



Milton Greidinger and Selfhelp's Virtual Senior Center: A New Chapter for Milton

As Milton Greidinger (88) tells the story, it was just a few years ago that he felt he had nothing to live for.

“Because of some medical issues and just the years catching up with me,” he explains, “I felt I was down for the count. I was waiting for the end to come,” he adds. “I couldn’t get out of the house much. Visits from friends were few and far between. It was so depressing.”

Then in late 2009, Milton became part of a demonstration project initiated by [Selfhelp Community Services](#), the City of New York, and Microsoft. The project, called the [Virtual Senior Center](#), enables homebound seniors to take part in live classes conducted at one of Selfhelp’s senior centers in Queens, NY, and provides internet access which the seniors use for entertainment, shopping or even for tracking down old friends. The project rolled out with seven seniors in 2010. The program picked up steam with recent funding from UJA-Federation of New York, that has allowed simplification of the interface (screen prompts), broadened programming and even jumpstarted online lectures and exhibitions with The Jewish Museum, the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art. The computer-based system uses an easy touch-screen interface that seniors 67-105 swear is as easy as turning on a light switch.

“Selfhelp’s Virtual Senior Center has *virtually* changed my life,” laughs Milton as he sits comfortably facing his computer, about to begin a current events class. “I can take part in political discussions, shop for my own groceries, attend a virtual Hanukkah celebration and even front some of the big bands music from the 40’s. Milton, in fact, discovered a way to record his own voice several times, then play it back with the band as he sings along live.

“I make new friends. I looked up a gal pal from 60 years ago. I swap cooking tips with another new friend, John. Who knows? Maybe we should write a cookbook for senior bachelors,” he smiles. “I look forward to each day. I wish everyone like me could have the chance to use technology to turn their life around.”

A few weeks earlier Milton participated from his apartment, in a music class that was hosted at the senior center. A special guest turned up that morning: New York City's Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who was there to announce to the media that Selfhelp's Benjamin Rosenthal Prince Street Senior Center had achieved the distinction of being classified as an "Innovative Senior Center" in New York City. The center's unique programs would serve as an inspiration to others; results will be evaluated.

Milton crooned a special song for the Mayor, who earnestly complimented Milton on this voice and enthusiasm.

Today, a Monday in May, Milton would debate the intricacies of NATO's plans to withdraw from Afghanistan during a current events class in the morning, observed by another special guest – a reporter from the Wall Street Journal. And later in the afternoon he would help tutor a young student online who has some difficulties reading. "The benefit goes both ways. The interaction helps both of us."

"As for the whole idea of technology for seniors, there's just no end to the possibilities," notes the former salesman for Korvette's department store. "I've thought about opening my own online giftware store. But whatever path I choose, I know I'll never be at a loss for something interesting to do."

Milton has testified (online, of course) before the New York City Council's Department for the Aging, to explain how technology like the Virtual Senior Center can have a life-changing impact on seniors who want to live independent but full lives at home.

He has also shared his story with international pioneers in aging technology from India, Israel, France and Australia.

"I'm alive again. I guess I'm one of the luckiest guys in the world," he says.