

# San Jose Mercury News

## **Tom McEnery: A brash young Jobs wrote his own epitaph**

By Tom McEnery

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In his famous challenge to John Sculley, Steve Jobs asked if he wanted to spend his life selling sugared water to kids, or did he want to change the world?

Jobs was quite a salesman. About a year after that famous quote, I saw much of that legendary asset when I met him to discuss the new Apple headquarters that he wanted to build in the southern reaches of San Jose. He had I.M. Pei to design it, bundles of cash, more cachet, and a plan that was "awesome." And he made me an offer that was tough to refuse: He'd make San Jose a great city. Jobs even talked about living in a loft downtown. Wow. You could really see that glimmer of greatness.

But within a year, the man he seduced to lead Apple would send Jobs on his way, and with him went much of the spark that so enlivened that company.

Gone but not forgotten. Like many other parents, I made sure a Mac was on my daughters' desks, part of their kit like a pencil.

There was a sign in my grammar school library at old St. Joseph's -- now under the Adobe Towers -- that said, "you can travel the world over in your library." Now it was possible in your own room. It was a gift to education and a boon to Luddites like me as well.

The word "great" is nowadays used in the most casual way. I prefer it for those who have transcending ideas or real courage. Jobs surely did.

Some of the reason for his unique cult status was his straight talk.

It was as legendary as his ability to turn the inventions of others into cash. As the "Woz" has noted, "he sells all the stuff I made."

In my conversation with Jobs about the "insanely great" headquarters that he would build, he disparaged a prominent Silicon Valley developer and philanthropist as a "sleaze ball" and ranted about how Jacob Rothschild had changed a deal at the last minute to buy a New York apartment.

He only savaged the important and dropped only the best names. He was brash and a bit annoying. And remember, he was still in his mid-20s.

Others have written how he changed the world, and I will let others more qualified expand on it.

But I do know this, because I have seen it clearly in my children and grandchildren, and in classrooms from Costa Rica to Ireland. Steve Jobs helped us all to dream a little more and to make those dreams easier to see. He may have been the supreme visionary in this special valley.

Perhaps most remarkable was that as a young man, he wrote his own epitaph when he said to another: "Do you want to change the world?"

Steve Jobs surely did and we are all the better for it.

TOM McENERY was mayor of San Jose from 1983 to 1991. He wrote this for this newspaper.