

# Unemployed mathematician finds unique path to a job

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SCOTTS VALLEY — He created "new breeds of horses, faster and more elegant," in the computer software world, and parlayed \$20,000 into a multi-million dollar company that in its first 30 months is shipping more programs than any other U.S. firm.

Paris-born mathematician Philippe Kahn, founder and partner of Scotts Valley-based Borland International, has done what millions dream of doing — turning the key to wealth and success.

In less than three and a half years, he climbed from the ranks of the unemployed — a seeker in a strange land — to the bridge of a vibrant company that employs 150 workers in Scotts Valley and has

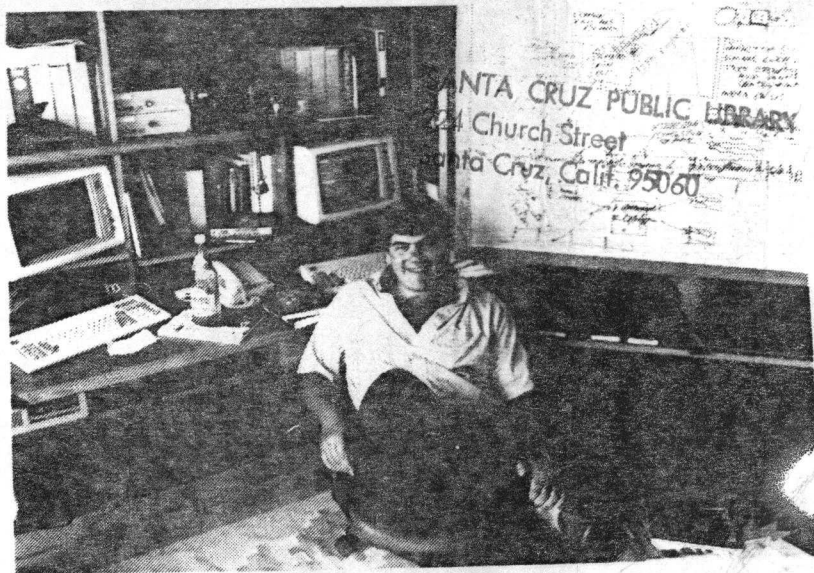
research and development companies in Great Britain and Denmark.

It came about "because I didn't have a choice," the 33-year-old Kahn says in his office at the southwest corner of a new stucco-and-wanwood building Borland leases along Scotts Valley Drive.

Kahn, his wife, Martine, and their two daughters "got off the boat" in Silicon Valley in August, 1982, after a teaching career in French universities and a try at marketing software in Ireland.

"I came here looking for a job, I applied everywhere. I was turned down by everybody. Then I didn't have a choice. I didn't have a job. I had to start my own company."

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Borland International Founder Philippe Kahn

## Unemployed mathematician

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With \$2,000 of his own and \$18,000 from relatives, he gave it a shot.

"It turned out to be a good idea," he says in grand understatement.

Kahn and the high-tech scientists who work with him created 11 "faster and more elegant horses" that bring to the computer screen instant encyclopedias, dictionaries, libraries of law and shelves of medical information.

"What Borland has done is make whole libraries of knowledge instantly and easily accessible," says the December 10 issue of the PC (personal computer) Magazine in describing the company's "Turbo Lightning" program.

Kahn says, "We're the company that ships the most units of software in this country. We did over 100,000 in November and will nearly do 200,000 this month. That's \$4.5 million in sales for November."

Borland ranks fourth or fifth in cash flow among this country's software companies, falling behind such giants as Lotus because its products are less expensive. Prices for the Turbo Lightning spellers, thesaurus and encyclopedia are \$99.95 each.

Its buyers, suppliers and dealers ring the telephone 1,500 times a day.

"One day, technical (department) alone got 600 calls," remembers the switchboard operator, who answers the phone interminably, "Borland, may I help you ... Borland, may I help you ... Borland ..."

The building originally housed part of Victor Technologies, a rising star in the high-tech heavens that fell to earth in the early 1980s.

Does Victor's karma linger on?

"We're very stable. We have 11 best sellers on the market and no single product is responsible for more than 20 percent of our sales," said the ursine and reticent Kahn Friday.

Slumped back in his chair, indifferently dressed, he appears bored by the press; giving very little of himself. There are long pauses after each question and his answers re-

flect impatience.

After Paris, does he like this California community?

"I like it here, otherwise I wouldn't be here," he answers shortly.

He slumps a little lower, keeping his eye on a small computer that flashes a technicolor kaleidoscope, never repeating itself, forever repetitious.

Did he expect to become wealthy?

"No. Money's not the issue. Money's what you make when you're having fun."

His abruptness with the press that comes across as sarcasm brings defense from those close to him.

Public relations woman Robin Tygh, soothes a reporter, "He turns some of the reporters off but it's not the way he is at all. He just feels there can't be any importance to answering the same questions over and over."

"He's not sarcastic at all. He's not like that with people. He cares about people. He cares about music and cares about art."

"He's a renaissance man."

She and Kahn's executive secretary, Susan Hartfield, are proud that their company supports the Santa Cruz Symphony. Prouder that 80 to 90 percent if its workers are locals and proud of the company's success.

"We've gotten so many awards we're going to build a display case in the lobby," Tygh says.

The lobby this season hosts a massive Christmas tree, spun with plastic spider webs and hanging mirrors. The tree is real, however.

The interview drags on. Kahn answering in monosyllables until, with a sly grin, he breaks the pattern, asking the reporter, "What about your life? How do you feel?"

The reporter teases him, saying that everything is overly okay and he's bored.

Kahn suggested suicide as a cure. He holds out his empty hand, pretending, "Here's a gun; use it!"

The reporter declines the empty offer.

**T**HE EXCHANGE RELAXES Kahn. The idea that he's found a cure for a reporter relaxes him. He begins to talk with less prodding.

"What I don't like here is that everything closes at 9 o'clock. I'm from Europe where it stays open all night and after I work here at the office until 9 or 10, I like to go out for a great dinner."

"Except for New York and Las Vegas, everything in this country closes down by 2 a.m. In Europe, it's open all night."

"I hate junk foods. I hate McDonald's. It's not just America that produces junk food. It's all over the world."

Yeah, but what about french fries?

"Well, if they're not too greasy."

He likes art, he says, as he picks

up an exquisite Erte statue from near the window. It is a figure of woman, East Indian in character, her hair woven into a single-strand cape that flows free of the body and circles into the legs.

"I got it directly from the guy," he says, of 93-year-old sculptor and fashion designer. He buys direct because art dealers are too expensive.

He keeps the "Erte" at the office "because this is where I spend most of my life."

A younger Kahn blew a jazz saxophone in Parisian nightclubs, working his way to a Ph.D. in mathematics.

He still owns a horn but it doesn't have any reeds.

"I don't play anymore unless I'm drunk. If I'm drunk and at a party and someone has a saxophone, then I'll play."

He doesn't watch average American TV fare; doesn't have a cable service connection to his home. He does have a VCR for home movies so he can choose his own entertainment.

"I hate cable TV. It's a waste of time. Everybody wastes a lot of time getting their minds polluted by crazy ideas from advertising."

He hasn't wasted much of his time.

Without a job back in 1982, Kahn anted his \$2,000 and \$18,000 from family members and started his own research and development cottage industry.

The company is still owned privately, in partnership.

Who are the partners?

Kahn won't answer.

How many?

"A few," he says.

When he first got to San Jose, he

visited his "third-related cousin" at a summer home in Santa Cruz and decided this was the place to live.

He's bought a home in Aptos. "I like Aptos."

Along with the confidentiality of ownership, there are certain other things he doesn't like known.

When the reporter noticed that one of the pictures in the company files showed Kahn standing by a harbor of sailboats, he asked if he was a boat-owner.

"I was until you asked that question. The boat just sank," he said.

Kahn's defensiveness doesn't appear to turn the press against him. He gets good, even rave, press reviews.

The Wall Street Journal praises him: "L'Enfant Terrible, L'Enfant Riche." His company was given the cover of PC Magazine, an unheard-of event.

"There's a certain faction of the trade press that appears to be very negative. But actually with us, the whole press is reacting positively. PC gave us the whole cover and that's very flattering."

He gets requests for interviews "all the way from the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal to the Santa Cruz Sentinel."

The PC writer has Kahn speaking with a heavy French accent. He reports Kahn, seated at a computer, saying as he punches the keys, "Eets een heer somewhar."

Somehow, Kahn's comic French accent has disappeared since that recent interview.

He is a non-political man.

"I'm more interested in building things than gaining power. I have no interest in power. No, I'm not interested in compromising to gain more power."

As the reporter leaves, Kahn tells him, "Give us a call anytime."

Then he pauses, smiles and says, "And we'll give you the time. Anytime."