

HCTC

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CONNECTION

NATIVE AMERICAN SEED

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roots

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One to grow

Native American Seed takes a localized approach to landscaping

BY DREW WOOLLEY

During the summer of 1980, Bill Neiman had an epiphany. After running his own landscaping business in Flower Mound for a few years, a grueling summer and a water shortage took a toll. After nearly 100 rainless days of 100-degree heat in north central Texas, customers were distraught as the beautiful plants they had invested in withered before their eyes.

One day, on his drive home to Argyle, he noticed some greenery on the side of the road that appeared to be perfectly healthy. "There was stuff out there blooming and green, so I would stop on the side of the road and started learning how to identify these plants that were doing fine," Neiman says.

The secret was that these plants were native to the region, unlike the beautiful, but alien, plants from regions like India, the Caribbean and Africa. That discovery spurred Neiman to found Native American Seed, which cultivates and restores native environments throughout the state and beyond.

"I don't think in terms of running a business," he says. "I think in terms of how I want to spend my life. That was a paradigm shift where I asked myself, 'Could it be that all these alien plants demand more natural resources than what our environment can handle?' I wanted to offer an alternative to that approach."

Over the last three decades, Neiman and his wife, Jan, have taken on projects across Texas' 11 distinct ecological regions, as well as coastal prairie restorations in Louisiana. To support their work in such diverse

ecologies, Native American Seed grows more than 50 species of wildflowers and grasses at its Junction headquarters, and it keeps about 5 acres' worth of specialized equipment for conducting native harvests.

The company also publishes a magazine twice a year to keep in touch with its customers. The publication acts as a field manual, including uses for each plant Native American Seed offers, information on how to identify the plants, and graphics of each one.

In the past, the company's dial-up internet speed was too slow to send the magazine files to a printer, forcing a lengthy detour. "We used to have to drive over to Kerrville, go to the library, break the file into five or six smaller files and upload it there. That's 120 miles round trip," Neiman says.

Those limitations nearly forced Native American Seed to relocate, until HCTC's high-speed service allowed them to keep up with the pace of modern business. For Neiman, faster internet service creates the potential for even more people with the grit to run a business outside urban areas to find opportunities in places like Junction.

"If you can't move at the speed that society is moving, you're left behind," he says. "We feel our work is too important for that." ☑



Owners Bill and Jan Neiman are passionate about native wildflowers and grasses.



Gene Stalzer, employee of Native American Seed, is dedicated to customer service.