



Lon Safko explains how to operate his company's SenSei program to Rose Rito, who has multiple sclerosis. The computer program aids the disabled with tasks around the house, such as turning on the lights.

## Keyboard to freedom

Computer dials phones, switches lights for disabled

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### Sun City

**T**apping a button on a computer, Rose Rito turned off a lamp several feet away.

Rito, who has multiple sclerosis, didn't have to roll her wheelchair up a ramp onto a stage, where the lamp rested on a table.

If necessary, Rito could use the same computer to make phone calls, change television channels or lock a door.

Lon Safko, president of Safko International Inc., met with Rito and other members of the Multiple Sclerosis Support Group in Sun City last week to demonstrate how his computer system works.

"It's great," Rito said. She hopes to have the Friends of Multiple Sclerosis Sun City Support Group buy a Safko system to donate to a disabled Sun City resident.

"It kind of floors you," said Joe King, whose wife, Ada, has multiple sclerosis. "I can't believe it."

King doesn't have a computer. He said he was impressed with how the Safko program could help disabled people control their physical surroundings.

Safko, a Tempe company, developed software called SenSei for use on a Macintosh computer.

Using the SenSei software, the computer monitor shows a room with items such as a phone, lighting, television, a door, a ceiling

fan, a typewriter and a library of books. The computer can operate about 250 household items, including remote-control devices.

The user can choose in which room in the house, for example, to turn off the light.

In the computer library, the user can pick from selected books, such as the Bible. The text on the computer screen can be enlarged, and the computer can read books in any of 14 voices.

The word processor allows people who have trouble using their fingers to select words from a directory by typing only the first letter. The computer types the word.

People who are unable to talk can move the cursor among a menu of expressions

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## SCLEROSIS

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such as "I'm hungry" or "Comb my hair" to get their point across without having to type a message.

The phone can be dialed through the computer. By using a directory of numbers, the user only has to tap a couple of keys. A microphone in the computer acts like a speakerphone, allowing the user to carry on a hands-free conversation.

"Our goal is for the disabled to be able to complete their education, re-enter the work force and be more independent," Safko said.

The company has adapted hardware so the severely disabled can use computers.

For example, a headphone device may be used by quadraplegics to operate the computer, even though they can't use their arms or legs. They point their heads in the direction they want the cursor to move, then puff into a stick to command the computer to perform the task they've selected.

Liz Jimenez, a Phoenix resident who has multiple sclerosis and uses a wheelchair, was one of the

first users of Safko's system. She appears on a video testimonial for the company.

"I used to sit in front of the television for 10 hours a day watching one channel because I couldn't change it," Jimenez said. "I'd sit in darkness because I couldn't turn on the lights."

Cost for the basic software and server box is \$1,600, and the price tag can range as high as \$16,000, including the computer, software, installation and training. Safko said his company is working on a system that would work on IBM-compatible computers.