

Prime Time: Resident's gift has Glen Eddy residents reading electronically

Friday, November 7, 2014

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Gazette Reporter



Al Gilbert, 92, a Glen Eddy resident, tries out an e-reader. (Kelly de la Rocha photo)

NISKAYUNA — Retiree Al Gilbert doesn't read plain old books anymore. You know — the kind with a cover, spine and pages.

“Well, that's old fashioned,” he explained, his expression not revealing whether he was kidding or not.

He wasn't.

The Glen Eddy resident reads between four and five nonfiction books a month on his Amazon Kindle e-book reader.

“Today, the Kindle is so lightweight, and it's so bright and clear, and it's very easy reading,” he said.

Gilbert is one of about 100 residents of the Niskayuna assisted and independent senior living community who have begun reading books on the handheld device in the past four years.

It's no coincidence there are so many at the complex who have gone from page-turning to page-scrolling. Back in 2010, the late Myron Nichols donated \$20,000 so every Glen Eddy resident could have a Kindle if they so desired.

A retired Presbyterian preacher who spent much of his life in California and Oregon, Nichols moved to Glen Eddy when it opened in 2001.

He died in 2011, but lived long enough to see the first e-book readers distributed.

"He was a minister, so he was very interested in philanthropic things. He saw an option here to give something which he thought the residents would enjoy," said Gilbert, who was a friend of Nichols.

Once the donated fund runs out, Glen Eddy will continue to provide e-book readers to residents, said interim executive director Andrea Paone.

Eva Thibodeau, who administers the e-book reader program at Glen Eddy, said the device — the newer models of which also offer access to the Internet — has opened doors for residents.

"We get some folks who come in not really so savvy with technology, and you give them an electronic device, and they're interested, and they learn how to email, so they're connected with people in a different area, so I think it opens communication. I think searching the Internet is pretty cool when someone hasn't had that experience," she said.

Resident Naomi Bristol has had an e-book reader since they were first offered at Glen Eddy.

"It was something to try," the retired librarian said with a smile.

Now she reads books on it all the time.

"I like to read in bed, and I was reading a heavy book — 'The Presidents Club' — a very good book, but very big and heavy, and I finally just bought it for the Kindle. Much easier to read in bed," she said.

The lightweight e-book reader, which can be loaded with a bunch of books, is great for traveling too, she noted.

But Bristol had a confession to make.

"I'm addicted to books — books you can hold," she admitted.

So, she hasn't completely given up conventional page-turning.

"If you own a book, you can make notes on it. You can't do that on a Kindle," she pointed out.

And a collection of electronic books doesn't hold the same appeal as those stacks of hard copies that surrounded Bristol during her career.

“There's something about seeing a bookcase full of books — books that you have enjoyed reading — and somehow it's just nice to see this array of books in front of you,” she said.

Thibodeau said not all residents have been interested in trying out an e-book reader, but most have. Other than a few dexterity challenges, she said there hasn't been much of a learning curve.

Learning to use the Kindle has led Bristol to consider getting a smartphone, although she said she's not sure which one to get or if she'll be able to figure out how to use it.

Gilbert hasn't been swayed.

“I think you become a slave to the thing. I see everyone walking around like this,” he said, putting a hand to his left ear to mimic talking on the phone. “I just haven't decided to get into that. I have a computer, and I do a lot of things on it, and I have the Kindle, so I don't need that other thing.”