

Byte Into Something Truly Amazing

Mac lover Donna Lynn Rhodes goes completely bananas over the Apple Store.

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I have fallen in love.

And the apple of my eye?

The Walnut Creek Apple Store.

It's everything I want in a partner: clean, sensible, honest, innovative, helpful, responsive, hands-on, comfortable and easy to talk to.

It's a match made in high-tech heaven.

When the Walnut Creek Apple store opened in July 2003 I didn't rush down there. In fact, I didn't muster the courage to go in there for the better part of a month. Even though I worked on a Mac at work and at home, I was intimidated to go inside. I found the Mac world behind

the huge glass windows strangely foreboding as I faced the sea of technology. After a few false starts, I made it over the threshold with confidence and determination and my life — double-click and scroll — has never been the same since.

Both Apple computers, as they were affectionately known back in 2003, have changed a lot since the early days. OS 10 had just been released and those of us lucky enough to own a laptop had an iBook. Digital cameras and CD burners were new on the scene and wireless Safari connections hadn't been invented. Fast forward eight years and we can't leave home without a bushelful of gadgets.

And one Apple is never enough — now we want a whole orchard.

During daylight hours there are a few things we've come to expect living in Walnut Creek: construction on Ygnacio Valley Road, solicitors outside Safeway and a line of people waiting at the Apple Store. But I don't mind the lines, it's part of the excitement. It's like waiting in line for a ride at Disneyland. You know that when it's your turn to "get on," it's going to be so worth it. And, like Disneyland, all the Apple Store employees adhere to a strict code of conduct that is both pleasant and perplexing. Also like Disneyland, there's not one bad apple in the whole bunch.

I have been to Apple Stores all around the Bay Area, the country and the world, but the Walnut Creek Apple Store is without a doubt my favorite. It's the employees —they are simply the best. It takes me almost as long to find a parking space outside as it does to hug and say hello to everyone inside. And no, they aren't just nice to me because I always bring homemade brownies when I visit the Genius Bar; it's because I am polite and appreciative and am genuinely grateful for whatever reason I am there. What goes around comes around — it doesn't take a "genius" to know that.

When the store went through a major remodel a few years back, I was disappointed they got rid of the theatre seats because I could watch and learn almost any time of the day. But those seats, and the too-big children's area in the middle took up way to much space. I understand why they had to change but it took some getting used to. Now if you want to learn, you have to make an appointment and, oh boy, is it worth it.

If you buy a computer from the Apple Store or on the Apple website, you can purchase a One to One Membership for \$99. This is the best \$99 you can spend. Young or old, experienced or a newbie, you can get one-to-one training on how to use any and all of the programs on your Apple computer, iPad, iPhone, iPod, etc. Apple wants you to be able to enjoy its products and truly must believe that the more you use them the more you get out of them. And the more you'll want more of them. Du-uh, what a concept.

You buy a car and before you leave the dealership, your service advisor gives you a quick run-through of all the whistles and bells on the car. Not two days later it's raining and you can't remember how to turn on the wipers, let alone program the Bluetooth and climate

control. Apple recognizes that as you do more, you're going to want to know more and that's why they offer workshops and classes for people who buy their products directly.

If you still are saying that you are "totally a PC person" and would never own a Mac, get over it. I've worked on both and it's like comparing apples to oranges. Once one member of your family pushes the Apple cart, the rest will too. The apple never falls far from the tree and in this case it shouldn't. Apple is like a drug and the Walnut Creek Apple Store is like a legal drug house. It's a captivating culture and I am completely and utterly hooked. You will be, too, when you get to know Raven, Patrick, Joel, Nick, Maurice, Lisa, Phil, Leland, all the "geniuses" and the whole amazing team of Applekins who make the Walnut Creek Apple Store the apple of my eye.