

# Subject is larger than life



**STRENGTH . . . Deb Gillett was inspired by paraplegic Peter Allen, who injured his spine 20 years ago**

*Photo: MEGAN BRAYLEY*

PETER Allen never imagined he would be anyone's muse, but the paraplegic police assistant intelligence officer is the subject of a new painting to be displayed in the Spinal Injuries Association art exhibition.

"It's something I would have never done for myself . . . to have a painting of myself up on the wall," he said.

After spending time with him and his family, Townsville artist Deb Gillett has created a symbolic piece depicting special moments from Mr Allen's life.

"What Deb has painted of me is nothing like what I would have envisaged in a pink fit," he said.

Mr Allen has been in a wheelchair since a motorcycle accident 20 years ago.

Ms Gillett said she wanted to show the positive aspects of his life.

"Peter and I were both really keen that the work of art would be a positive thing," she said.

"We wanted that awareness message in there, so clearly we had to talk about his disability."

She hoped the work would show that even people with those kind of injuries can lead active, healthy lives.

"I begged to be paired with Peter because his energy is particularly amazing," she said.

Mr Allen and his family live on a 20ha lot at Black River which he traverses on a modified four-wheel motorbike.

"I can change the

gears with my hands," he said.

"You just try and replace the things you do. I rode two-wheel motorbikes then and I ride four-wheel motorbikes now."

Spinal Injuries Association North Queensland manager Robyn Reid said the art exhibition, beginning November 12 at the Riverway Arts Centre, marked Spinal Injuries Awareness Week.

Works from many artists will include paintings, glass sculptures and tile work.

"By bringing together these two very different cultures – the art community and the disability community – we hope each will continue to benefit from the other," she said.