A \textcolor{red}{\textbf{COMPANY PROFILE}}

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\textbf{Growing wild about nature}

\textcolor{red}{\textbf{BY MELANIE LEE}}

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\textbf{FIVE YEARS AGO} the giant IBM Corp. took to heart environmental restoration expert Bill Neiman's sage advice: "If you do just one thing for the environment this year... let it be wildflowers."

And so it was that a remarkable relationship was begun, one that might prove inspirational for other companies eager to heed the call of the wild.

In 1987, Bill and Jan Neiman ran a native plant nursery south of Flower Mound in Denton County. That year, they struck a deal withIBM to manage 6,000 acres of The Colony, a land bank IBM wanted to maintain with native plants. Bill Ros, then IBM land acquisition manager (now retired) remembers it well.

"I was the one who originated the idea — the problem was getting someone to execute it," he says. "The county extension folks in Denton tipped me off about Bill and Jan Neiman who had a retail shop selling natural landscaping. We hit it off.... They seemed to be the right kind of people: they wanted to do things natural."

Ros, who is a director for the National Audubon Society, says his bosses were impressed with the notion of preparing the land for future use by getting away from using fertilizers and chemicals, and with addressing water problems by using native grasses. Besides, wildflowers just make a darn good looking spread.

"At Bill and Jan's backyard, you could just step in and say, 'Here's a little patch of native grasses and wildflowers. Can we do that?'" he says.

"We took it on as a project to help the Neimans, and to help IBM get a sense of what it takes to restore a piece of land," Ros says.

When IBM began it's restoration project, the Neimans had been in business for five years and had already sold trees to the city of Dallas and used in multiple projects. IBM's project was huge, and the Neimans were able to use their expertise to make it a success.

"The Neimans say they guarantee that 100 percent of the seeds they sell are grown and harvested from fields within Texas and promise premium seed from the Perennials Group. They also sell wildflowers for the use of Texas lawns.

"I can't understand why other farmers aren't jumping on this," says Neiman of his pioneering efforts in the use of the native North American grasses, which can withstand as little as six inches of water a year, has no natural diseases or pests, withstands extreme heat and cold, doesn't respond to fertilizers like some grasses grow—over five to six inches.

"Besides their work as environmental restoration and land managers for IBM at The Colony, the Neimans for the past two years have worked with TCU Electric to sell 40 acres with wildflowers each year under the BigTrees in North Dallas along LBJ Freeway, Military Parkway, Regal Rose and other heavily-traveled corridors.

Even on the cutting edge, Bill Neiman is a director at large for the Texas Organic Growers Association, a group he says is exploring with American Airlines possibilities of producing organic produce for the airline's first-class flights. And just last week Neiman traveled to South Texas to conduct his first bluebonnet seed harvesting deal he struck with a landowner who wanted the things off his property.

As awareness of water and land usage issues continues to increase, many progressive companies and individuals want alternatives to old and increasingly, inefficient stewardship.

"For people who are open to new thinking, Bill Neiman is being heard," Cooper says. "It's a hard thing to say through. If that's the people in our area. You could say he is at the cutting edge of an industry that could well attract investors. I myself am receiving more calls from people interested in native plants for landscaping, including the general public and small businesses."

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