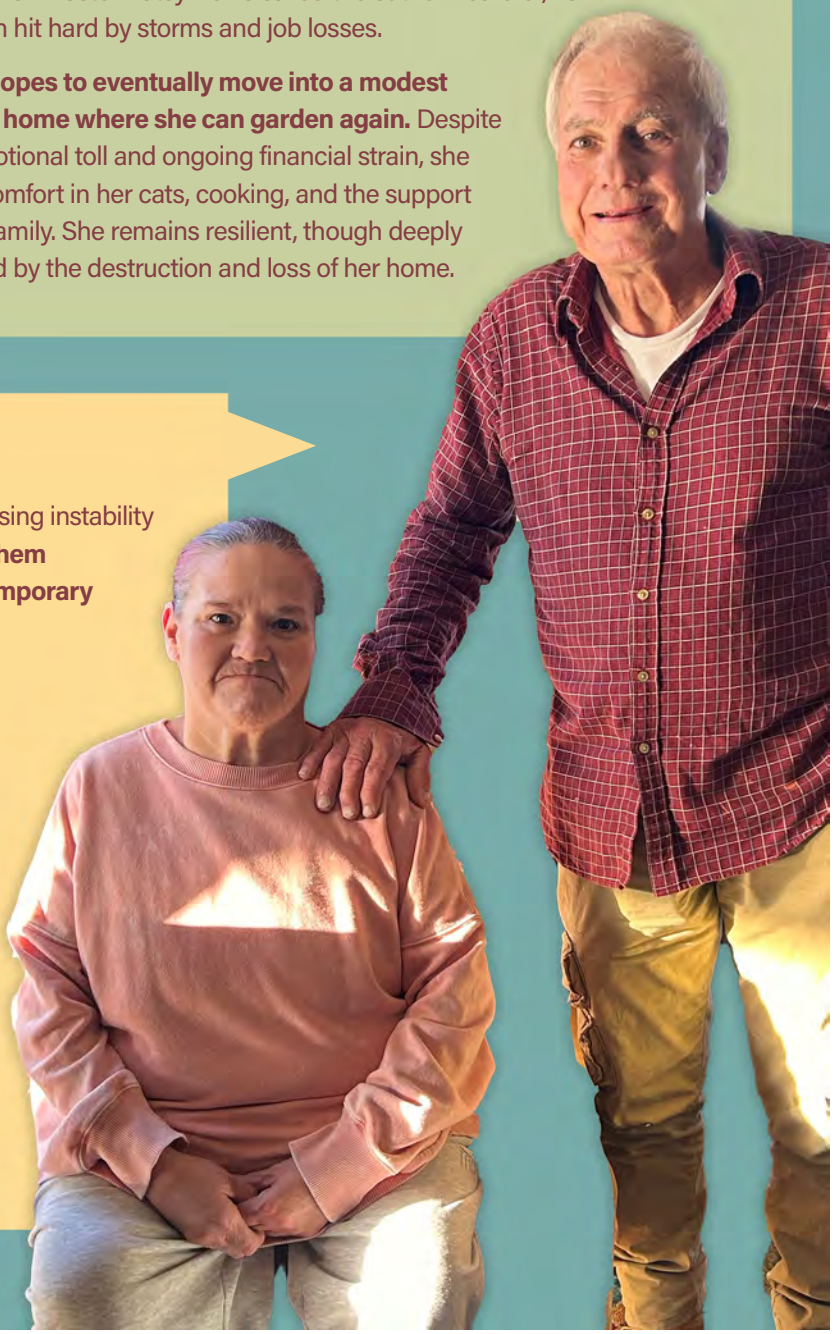


## "Clyde is Home." Life After Hurricane Helene

At 81, Betty Rathbone is **starting over after Hurricane Helene** destroyed her longtime home in Clyde in 2024. She lived on Broad Street for 20 years and worked to make it beautiful, but the storm forced her and her grandson to flee. Now, she's paying $1,300 a month for a small temporary rental—draining her savings—and is **struggling to find affordable housing.**

Like many in Haywood County, **Betty is on a waiting list for a Section 8** voucher through Mountain Projects, but **a shortage of rental units and a recent federal cut of 200 vouchers** has made help harder to come by. Executive Director Patsy Davis called the cut "unheard of," for a region hit hard by storms and job losses.

**Betty hopes to eventually move into a modest mobile home where she can garden again.** Despite the emotional toll and ongoing financial strain, she finds comfort in her cats, cooking, and the support of her family. She remains resilient, though deeply affected by the destruction and loss of her home.



## Nowhere to go: Travis and Dora's Story

Travis Hobbs, 70, and his wife Dora, 53, have faced housing instability since an **electrical fire destroyed their RV, leaving them homeless.** Mountain Projects was able to **provide temporary housing** while they searched for another home.

Though Travis receives Social Security and Dora has income, the couple struggled to find affordable permanent housing in western North Carolina, and their situation reflects a housing crisis in the region. A 2024 community survey found **43% of residents worry about paying rent or mortgage,** and nearly **8% have experienced homelessness** in recent years.

Mountain Projects is one of several organizations working to address this, managing a Section 8 Rental Assistance program which **serves 900 families through 700 landlords** in Haywood and Jackson Counties. The program injects $4.4 million annually into the local economy. Still, over 500 families remain on the waiting list.



*Jill Stevens (and Ruthie) are participants in our Self Help Housing program. To keep costs within her budget Jill is helping build her own home.*

## Jill's Journey to Homeownership

Jill Stevens, a 27-year-old from Clyde, is on her way to becoming a homeowner through **Mountain Projects' Self-Help Housing** Program. As a single-income earner working in Asheville, Jill found traditional homeownership out of reach—until she joined the program, which helps low-to-moderate-income individuals build and finance their own homes through a USDA mortgage.

With the support of Mountain Projects, Jill is working toward homeownership by contributing sweat equity, a key aspect of the program. She's excited to bring her long-held decorating dreams to life and to share the home with her dog, Ruthie, and cat, Titan.

Applicants like Jill must **meet income, credit, and work hour requirements to qualify.** Jill emphasizes the value of the opportunity, encouraging others to apply if they're committed and in need of affordable housing. Her journey highlights how hard work and community support can turn the dream of owning a home into a reality.

**For more information about our Self Help Housing program through the Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership, contact Maggie Leftwich, SMHP Manager, at 828.452.1447**

# Mountain Projects Seeks Organizational Partners for Homes for Hope Initiative




CALL TO ACTION: Mountain Projects is **calling on local nonprofits, faith-based groups**, civic organizations, businesses, and community leaders to join a growing coalition for its Homes for Hope initiative—an ambitious, **community-driven response to the housing crisis in Western North Carolina.**

Homes for Hope is designed **to provide safe, affordable, and stable housing for families and individuals who are experiencing housing insecurity** as a result of flood events in Western North Carolina.

"Mountain Projects has land in Bethel Village in Waynesville, reserved for families focused on flood recovery," said Deputy Director, Si Simmons.

"Homes for Hope is a **call to action** for our entire community to come together to **build replacement housing. We're looking for mission-aligned partners** who want to re-establish these families in safe housing."

## Seeking Partners

Mountain Projects **invites businesses and organizations to get involved** in ways that match their expertise and capacity.

Organizations that join the Homes for Hope partnership will play a primary role in home construction, from conception to completion. Interested organizations are encouraged to reach out to explore partnership opportunities.

**For more information or to express interest, please contact:**
**Si Simmons**
**Deputy Director**
**Mountain Projects, Inc.**
**T. 828-452-1447**
**E. ssimmons@mountainprojects.org**

# Mountain Projects' Senior Services Provide Wide-Ranging and Critical Support

*Mountain Projects provides a wide variety of services to help meet the needs of our growing senior population. These programs include congregate nutrition centers for meals and socialization, in-home aides and companion services.*

*Other services, coordinated at the **Haywood Senior Resource Center**, are designed to **equip and empower** older adults to live in their own homes as long as they wish, and to do so safely, through community resources and collaborations.*




*Mountain Projects In-Home Aide Roberta Houston, shown here with client Roger Moody, was recently honored with the "Essential Piece" award by the North Carolina Community Action Association for her 18 years of work in senior services.*

## In-Home Aides Provide Lifeline for Low-Income Seniors

For Roger Moody, 74, who lives with **partial blindness caused by hemianopia,** everyday tasks like doing laundry or preparing meals are nearly impossible without help. Fortunately, he receives regular assistance through **Mountain Projects' In-Home Aide Program** - a lifeline for many low-income seniors across Haywood County.

Each week, Roberta Houston, an in-home aide with Mountain Projects for nearly two decades, visits Moody's apartment at The Towers in Waynesville. She **helps** with household chores, ensures his food and clothes are accessible, and—most importantly—provides companionship.

"They feel like they're part of your family," Houston said while scrubbing Moody's stovetop.

Moody, who describes Houston as his "Energizer Bunny," said the two have built a close bond. "You'd think she's a teenager, the way she darts around," he joked. "She even brought me ramps from her garden."

Houston is one of just six part-time aides employed by Mountain Projects' Senior Services—a number that falls far short of meeting the growing demand.

"We currently have about 75 seniors on our waiting list," said Darlene McElrath, Senior Services Coordinator. "**We simply don't have the funding or staff to help them all.** For many of our clients, their aide is the only person they see all week."

**Each aide serves up to four clients a day.** Two of the six also staff the county's senior nutrition sites in Waynesville and Maggie Valley, further stretching their time and resources.

"It's a hard job," McElrath acknowledged. "And our aides are holding this program together with sheer dedication and heart. **We receive one pot of money from the state each July, and we have to make it last all year."**

In addition to staffing and funding shortages, another pressing issue is the lack of a senior center in Canton. The town's former location at the Canton Armory is no longer viable due to flood risk. High Street Baptist Church temporarily housed the program, but that arrangement has since ended.

McElrath said they are actively searching for a new site that includes both a kitchen and a bathroom, which would allow them to resume services in Canton similar to those offered in Waynesville and Maggie Valley—hot weekday lunches and social activities like bingo.

"We know there are a lot of seniors in Canton who would benefit from having a location there," McElrath said. "But like everything else, it comes down to space and funding."

Mountain Projects anticipates that the need for in-home aides will continue to grow in Haywood County. Executive Director Patsy Davis explained, **"The 55+ population is larger than the North Carolina average. Over the last two decades, this age group has grown to comprise 25.6% of the county's residents."** She added, "Did you know the percentage of children under 5 years old has decreased? Without increased support, many older adults will be isolated and struggle to manage their daily lives."

To learn more about how you can support Mountain Projects' In-Home Aide Program, contact Darlene McElrath, Senior Services Coordinator, at 828-356-2838 or via email at dmcelrath@mountainprojects.org.

# Head Start: A Legacy of Education

For six decades, Head Start has been more than a program—it's been a promise to provide every child with the foundation to thrive. **Head Start provides comprehensive early learning, health, nutrition, and family support services, ensuring that every child, regardless of their circumstances at birth, has the opportunity to succeed in school and life.**

An invaluable resource in Haywood and Jackson Counties, the program employs 50 teachers and staff members and serves 177 children ages 6-month old, up to pre-kindergarten.

Head Start funding is under threat in the next federal budget.

Do you have a Head Start story to share? Mountain Projects is encouraging our alumni and their families to share their memories and stories of how the program and its services have supported their life goals and achievements.

*"I've worked for Head Start for 30 years and I can attest to the powerful results of this program that have improved the lives of many children and families in Haywood and Jackson Counties."*

*– Christie Paxton, Head Start Director*

*In May, our five Head Start Centers in Haywood and Jackson Counties held graduation ceremonies. Here, Head Start Director Christie Paxton meets a graduate on his level to award a diploma. Mountain Projects has administered Head Start in our area since 1965.*







*Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP) Care Services Coordinator Patricia Hoyle, staff member Avery Messer and Coordinator Christy Mosteller*

# Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP) Making A Big Impact in WNC

Mountain Projects is one of more than 60 WNC human service organizations participating in the Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP) since 2022. The program has **delivered real, measurable improvements** in the lives of thousands of Western North Carolina residents.

Through this innovative Medicaid-funded program, more than **10,000 people** have received critical non-medical services like healthy food, **safe housing, and reliable transportation**—key supports that help improve overall health and well-being of friends and neighbors in Haywood and Jackson Counties.

Here's what **HOP has accomplished** on a regional basis, so far:

- Delivered over 280,000 essential services
- Helped 2,331 families secure stable housing
- Distributed more than 144,000 healthy food boxes
- Supported 312 local jobs and generated $57 million in local service income
- Estimated $1,000 in healthcare savings per person, per year

HOP proves that **investing in people's basic needs leads to healthier communities and a stronger regional economy.** HOP funding is at risk with budget cuts at the federal and state level.

"HOP is strengthening the health of so many in Western North Carolina," said Christy Mosteller, Program Coordinator. "We're proud to play a part in this pilot - we have an opportunity to make a generational impact on the well-being of our community."

# Time Capsules: Mountain Projects Celebrates 60 Years

*This year we celebrate the completion of six decades of work in service of our neighbors in Haywood and Jackson Counties. Our scope and impact has grown since our 1965 inception, but not our mission: to help people and change lives.*

## 60 Years of Community Action Leadership



*Patsy Davis*
*1998-2025*



*Bob Leatherwood*
*1988-1997*



*Sara Q. Brown*
*1988-1997*



*George Carpenter*
*1967-1985*



*Jeffrey McArthur*
*1966-1967*



*Bruce Wike*
*1965-1966*



*Gerald Davis*
*1965*

Since its founding in 1965, Mountain Projects has been guided by compassionate leaders dedicated to helping people and changing lives. Only seven executive directors have led our organization over the past 60 years, each leaving a lasting impact on our community.

From our very first leader, Gerald Davis, to our longest-serving and current Executive Director, Patsy Davis, these individuals have shaped Mountain Projects into the vital nonprofit it is today. These Director's dedication to public service has helped countless individuals and families in Western North Carolina.

## Section 8: Decades of Good Work

Excerpt from a 1986 letter to the Editor in the *Mountaineer:*

"I just wanted people to know that, despite the state of the world and all of the bad things that happen, we do have much for which to be grateful.

I am sure there are many people in the world like [Mountain Projects Section 8 Director] Joan Robb, and I imagine they are hand-picked for the jobs they do as it must surely be depressing at times.

People who care are few and far between, and I have never been so impressed with an operation as I was with those people in Mountain Projects last week. I take my hat off to them, and I know that, should my lifestyle ever change and I suddenly need to have help, as long as there are people like Mrs. Robb in the world, we will get by."

Sincerely,
Albert T. Masters
Waynesville



*Joan Robb, Section 8 Director in 1986*



*2025 Section 8 staff members Paula Robinson, Chad Hall, Amanda Singletary and Nicole Parton*



*Foster Grandparent Alice Haley in 1995*



*Phyllis Aughe, Foster Grandparents Director (right) and Charlotte Spain, Foster Grandparent*

## Foster Grandparents Fill A Special Role

In August 1989, Mountain Projects used a federal grant to launch a Foster Grandparent Program—and over 30 years later, it's still making a meaningful impact in the lives of local children and older adults.

Part of the Older Americans Volunteer Program, this initiative gives income-eligible adults aged 60 and older the chance to support children in Haywood and Jackson counties by volunteering in Head Start classrooms, child development centers, and schools.

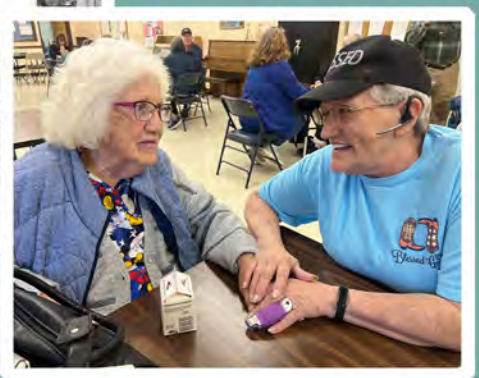
For 20 hours each week, Foster Grandparents provide individual attention to children with special needs, including those with physical or developmental disabilities, or those at risk of abuse, neglect, or other challenges. The Foster Grandparent Program provides valuable assistance to children and offers older adults a meaningful way to stay active and involved in their communities.

## Congregate Nutrition Centers Since 1974

Mountain Projects has operated Congregate Nutrition Centers in Haywood County since 1974. More than just a hot meal, the centers provide a place for connection, laughter, and positive well-being for seniors. Seniors who are home-bound receive deliveries to their doorstep.

As one participant put it in a 1974 issue of the *Mountaineer,* "I come to make new friends, and there's nary a one that I don't love!"





*Congregate nutrition center clients in the early 70's and Annette Washabaugh, Waynesville Congregate Nutrition Site Manager, in 2025*

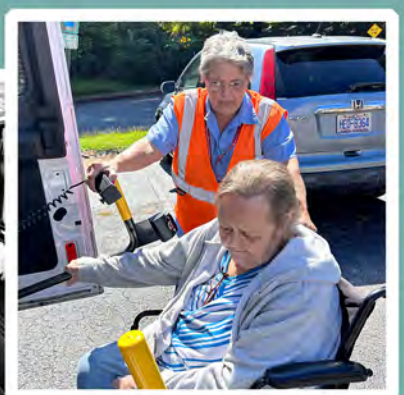
## Critical Transportation Services Since 1990

In just the past year, Haywood Public Transit provided 38,452 trips for our community—helping people reach essential services, emergency care, and more. Every weekday, our drivers keep the wheels turning, making a difference in countless lives.

When Hurricane Helene brought devastation to Western North Carolina, our Haywood Transit team went above and beyond. With six propane-fueled vehicles in motion, our drivers worked tirelessly to deliver meals, water, diapers, and cleaning supplies to those in need. They didn't just provide transportation—they delivered hope, relief, and care during a time of crisis.

Haywood County Public Transit was founded in 1990, when the state of North Carolina asked Haywood County to consolidate and streamline a number of smaller county transportation systems. The fleet was placed under the auspices of Mountain Projects.





*Haywood Transit clients in the early 90's, and Transit employee Rhonda Hunt helping a client in 2024*

## Weatherization & Rehabilitation



*Weatherization and Rehabilitation clients in 2000, and staff member Avery Messer in 2024*



Weatherization programs, funded federally and administered at the state level, are crucial for repairing roof leaks, replacing windows and heating units, and installing insulation for people without resources. The program aims to help elderly, disabled, and disadvantaged community members to boost energy efficiency and provide a stable and safe living environment.

Our longtime Director of the program, Vivian Bumgarner, has been on staff for four decades. She and her staff have one statewide awards for their achievements in the field.

## 60 Years of Head Start



*Head Start students in 1968, and students with teacher Traci Royster at the Waynesville Center in 2025*



This year marks 60 years of Head Start—and Mountain Projects has been there since day one, proudly serving Haywood and Jackson Counties since 1965!

For six decades, Mountain Projects Head Start has helped local children build strong foundations through early childhood education, health and nutrition, and family-focused support—all at no cost to eligible families.

Our mission remains the same: to give every child the tools they need for school success and lifelong learning, while empowering families to reach self-sufficiency.

## Welcome Si Simmons



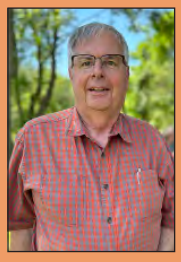
*Si Simmons is set to become the 8th Executive Director of Mountain Projects*

Si Simmons, a coach and community leader in Haywood and Jackson counties, has been named the next Executive Director of Mountain Projects.

Simmons, currently the organization's Deputy Director, will assume his new role on July 1, following the retirement of longtime Executive Director Patsy Davis.

To welcome Si as Director, email him at ssimmons@mountainprojects.org or call 828-452-1447.

## Call John!



*John Chicoine, former Manager of the Haywood Senior Resource Center, still works as volunteer coordinator and in other roles. Call him to volunteer!*

**828.356.2833**

## *Contact Us*

**Waynesville**
2177 Asheville Rd.
Waynesville NC 28786
Phone: 828-452-1447

**Sylva**
154-B Medical Park Loop
Sylva, NC 28779
Phone: 828-586-2345

*To qualify for our services, schedule a conversation with one of our intake counselors in Haywood or Jackson County.*

**Call for an appointment:**

**Haywood County**
**828-492-4103 or 828-492-4114**
**Jackson County**
**828-586-2345 or 828-550-5315**

# Introducing the Patsy Davis Legacy Fund

*Honoring a Lifetime of Leadership and Love in Action*




To celebrate her extraordinary service, we are honored to announce the creation of the **Patsy Davis Legacy Fund.** If you know Patsy, you know her work has never been just a job—it has been her calling. Her fierce compassion, steady courage, and tireless commitment to others have changed lives and shaped communities. Most recently, she was awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of North Carolina's highest honors—a fitting tribute to a woman whose life has been defined by service.

### A Legacy That Lives On

The Patsy Davis Legacy Fund will carry her spirit forward by **focusing on one of the region's most pressing needs: affordable, safe housing.** Too many families in our region are struggling to keep a roof over their heads.

This fund will provide direct support for:

- Self-help home construction
- Emergency repairs and weatherization
- Safety improvements
- Other housing needs for those most at risk

This is more than a housing fund. It's a continuation of Patsy's legacy—**a lifeline for those in need, and a way to honor the countless lives she's touched.**

### How You Can Help

We invite you to join us in this meaningful tribute. Your gift—of any size—will make a tangible difference for families in crisis and help extend Patsy's impact for generations to come.

**To donate, visit MountainProjects.org/LegacyFund**

Or mail your contribution to:
**Legacy Fund, Mountain Projects, 2177 Asheville Road, Waynesville, NC 28786**

## *Your support strengthens our community!*

*Your gift – whatever the amount – will go straight to work, providing tangible, life-changing support to those who need it most.*

**TO DONATE ELECTRONICALLY:**
- Visit our website, MountainProjects.org/giving & fill out the online contribution form

**TO DONATE BY MAIL:**
- Fill out the enclosed contribution coupon
- Place coupon with credit card info OR check in return envelope, drop in mail

**WANT TO VOLUNTEER?**
- Call John Chicoine, Volunteer Coordinator: 828-356-2833

**DONATE "ALMOST NEW" HOUSEHOLD ITEMS:**
- Mountain Projects Resale Store, 2143 Asheville Rd., Waynesville
- Sylva Linings Resale Store, 1264 W. Main St., Sylva

## *We're grateful for your contributions!*

Mountain Projects is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible. EIN: 56-0849092