

This artwork, created by Mike South, hangs in the waiting room in the New River Clinic in Scarbro Loop, West Virginia.



## **Exhibit to Showcase Work, Life, of Coal Miner, Artist and Advocate Mike South**

Lexington, VA • Oct. 28, 2005 — Mike South was a coal miner. He was a Black Lung activist. He was an artist. The unique vision his extraordinary life produced will be on display in the upcoming exhibit, "Paintings and Drawings of Mike South" at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va.

The exhibit, which will run through Dec. 31, opens on Nov. 12 with a reception from 2-4 p.m. Both the reception and the exhibit, which are open to the public free of charge, will be located in the Faculty Lounge of the Washington and Lee University School of Law.

South, a former president of the National Black Lung Association who died of Black Lung disease in 2001, was instrumental in inspiring the establishment of the Black Lung Clinic at Washington and Lee University School of Law. The clinic, which matches select law students with miners seeking Black Lung benefits, provides legal counsel to individuals who otherwise would have to fight the uphill battle to collect benefits without representation.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the clinic - the only one of its kind in the United States. Organizers say the exhibit, presented as a tribute to and celebration of Mike South's work, is a perfect way to observe the clinic's decade milestone.

South's widow, Kathryn, and many of his friends from the West Virginia mining community, including a large group from the Fayette County Black Lung Association, will attend the opening reception.

For almost twenty years South, who served as the president of the National Black Lung Association from 1994 to 1999, fought tirelessly for dust free working conditions and an adequate compensation system for coal miners suffering from Black Lung. Even as the disease required him to rely on an oxygen tank and a wheelchair, he traveled the country speaking out on the cause in diverse venues, including Congress and the Department of Labor.

A self-taught artist, South created works depicting his home and family - including his father, who entered the mines at nine years old and lost his life to Black Lung - and the life of a coal miner. His artwork was often sold to raise money and awareness for the Black Lung movement. South changed mediums when his lungs became too weak to be exposed to the fumes of oil paint. He moved to drawing, and the collection includes a notebook of cartoons.

Andrew McThenia, a professor emeritus at the School of Law who worked with South through W&L's clinic, has noted South's ability to defy conventional notions of what can be challenged, refusing to accept even the dictates of his deteriorating health. Of South's drawings, McThenia says, "humor is an integral part of his later cartoon work. Much of that work was done during the most painful periods of his illness: and doubtless represents one more way he had of mocking death."