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FoxTales: A Techie's Bittersweet Coming-of-Age Story

Hentzenwerke Publishing Announces FoxTales: Behind the Scenes at Fox Software; Riveting Narrative Offers 'A Foot Soldier's Perspective' on the Mercurial Leadership and Market Share Battles of a Software Company Success Story

MILWAUKEE, December 1, 2003 – Hentzenwerke Publishing today announced the release of *FoxTales: Behind the Scenes at Fox Software*, by Kerry Nietz. In this riveting first-person narrative, Nietz recounts a slice of computer history – the eruption of demand for personal computer software – from his perspective as a young programmer working for the mercurial leader of one of the software industry's most successful companies.

FoxTales begins in 1988, when Fox cofounder Dave Fulton hired Nietz, a local farm boy and an honors computer science graduate of Bowling Green State University. At the time, Fox was a little-known startup with 30 employees sharing an old bank building's office space in the sleepy Toledo suburb of Perrysburg, Ohio. But Nietz's hiring coincided with booming demand for PC software – demand that fueled Fox's frenetic workplace, fierce legal and market-share battles with archrival Ashton-Tate, and four years of explosive company growth culminating in Fox's acquisition by Microsoft in 1992 for \$173 million.

"I was just out of school, and here was this dream job working on personal computer software instead of being locked away in a room working on mainframes – and in northwest Ohio, there wasn't much else," Nietz said. "A college kid walks into a hurricane – lawsuits, impossible development deadlines, a tyrant always at my door. College can't train you for that."

Fortunately, Nietz – whose childhood dream was to be a writer – kept a journal during his time at Fox. Many of the recollections that make up *FoxTales* revolve around the experience of "working under less than optimal conditions" for Fulton, "a smart guy who made a lot of good decisions but was not a good people person," Nietz said. *FoxTales* portrays Fulton as the dynamo

of Fox's success but also a tyrannical leader whose employees lived in fear of his knock on their doors – not only at work, but even at their homes. (Once, after a blizzard, Fulton drove from house to house through 10 inches of snow to pick up his developers and bring them to work – then left them at the office without telling them how to get home.) “You never knew who was going to get fired next,” Nietz said. “Dave once fired a guy for taking home a can of pop.”

On the positive side, Nietz noted that for someone fresh out of college, free soda pop was a compelling perk of working at Fox Software. More importantly, Fulton's industrious young software developers enjoyed a remarkable level of job responsibility – and the adrenaline rush of working at the bleeding edge of software development in a highly competitive marketplace.

After Fulton negotiated the lucrative buyout by Microsoft, he took most of his Fox Software team, including Nietz, to Microsoft headquarters in Redmond, Wash. “Our choice was to move or resign – but if we resigned, we wouldn't even get a severance package,” Nietz said, noting that ironically, “Dave uprooted us all despite having gone out his way to hire people with strong local ties so they wouldn't go elsewhere.” Nietz ended up spending seven years at Microsoft – outlasting Fulton, who left the company in 1995.

“All along, I said to myself that ‘this is really going to be a good story one day,’” said Nietz, a full-time writer since retiring from the software business in 1999. “This is my story – a ‘foot soldier's perspective’ – about coming of age in the software business.”

FoxTales: Behind the Scenes at Fox Software can be purchased in softcover (\$9.95) from Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers, or direct from the publisher at www.hentzenwerke.com.

“Most stories about high-tech companies are written from, and for, the perspective of those who lead them,” said Whil Hentzen, president of Hentzenwerke Publishing. “Kerry Nietz has written a story for the rest of us – the thousands of techies and other employees who work for those leaders, and who each day must deal with the consequences, good and bad, of their decisions.”

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About Hentzenwerke Publishing

Hentzenwerke Publishing, a division of Hentzenwerke Corp., is a Milwaukee, Wis.-based publisher of technical books for software developers and users. *FoxTales* is Hentzenwerke's first popular title intended for general audiences. Founded in 1982 as a custom software developer, Hentzenwerke published its first book in 1997 and currently offers more than 25 titles available in print or e-book format at www.hentzenwerke.com as well as through Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers. For more information, call (414) 332-9876, e-mail books@hentzenwerke.com, or visit www.hentzenwerke.com.

About the Author

Kerry Nietz graduated with honors from Bowling Green State University with a degree in computer science. He was employed by Fox Software as a software developer for four years, where he worked on FoxPro versions 1.0 and 2.0. Following the Microsoft's acquisition of Fox, Nietz moved from Toledo to Redmond and became Microsoft employee #29754 for nearly seven years. While at Microsoft, he helped develop FoxPro versions 2.5 and 3.0 for both Windows and Macintosh, then left the "Fox pack" to work briefly on Expedia and then on Microsoft's online bill payment system, TransPoint.

Nietz has been a full-time writer since 1999 and currently makes his home on the family farm in northwest Ohio with his wife, a dog, a cat, and "whatever varmint is living in the crawlspace this week."