

**Creating a Global Village without Vision or Hearing:**

***iCanConnect Helps* *Colorado Man Tap into 21st Century Technology***

Cy Selfridge can’t see and has limited hearing, but thanks to modern technology, remains connected both to a sprawling network of family members and a community of people across the world who share his many interests

Selfridge is 71 and lives outside of Denver where he keeps in touch with his 15 children, does handyman work, massage therapy and hosts an online cooking community.

As a child, Selfridge lost vision in his right eye due to a bicycle accident. As young man, he left college to help with the family restaurant business. Eventually, he bought a half dozen of his own restaurants.

“I enjoyed it,” recalls Selfridge. “But common sense told me the restaurant business was never going to make me any money.”

So Selfridge became a computer programmer. He owned his own business and, eventually, landed a job as a defense contractor at the Pentagon.

But, as his career soared, his eyesight continued to weaken. A corneal implant provided great improvement. Then, in 1988, during a subsequent surgery to improve the vision, his optic nerve was irreparably damaged and he was left totally blind.

“You win some, you lose some,” says Selfridge in a matter-of-fact tone. “You might as well move on.”

Soon after losing his sight, Selfridge moved back to Oklahoma where he became a newspaper editor, then a massage therapist.

Over the years, Selfridge’s hearing also diminished. He now wears hearing aids yet – true to form – continues to be curious about the world and determined to connect with others who share his many interests. Of course, with no vision and limited hearing, it isn’t always easy.

Case in point – operating the iPhone touch screen.

“That touch pad and I are going around and around and that’s being charitable,” says Selfridge in his signature plain-speak.

Because Selfridge is classified as deaf-blind, he was able to take part in a program that offers free equipment to support his communications needs. The Colorado iCanConnect program provided Selfridge with a Braille Note Apex, a portable braille reader that connects to his iPhone and gives him instant access to information and people.

“Being able to connect to the Braille Note so that I can more easily look through my contacts and correct spelling so Siri can understand it better, does make using the contacts a whole lot easier,” explains Selfridge, referring to the iPhone voice command system. “And it sure as the dickens makes adding entries a lot easier.”

The iCanConnect program also provided Selfridge with a Mac Book computer. He appreciates its built-in voice-over feature and has found that he is able to get more information and easier access to people around the world who share his interests.

With his new Mac, Selfridge is able to get detailed information on items such as cooking ingredients – important information for the email list he maintains that teaches blind people how to cook. He ticks off a list of connections that make up his global village.

“People from Japan, Russia, Germany, New Zealand, a whole herd from Canada,” says Selfridge. “I’ve learned a lot about people I never would have known about otherwise. For a deaf-blind person to be able to communicate using the computer is unbelievable.”

Offering people with both vision and hearing loss access to 21st Century communications is the goal of iCanConnect. The program is the outreach arm of the federally funded National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program (NDBEDP), which is offered in every state in the country. A wide array of communications equipment and personalized training is available at no charge to people who meet income guidelines.

For Selfridge, iCanConnect has been a true game-changer.

“For a deaf-blind person with a braille keyboard and a braille display it simply unlocks the rest of the world,” he says.”

Learn more about iCanConnect in Colorado by calling 1-800-825-4595, TTY: 1-888-320-2656 or at [www.icanconnect.org/colorado](http://www.icanconnect.org/colorado).

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