Written by Todd Carter
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This year the Watauga Crisis Assistance Network (WeCAN) observes its tenth year of helping community neighbors in crisis. Conceived, organized and funded by the faith community in 2002, WeCAN is administered by Hospitality House and serves as a clearing house of benevolence assistance and crisis services for Watauga County residents. A cash-in, cash-out program where 100% of donations go directly toward helping people, WeCAN is designed to relieve the pressure of crisis management and the uncertainty of benevolent requests for clergy and other church staff. Everyday people in Watauga County face eviction, utility cutoffs, heating fuel shortage and prescription medication needs. By providing guidance and assistance in creating a plan for overcoming recurrent situations, WeCAN is often able to stabilize a household in crisis and to prevent homelessness. Those served by the program are also offered follow up counseling to help them achieve long-term stability. “From an economic standpoint, preventing homelessness is a more cost effective option for local communities,” states program coordinator, Graham Doege. “Stable, continuous housing is often the only thing keeping people living in poverty from falling into homelessness.” On November 1st, WeCAN launched its annual “Warm Hearts Warm Homes” initiative and as in years past the funds raised will be used to help provide heating fuel and other services to keep people in their homes and out of the potentially fatal winter elements. With 25% of Wataugans living in poverty, another 20% unable to earn a living wage and fuel costs on the rise WeCAN estimates needing at least $100,000 for assistance this winter season. Last winter WeCAN provided $80,500 in heating assistance and as this winter is upon us, the program has already seen an increased demand for assistance. In November, 212 county residents were kept warm and stable with over $16,000 in assistance; however, December has started with a shortfall of $13,000 as people are being put on a waiting list pending contributions. WeCAN encourages churches and faith-based organizations, along with individuals, civic organizations and businesses, to recommit to the mission of WeCAN. Doing so will effectively streamline resources, resulting in a stronger force for fighting poverty and affecting greater positive impact on Watauga County. Each $420 contribution provides for one residence the 100 gallon minimum purchase of heating fuel. Donations can be mailed, payable to WeCAN, to PO Box 309, Boone NC 28607 or can also be made online at www.hospitalityhouseofboone.org. To learn more about WeCAN and the services offered please contact Graham Doege at 828.264.1237 or wecan@hospitalityhouseofboone.org