



[Micronews Home](#)

[Search Micronews](#)



[MSW Home](#)

[Micronews Home](#)

Micronews Archives

[Articles](#)

[Bug Bash](#)

[Congratulations](#)

[Executive E-mails](#)

[In Brief](#)

[Letters to the Editor](#)

[Photo Gallery](#)

Related Sites

[MSW Home](#)

[MS Library](#)

[Windows Live Expo](#)

Apple for the Teacher

By Aaron Halabe

October 13, 2006

relate

He walked into a humid conference room thick with silent admiration, and departed to thunderous applause. Who "Woz" that superhero dressed in black?

Steve Wozniak, personal computer pioneer and co-founder of Apple Computer, regaled a throng of 375 Microsoft staffers last week as part of the Visiting Speaker Series.

The crowd in Redmond Building 43 hung on every word as Wozniak described early circuit design and microprocessors, his love of pranks, his friendship with Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, and a long-held view of computer design that emphasizes minimalism.

- [Gladw Points](#)
- [Breakf NYT R](#)
- [Amazc Wozni:](#)



A member of the Inventors Hall of Fame and winner of the National Medal of Technology, Steve Wozniak, right, signs copies of his book Oct. 6 in Redmond.

Bearded, burly and bespectacled, Wozniak, 56, cuts an odd visage as a multimillionaire computer-industry titan.

Perhaps it's because he never really intended that role for himself. Growing up in what was later known as Silicon Valley during the advent of the integrated circuit, Wozniak was content to tinker with electronics. He figured he'd become an elementary school teacher or an engineer who would design televisions or satellite guidance systems.

His father, a Lockheed engineer, supplied him with transistors and diodes that he used to build science fair projects, including computer that played tic-tac-toe and rudimentary calculators.

Those endeavors taught him the value of learning by doing.

As a boy, computers were mentioned only in the realm of rocket science, but in high school an electronics teacher gave him a chance to program a computer. "No mortal got near them," Wozniak said. "Whoa, that's like you

are god, you are powerful. ... Nobody's going to even know you're doing this in the whole school. But you're going to know something in your own head ... something so incredible that nobody would believe – you're programming a computer."



Introduced in 1977, the Apple II personal computer was the first commercial success for Apple.

His passion sparked, Wozniak built a series of small computers. With each iteration he challenged himself to produce simpler, more elegant designs.

"I did it with no friends, no teachers, not my parents. I just went into my room all alone. I was a very inside-type person."

Wozniak studied code, instruction by instruction. Later, he learned Bill Gates' BASIC programming language for the Altair microcomputer. A friend borrowed the BASIC tape from the local computer club, made unauthorized copies and later received "the first letter against piracy from Bill Gates."

Another friend introduced Wozniak to Steve Jobs, who also was fascinated by electronics and pulling pranks. In high school "Woz" placed a fake bomb in a locker. The device used a metronome to make a ticking sound. The locker was rigged with a switch to speed the ticking when the door opened. Police and school administrators were not amused.

To pay for his senior year in college, Wozniak got an engineering job at Hewlett-Packard. He expected to grow old there, but he also accepted an offer from Jobs, then at Atari, to help design the game "Breakout."

"It's when the idea of using microprocessors to make video came into my

head, so it was a very useful experience.”

In 1975 Wozniak designed the Apple I, which offered a keyboard instead of the more typical front panel with switches and lights. Apple Computer, which incorporated in 1976, sold about 150 units.

Apple II, which sold 2 million units, showed people “things they never expected in a computer ...color and graphics, high-resolution, paddles and sound for games, incredible expandability (and) huge amounts of RAM,” Wozniak said. “We knew we had a winner here.”

Even after the company was successful, he still longed to fulfill his dream to teach elementary school, which he did for eight years with little public notice.

Wozniak, who had dropped out the University of California-Berkley years earlier, returned and completed a bachelor’s degree in computer sciences in 1986. “Of all the people who started computer companies, I went back and got a real college degree.” His audience groaned and chuckled at the good-natured dig at Bill Gates, who left Harvard University during his junior year never to return.

Wozniak disclosed that his next book will be about pranks, underlining a theory that “what’s fun for a kid can also be fun for adults. And that’s a philosophy of mine.”

[*Have an opinion or feedback on this story?*](#)

[↑ Top of page](#)

©2007 Microsoft Corporation. For Internal Use Only. Contact Us