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Q&A with Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak

By **John Boudreau**
Knight Ridder Newspapers

SAN JOSE, Calif. — Steve Wozniak says he never intended to change the world. That was the other Steve, Steve Jobs.

He just wanted to build computers. Oh, and he really — really — wanted to spend his career as a Hewlett-Packard engineer, a position he reluctantly left.

Life turned out differently for the self-trained electrical engineer. In 1976, he and Jobs started Apple Computer, which would help launch the personal-computer revolution.

Observers say Apple would never be what it is today without either Steve — Jobs, the tech evangelist and visionary, and Wozniak, whose technical genius created computers for the masses.

"I didn't want to start this company," said Wozniak, known in Silicon Valley simply as "Woz." "My goal wasn't to make a ton of money. It was to build good computers. I only started the company when I realized I could be an engineer forever."

Wozniak, 55, left Apple in 1981 to work on his engineering degree at the University of California, Berkeley, and dabble in other things. He returned for three years in 1983. Though he has been involved in other ventures since Apple, Wozniak will always be identified with the Cupertino, Calif., company.

Wozniak, who will publish an autobiography, "I, Woz," this fall, prefers to stay out of the spotlight but willingly signs autographs on everything from laptops to an apple (the kind you eat).

He also recently linked up with former Apple Chief Executive Gilbert Amelio, who was ousted from Apple in 1997, and Ellen Hancock, who was chief technology officer, also until 1997, to form Acquicor Technologies. It raised \$150 million last month to buy other technology companies.

Wozniak recently sat down with the San Jose Mercury News to talk about Apple's 30th anniversary in his home perched in the Los Gatos hills. Here is

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an edited version of that interview.

Q. In 1976, how did you think a personal computer would change people's lives?

A. We did believe that computers would fit into every home because of the price and some of the things they did. We thought people would use the computer in the home for normal home things: You have a kitchen so you keep recipes on it. You have a checkbook and you can have the computer do the subtraction for you. We didn't realize what having a computer in virtually every home would be like — how you can make a decision and a million lives are affected.

I was just doing something I was very good at, and the thing that I was good at turned out to be the thing that was going to change the world. That wasn't my plan. I didn't think, "I'm going to change the world." No, I'm just going to build the best machines I can build that I would want to use in my own life.

Steve was much more further-thinking. When I designed good things, sometimes he'd say, "We can sell this." And we did. He was thinking about how you build a company, maybe even then he was thinking, "How do you change the world?" He spoke like that.

Q. The big computer companies of the day didn't see the potential for a small computer for the home. Why is that?

A. Some of them expressly said this is not going to be a successful business. They didn't see the little bends in the curve. They probably didn't see the ease of running cheap applications software, a lot of little startups using low-cost technology to build peripherals and software, or things like VisiCalc (spreadsheet software).

Q. You were working at Hewlett-Packard while you and Steve Jobs were creating Apple Computer. Did HP know about your Apple work?

A. Yes. As soon as Steve Jobs suggested, "Why don't we sell a PC board of this computer," I said, "I think I signed something, an employment contract, that said what I designed belongs to Hewlett-Packard." And I loved that company. That was my company for life. So I approached Hewlett-Packard first. Boy, did I make a pitch. I wanted them to do it. I had the Apple I, and I had a description of what the Apple II could do. I spoke of color. I described an \$800 machine that ran BASIC (an early computer language), came out of the box fully built and talked to your home TV. And Hewlett-Packard found some reasons it couldn't be a Hewlett-Packard product.

Q. Did HP ever express regret to you about passing on the Apple I and Apple II?

A. Oddly enough, by the time I was working on the Apple II, and we were selling the Apple I — and I was working at Hewlett-Packard still — they started up a project on my floor without telling me. ... I asked to be on the project. I really wanted to work on computers. And they turned me down for the job. To this day I don't know why. I said, "I don't have to run anything," even though I'd done all these things and they knew it. I said, "I'll do a printer interface. I'll do the lowliest engineering job there is."

I wanted to work on a computer at my company and they turned me down. When you think about it, every time they turned me down, it was fortunate for the world and it was fortunate for myself.

Q. Eventually, the two of you sought out investors. And is that when you left HP?

A. A venture capitalist got Steve Jobs talking to Mike Markkula. Mike had been an engineer and he had gone into marketing, at which he was superb. He had early stock options at Intel. He was looking for things to do, dabbling around in investments, and here we were. He wanted to bring technology into the home. He looked at what we had and got excited. He took the time to see that what we had was such a huge leap in technology. He decided to back us fully if I decided to leave Hewlett-Packard.

I balked at first. Steve was getting all my relatives to call me and tell me, "You should do it." But I had a job for life at Hewlett-Packard and that meant more to me. It was a tough decision. Finally, I decided I can start this company, but I don't have to run it. I just have to be an engineer.

Q. How would you describe your relationship with Steve Jobs?

A. We are friends and polite and talk to each other once in a while. ... We've never had an argument. There have been a couple of artificial ones over misinterpretations of things in the press. I'm an analytical person. When I talk with reporters, I will talk about the pluses and minuses of an issue and, boy, sometimes they like to grab a little minus, twist the words a little, exaggerate it and make a headline.

Q. Does Steve Jobs ever give you heads-up on a hot new product?

A. I would never ask. And the reason I would never ask is I think it was bad for Apple to have all the rumors and leaks from the inside. I also didn't like to get pre-released products from the inside because whatever I got had some bugs, and I'd have to go down to the company and get it upgraded, get it upgraded, get it upgraded.

I'd rather know what real people are getting and buy stuff in real stores. I've got a lot of friends who work there and I will never, ever ask them what's going on. I don't want to know. Once in a while, though, if a computer doesn't work with a cellphone I have, I loan my cellphone to some engineers and they'll make sure the next operating system version works with it.

Q. What's it like being Steve Wozniak and shopping in an Apple store? Are you recognized?

A. I was in Boston once. I needed two AC adapters. I ran into this new Apple store. I went up to the counter, "I'd like two 65-watt AC adapters." I didn't say anything about who I was. And they bring them out. I say, "How much?" They say, "We are expensing it." I said, "Yeah, but how do I pay for it?" They said, "No, no, no — we are allowed to give gifts to special people."

Q. Do you attend Apple product-announcement events?

A. That's actually one of the nicest things Steve does for me: He makes sure I am always invited to the VIP guest area for the product rollouts. I appreciate that more than I can ever say. Those things have inspired me. They have inspired my children when I have brought them in the past. They are really great to see.

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