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Riverbender.com's Alexa-Friendly news platform helps the blind get local news

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ALTON – Members of Alton's blind community have given Riverbender.com feedback on the Alexa-friendly news platform currently being implemented.

Because of the ability for news to be “spoken” from an electronic device such as an Amazon Echo, blind people in the area now have a chance to get their news from a local source. Madison County Association for the Blind former president Terry Heltsley said he was unable to find a good way to get Riverbend-centric news from other platforms. He said television news focuses too much on the St. Louis side of the river and he could

not read newspapers. When he received his Amazon Echo from the Veterans Administration, he found himself impressed with his newfound ability to find local news.

“I actually found you guys by calling the old Time and Temperature number (618-465-4545), and I heard about Riverbender.com,” he said. “When I got my Echo, I asked Alexa to find St. Louis news, and it gave me the usual rundown of Channel 2, Channel 4 and the rest of those St. Louis places. I asked for Illinois, and Riverbender.com was at the top of the list.”

Heltsley said Riverbender has helped him stay informed on local news and said the blind community could greatly benefit from its Alexa-friendly platform. He added, however, many blind people cannot afford things like an Amazon Echo.

“I mean, it's great if you can afford it,” he said. “I got mine from the VA in Chicago. I don't know how many people can afford them without some form of donation program.”

The Madison County Association for the Blind currently has a membership of 22 and serves blind and legally blind people across the county. They will be at the Alton Shop N' Save this weekend and the East Alton Shop N' Save next weekend collecting donations to help bring more accessibility to blind people in this area.

Outside of the Amazon Echo, Heltsley said blind people in the area often need expensive devices to assist them with daily life. The association works with local organizations such as IMPACT to help bring that to people in the area.