

**iPad Enables Deaf-Blind Ohio Grandmother to Connect Long Distance with Family**

**iCanConnect Offers Free Training and Technology**

76-year-old Shirley Rybarski of Columbus, Ohio took some people by surprise when she decided she was going to learn to use an iPad. She is deaf, has very little vision and had never before operated a touch-screen device.

“I have to be honest,” says her son, 48-year-old Tim Rybarski, a computer programmer who lives hundreds of miles away in Long Valley, New Jersey. “I was skeptical.”

Turns out, mother knew best.

“My friends think the iPad is my new toy,” laughs Shirley Rybarski. “ I love it.”

It’s easy to understand why. Unlike a regular computer screen, the iPad’s enhanced retina display makes it possible for her to see large-sized fonts. Rybarski can now read the daily newspapers, but what she likes best about the iPad, is the way it offers her instant connection to family members spread across three states.

“My granddaughter from New Jersey emailed me. Another granddaughter from North Carolina faxed me, so I told her to email me,” says Rybarski. “ I think they want Facebook., so I will do Facebook.”

Shirley Rybarski is among the first wave of people to take advantage of an innovative program that provides long-distance communications tools to people with significant combined vision and hearing loss. Launched in 2012, the [National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program](http://www.fcc.gov/encyclopedia/national-deaf-blind-equipment-distribution-program)

(NDBEDP) has provided hundreds of computers, iPads and adaptive equipment to deaf-blind consumers nationwide – at no cost. The equipment is key, but as Shirley Rybarksi learned, so is the one-on-one training.

“At first with my new iPad I was scared to touch the screen,” recalls Ryabarksi. She gained confidence and learned how to manipulate the iPad with help from both a trainer and an interpreter at the [Columbus Speech and Hearing Center](http://www.columbusspeech.org/deaf-services/cpd/), one of many local agencies nationwide to administer the iCanConnect program.

With Mom on email, it’s much easier for Tim Rybarski to keep in touch.

“Rather than the (relay service) phone call once a week, we’re definitely communicating more regularly,” explains Tim Rybarski. “I’m on email all the time, so it’s easy.”

The ease of email has also opened up connections with old friends and extended family from Pennsylvania, where Shirley Rybarski spent most of her life.

“People ask me how to get hold of my Mom, I think it’s a little intimidating for them to call relay service,” says Tim Rybarski. “ These people use email, so my mother’s communications with extended family – sisters-in-law, my aunts and uncles – is going to open up.”

Shirley Rybarski welcomes the connections and her newfound access to modern technology.

 “Many thanks for the iPad,” she says. “ I am so happy.”

The National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program has an outreach arm called [iCanConnect](http://www.iCanConnect.org). Equipment, assessment and one-on-one training is offered in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. There is no charge for qualified consumers who meet financial guidelines.

Learn more and download an application at <http://www.iCanConnect.org>. The website accommodates users with low vision, people who use screen readers and features video that is both audio-described and closed captioned. Information about iCanConnect is also available by calling 1-800-825-4595 | TTY 1-888-320-2656.

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