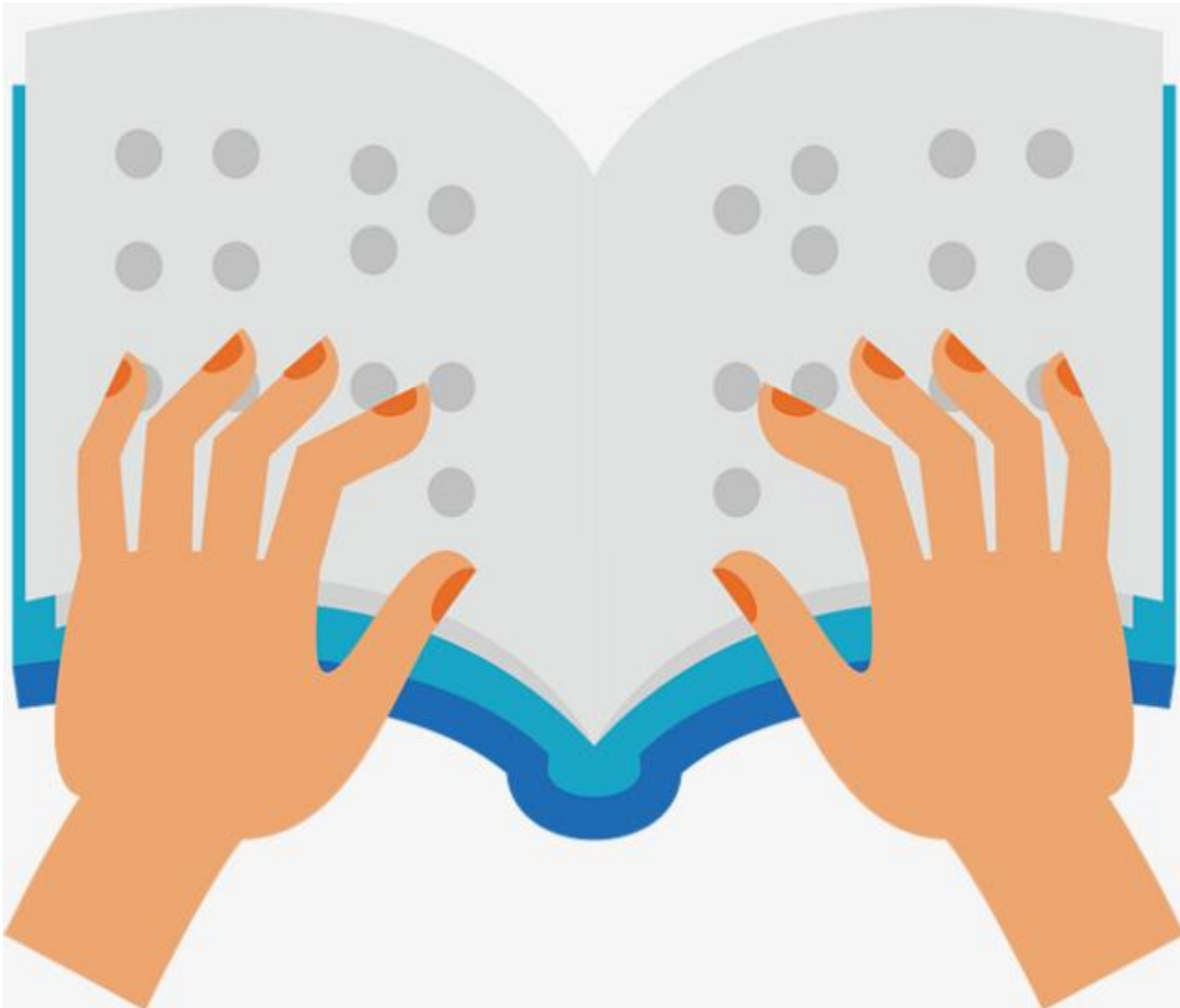


# **Madison County Association for the Blind hosting weekend fundraisers to bring accessibility to everyone**

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer  
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ALTON – The Madison County Association for the Blind is raising money outside the Alton Shop N' Save this weekend in an effort to assist the lives of fully and legally blind individuals in the area.

Founded in 1955, the association now claims a membership of around 22 people, but former president and current board member, Terry Heltsley, said they assist anyone who needs it throughout the entire county. He said they help blind and legally blind people attain devices to assist them in their everyday tasks. Those items can be expensive, however, and quite hard to find. The group's membership is not limited to the blind, and Heltsley said people with sight are welcomed to join. Their next meeting is the first Thursday of September from 1-2 p.m. at Senior Services Plus (SSP) in Alton.

“We have 22 members, four of us, including myself, are veterans,” he said. “Five of us are men, the rest of us are women. I am the past president, but am still on the board. The current President Jack Howard and I have the same outlook on things. We are also an affiliate of the Illinois Council of the Blind.”

Heltsley said there are more than 22 blind people in the county, which has a population of more than 200,000 people. He said his wife often points out other blind people, or he can hear the taps of their canes in public. When he meets someone with the same condition, he says he tries to spread the word of his organization by giving them his phone number or Howard's phone number as well as directions to their website.

Outside of providing assistance for accessibility devices, the association also organizes birthday parties and Christmas parties for its membership. It also gets free tickets to Cardinals Baseball Games and the St. Louis Muny as well as Alton Little Theater.

Many of the events planned by the association have to take place during the day, he said, due to the current state of public transportation in the area hosting more bus routes during the day than at night.

More information on the association can be found by contacting Heltsley at (618) 216-2790 or Howard at (618) 420-0352.

The group will have similar fundraisers the weekend after this one at the East Alton Shop N' Save location. They recently finished raising money outside area Wal-Marts.