

**Deaf-Blind Communications Pro Gets His Career Back on Track with iCanConnect**

Born blind, Roger Cicchese has always been fascinated with sound. He was eight years old in 1960 when he first got behind a microphone, making announcements at his parent’s movie theater in Weymouth, Massachusetts. It was the beginning of a long career that nearly ended abruptly five years ago when he began going deaf.

“I had just gotten the opportunity to work in a new recording studio in New Hampshire,” recalls 62-year-old Cicchese, who still lives in Weymouth. “And they (doctors) said, oh, you won’t do that again.”

The job in jeopardy, his hearing nearly gone, Cicchese became increasingly isolated. He felt unsafe venturing from his apartment, could no longer hear the text-to-audio software he used to access emails on his computer and was unable to carry on a phone conversation. He felt entirely alone.

 “All I have left in the world for family is my sister,” explains Cicchese. “When I started having all this trouble with my hearing, I couldn’t understand what she was saying when I called her.”

Cicchese’s life changed when he found out about the [National Deaf-Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program), which is promoted as [iCanConnect](http://www.icanconnect.org). It provides people with significant combined hearing and vision loss access to communications technology so they don’t have to be cut off from their family or friends or business associates. Cicchese received a portable device called a Braille Sense U2 that reads aloud the content of a computer screen and also enables him to access his computer with a braille display.

“If the speech is turned on, I can actually understand every word,” explains Cicchese. “If I go someplace and want to work in silence I lightly run my fingers over the braille display and read with complete privacy and total accuracy.”

Cicchese, who graduated from Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown, Mass. and Assumption College in Worcester, Mass., has long been a braille reader, but could never before afford braille technology. iCanConnect offers consumers who are deaf-blind and who meet income guidelines, the technology and individualized training at no cost.

The equipment enabled him to take that job in New Hampshire where he can now easily read scripts in braille and quickly provide narration (Cicchese’s repertoire includes more than 80 character voices). He is able to easily exchange emails with his sister. The equipment has empowered him to pursue a long held dream to launch a career as a writer.

“Sure is a nice reward to get paid for something you’ve written and the thing that’s making the difference for me is the technology I’ve obtained through iCanConnect,” explains Cicchese. “It gives me control over and access to information in a more direct way than speech can do for me and that’s why I have the confidence to do this.”

Now in its second year, iCanConnect provides a wide array of communications technology and training. Consumers are assessed to determine what equipment - iPads, phone amplifiers, screen-reading software, and other tools – will best help them stay connected.

iCanConnect is available in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Learn more at <http://www.iCanConnect.org>: click on “State Partners” to find each state’s contacts. There, you will find out how the program works, what kind of distance equipment is available, how to find out if your income qualifies, and how to apply. The website is accessible to users with low vision and those who use screen readers, and it features video that is both audio described and captioned. Information about iCanConnect is also available by calling 1-800-825-4595 Voice or 1-888-320-2656 TTY.

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