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News and Views of the Supermarket Floral Industry

Mel Resendiz and the American dream come true

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Growing up in La Florida, a town of 2,700 in the Sierra Madre range in Queretaro state, Mexico, Ismael Resendiz was the middle child in a brood of 13 in a struggling farm family. In Rainbow, CA, today he is the owner of a 125-acre flower farm (he also owns 1,000 acres in Baja Mexico) that employs 20 and sells 200 varieties of flowers with more than \$500,000 in annual sales.

His journey to success is a story that encompasses the American dream: Even though you start with nothing, if you work hard and play by the rules, you can be successful.

Born in 1960, Mr. Resendiz left home at the age of 14 and traveled to Sinaloa, a northwestern Mexican state, where he cut sugar cane and picked cotton. He also learned a lot about hard work, being quick and dependable and getting ahead. Soon he graduated from cutting and picking to supervising the



Ismael (Mel) Resendiz holds a bundle of seven protea.



The hills come alive with color in Rainbow, CA, as waxflower, riceflower, Grevillea Ivanhoe, leucadendron and ligustrum come into bloom. The steep slopes also show that these fields, belonging to Resendiz Bros. Protea Growers, require the practice of vertical farming.

work crew.

After five years in Sinaloa, at age 18 and with \$70 in his pocket, he decided to try his luck in the United States. He persuaded an older brother to make the trip with him. "I survived on sweet rolls and soda pop, beans and tortillas," he said. He finally got a job working for Howard Asper Sr., farm manager for Zorro Protea Farms, who in the early 1960s developed the first commercial protea nursery in California just north of Escondido.

Meanwhile, Peter Sacks, an owner of Zorro Farms, introduced Mr. Resendiz to protea. Dr. Sacks was a native of South Africa, where protea are common, and wanted to grow them here. "I couldn't imagine them being used in flower arrangements," Mr. Resendiz said. "I thought they must be used to make fancy perfume." Mr. Resendiz began to learn English, picking up words and phrases from field workers and managers. Mr. Asper helped, bringing him kindergarten books and audiotapes to help him learn faster.

In 1988, at age 28, Mr. Resendiz was promoted to farm manager. By this time, he had his father, Antonio, and his brothers Porfirio, Ramon and Raul working at Zorro with him. His mother, Victoria, took care of the children. In a partnership with Dr. Sacks, Mr. Resendiz bought 10 acres of land on Rainbow Crest in 1995 and filled it with protea plants. The next year, he planted himself in the United States permanently, becoming a naturalized U.S. citizen.

In 1998, the Zorro land was



Jessica Resendiz, 8 years old, swims in a sea of pincushion protea bouquets at Resendiz Bros. Protea Growers in Rainbow, CA. She is the daughter of Raul Resendiz, brother of owner Ismael Resendiz.

sold to developers, and Zorro moved to Rainbow Valley. But within a year, it went belly-up. Protea were not well-known at the time, and lots of unsold flowers had to be dumped. The Resendiz family was on its own again, but Mr. Resendiz decided to stick with this often temperamental flower. "My brothers thought I was crazy," he said. They were also a little uncertain about his unorthodox horticultural techniques, which included talking to the plants. "Giving them lots of tender, loving care" is the way he put it.

His reputation as a hard-working, dependable and honest person helped Mr. Resendiz find an investor to help expand

his fields. One day in 2000, Mr. Resendiz realized he was the grower, field worker, irrigator, salesperson and bookkeeper. He suggested to Diana Roy, a small protea grower nearby, that she come to work for him. "In effect, I took over his office while he took over my fields," Ms. Roy said in a phone interview. She is sales and marketing, human resources and financial manager for the farm, which started in 2000 with offices in a small trailer.

Mr. Resendiz also turned to his brothers for help. Raul took over responsibilities in Mexico; Porfirio, nursery and propagation operations; Ramon, harvesting. The office, nursery and

packingshed were moved down to the village of Rainbow.

Resendiz Bros. holds awards from the Society of American Florists (Best of Class, 2007) and a passel of blue and red ribbons and Best of Class awards from 2006-08 from the Wholesale Florist & Florist Supply Association.

Rainbow Valley is now home to Mr. Resendiz, his wife and six children. In October, when the protea is in bloom, the steep valley hillsides come alive with colorful flowers, some as big as 12 inches across. Mr. Resendiz appreciates the view. "I love these flowers," he said, "and I love growing them. It sure beats picking cotton."



Diana Roy, pictured here with some of the Resendiz Bros. staff in the firm's packing facility in Rainbow, CA, handles sales and marketing, human resources and financial.