



Southern folk...with Stacey Carrick

COLOUR
ORIGINAL

Robert Pyne

Pictures by Romy Siegmann

MT Sheridan resident Robert Pyne has been a quadriplegic for the past 14 years, but that hasn't stopped him putting the "ability" in "disability".

The son of former mayor Tom Pyne spends his time assisting and campaigning for the rights of other disabled people.

He has a number of roles, including the regional disability liaison officer at James Cook University, the chair of the Far North Queensland Regional Disability Council, the president of advocacy group Rights in Action and a member of the Disability Council of Queensland.

Mr Pyne's JCU position involves attracting people with a disability to vocational education and training or university.

He provides information and advice about post-school options, support and services and helps people with disabilities move from school into training and education and then into their chosen career.

Mr Pyne was appointed to the disability council by Disability Services Minister Warren Pitt.

"Disability councils provide an opportunity for Queenslanders with a disability, their families, service providers and local community members to get involved in government decision making, particularly in regard to the delivery of quality disability services in the state," he said.

Mr Pyne also speaks out on behalf of people if they need assistance with government funding or housing.

He said access and services for people with disabilities in Cairns had improved over the years.

"Some hotels have excellent access but many don't," he said.



"Footpaths and guttering have improved, but we have a long way to go.

"Cairns still misses out on valuable tourist money because some facilities catering to people with disabilities aren't of a high enough standard. This affects locals as well."

Mr Pyne became a quadriplegic when he had an accident in 1991 – he dived off a boat and hit his head on a sandbar.



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After his accident, he returned to university to further his education.

"It's important to increase your education because it widens your options," he said.

He said he could still achieve just about anything he wanted to.

Mr Pyne said he would like to contest a seat at the next council election in 2008 as an independent candidate if Division 3

Councillor Jeff Pezzutti signalled his intention not to return.

He said one of his priorities was to stop rates increasing.

"I just want Cairns to be a great place to live for all residents," he said.

"I would like Cairns to become known for its tropical buildings, shady green spaces and healthy environment.

"Proper planning can ensure development is sustainable and enhances the character of neighbourhoods and suburbs.

"This isn't a stepping stone for higher aspirations for me - I don't want to be mayor or a Member of Parliament."

Mr Pyne, a fourth-generation Cairns man, has always lived on the south side.

He was born in Gordonvale, grew up in Edmonton and has lived in Mt Sheridan since 1997.

"Infrastructure has improved, but I am sad to see the loss of the semi-rural lifestyle," he said.

"There are housing developments where cane paddocks used to be and children don't have the same opportunity to ride their bikes around the bush and cane paddocks and go swimming in creeks like we used to."