

ART *In America*

Drawing Inspiration From Disability

(NAPSA)—Increasingly, individuals with a physical disability are redefining what it means to be disabled.

According to the American Disability Act (ADA), about 43 million Americans—one in seven people—are living with at least one disability, and most Americans will experience a disability at some time during the course of their lives. For some, that experience can be such that it changes the direction of their life forever.

Take for example, Californian artist Dennis Francesconi, who, as a result of a skiing accident at age 17, broke his neck and became a wheelchair-bound quadriplegic. Fortunately, he refused to see this as the end of his life.

Eventually, he began to draw by gripping a pencil between his teeth. In time, and with the support of his wife, Kristi, his skills as an artist blossomed.

Later, he was introduced to the U.S. Mouth and Foot Painting Artists (MFPA), a for-profit organization run by disabled artists seeking financial independence, formed nearly 50 years ago.

Said Francesconi, "One of the proudest moments of my life was when I was promoted by the MFPA to be a full member artist and I was able to tell the Social Security officer that I didn't need the monthly benefits check any more."

Something of which he can be equally proud is his consideration and compassion for others in trouble. Recently, Francesconi spent four months creating a 6½ feet by 4



Dennis Francesconi seen here with his tribute painting titled "Freedom, America Remembers."

feet painting, by mouth, to show his support for the fallen and injured members of the armed forces. Titled, "Freedom, America Remembers," he plans to donate the work to a major U.S. disability rehabilitation hospital for the military.

Francesconi's paintings have been shown in exhibitions all over the world, but like his more than 60 fellow American artists, his main income comes from painting images that are reproduced and sold as holiday cards and calendars by the MFPA.

Each year in October, artists such as Francesconi and those from other walks of life draw attention to the valuable contribution that the physically disabled bring to society during National Disability Awareness Month.

To find out more about the MFPA, the artists and their products, go to www.mfpausa.com.