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GLAMOUR SHOT

The team at Resendiz Brothers, led by Diana Roy and Mel Resendiz (right), created a robust portfolio of protea close-ups, wreaths and bouquets, along with behind-the-scenes farm shots. Pictured product includes 'Almond Buff' protea (upper right); 'Flame Giants' leucospermum (lower right); and 'Brenda' and 'Lieben Cherry' protea in the truck bed.

Through their commitment to embracing every promotional opportunity, big or small, Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers propelled their products to the national spotlight, earning the company Floral Management's 2018 Marketer of the Year honors.

BY KATIE HENDRICK VINCENT

When you work the land for decades, you understand that results take time and patience. When you plan for and rebound from whatever nature throws your way, you know that resiliency and attitude are as important as sun and rain. When nature is your life's work, you know success does not come overnight.

Mel Resendiz knows those lessons by heart and hand, having worked as a flower farmer for four decades. And he applied that patience, persistence and painstaking attention to propelling the protea from obscurity into a head-turning, industry favorite and go-to for brides, event planners, designers and everyday flower buyers looking for something extra special. When he and fellow flower farmer Diana Roy teamed up to run Resendiz Brothers Protea Growers LLC in Fallbrook, California, in 2001, they vowed to make the exotic familiar and the protea practical.

"From the beginning, we both agreed that, in order to succeed, we really needed to focus on marketing," Roy said. Their goal: increase consumer awareness and influence floral trends to drive sales of protea flowers and foliage. Their ap-

proach? Seize every chance, big or small, to promote proteas. Over the years, their efforts have snowballed, with "every opportunity leading to another," Roy said.

The opportunities have put proteas on the national stage, appearing in the Rose Parade and the First Lady's Luncheon, as well as every major bridal magazine. In the past five years, Resendiz Brothers has added 93 acres of farmland and increased sales by more than 30 percent. Roy and Resendiz have also encouraged protea growers around the globe to embrace social media to parade their own products, helping fan the flame of protea appreciation worldwide.

"Mel's infinite passion for growing proteas and Diana's undying dedication to sharing their beauty enabled a protea revolution that extends throughout the floral industry," said uBloom founder J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, who visited the farm for his 2010 documentary series, "The California Grown Experience."

For their commitment, tactics and impressive results, Resendiz Brothers received Floral Management's title of Marketer of the Year, along with a \$5,000 prize sponsored by DESIGN MASTER color tool, inc.

Results at a Glance

Here's how Resendiz Brothers' marketing efforts have paid off. All figures relate to the past five-year period:

Investment

\$160,000 in marketing. That number includes \$13,500 in digital marketing media, \$45,000 in industry event registration fees and membership dues, \$58,000 in product donations and \$5,000 in farm events and workshops.

Results

The company has:

Increased protea sales more than **30 percent**.

Added **93 acres** of farmland to accommodate higher demand.

Received an estimated **\$1.7 million** worth of media coverage in industry and consumer publications such as Floral Management, the San Diego Tribune and Sunset magazine.



WARM WELCOME

A sign of hospitality, the wreath appears in Resendiz Brothers' logo, as well as social media posts on the first day of every month with the word "welcome." Pictured to the right are 'Grandicolor' protea and 'Coccinea' banksia.



If a Protea Grows in California, Will Anyone Care?

When Resendiz Brothers launched, few consumers had seen the exotic flowers, though the product had been grown in the United States for nearly half a century. That's because they hardly ever appeared in flower shops.

In the 1960s, Howard Asper Sr., a noted horticulturist, introduced proteas to California. The exotic flowers, native to South Africa, flourished in the state's Mediterranean climate (mild, wet winters, westerly winds and hot, dry summers). Intrigued, retired landowners started growing proteas, in hopes of generating some extra income. They blanketed the hills of San Diego County with fields of red, orange, yellow, pink and green flowers, and waited for the money to roll in.

MOVIE STAR Resendiz Brothers received free promotion — complete with high-quality video footage — when J Schwanke, AAF, AIFD, PFCI, visited the farm for a documentary series in 2010 (left) and again this spring when the San Diego Water Authority included the company in its year long campaign, Brought To You By Water (right).



Alas, only a fraction of the proteas ever entered the marketplace. The North American floral industry wasn't yet familiar with proteas, which have 73 genera and more than 1,500 species, and the farmers did little to educate buyers about their unusual product. By the 1990s, most gave up, happily selling their land to real estate developers for a handsome profit.

Resendiz had spent two decades working alongside his brothers Porfirio, Raul and Ramon at Zorro Protea Farms when the company shuttered in 1999. He was not ready to abandon the wonderful world of Proteaceae. A few years earlier, he had purchased 10 acres, where he was already growing proteas for his own enjoyment. He reached out to Roy about joining forces with his new company. In December 2001, they shook hands and agreed Resendiz would oversee the fields while Roy ran the office.

Show, Tell and Sell

To raise the profile of proteas, for the benefit of the business and the industry, Resendiz and Roy knew they needed to network with wholesalers, retailers and designers.

They started going to as many trade and design shows as possible, a practice they continue today. In addition to shaking hands and passing out business cards, they discovered multiple opportunities to put proteas in the spotlight — such as renting booth space to set out displays, providing product for event

décor and various programs and entering flower competitions.

"Industry events provide incredible potential," Roy said, citing the Society of American Florists' annual convention as one with major impact. The Outstanding Varieties Competition, for instance, has led to prominent coverage in *Floral Management*, where readers learned exactly why judges evaluated the product so highly and received practical ideas to use in their businesses.

"The contest has given us prestige and exposure," Roy said — even in years when Resendiz Brothers walked away without a ribbon. "Simply entering meant attendees got to see and touch our proteas, which is huge." That same philosophy explains her annual donations for the SAF Sylvia Cup Floral Design Competition; having contestants handle Resendiz Brothers product has turned some of North America's most influential designers into protea evangelists.

Furthermore, industry events have introduced Roy and Resendiz to savvy, ambitious professionals with similar goals. They've swapped countless ideas and joined peer groups, combining forces to expand their marketing reach. (More on this later.)

You Gotta See It

The "Field of Dreams" mantra — "If you build it, they will come"? Pure Hollywood fantasy, Roy says. "People don't want something they don't know exists," she said. "No one will buy product sight un-

seen. A lot of Californian protea growers learned that the hard way."

Since Resendiz Brothers' inception, photography has been a top priority. The farm grows more than 250 varieties of proteas and foliage, and each one has had its close-up by Roy. Quality images do the products justice, highlighting their distinctive traits, namely texture. "I want people to imagine the feel of a mink protea's fuzz or a pincushion's spindly bracts when they see our pictures," she said. "Those details are what wow customers." (The trick to capturing them? "Soft light, a clean background and practice," Roy said.) The single-variety shots populate the Resendiz Brothers website, giving buyers a visual list of what's available. They also go on Pinterest, where they await trend-seeking brides.

These close-up images, however, are just a fraction of the company's robust portfolio. Roy takes multiple lifestyle shots a day, alternating between her iPhone and DSLR cameras (a Nikon D5000 and Nikon D5500), and has become "rather insistent" that the staff follows suit. "When you're surrounded by beauty on a daily basis, it's easy to take it for granted," she said. "I remind everyone here that we're privileged to work with proteas, and we should welcome people into our world with behind-the-scenes pictures." Now it's ingrained in workers to commemorate moments such as harvesting proteas in the field, unloading them from a truck bed or arranging them into a wreath. "It's incredibly valuable to always have a

camera nearby,” Roy said. “In five to 10 minutes, you can get amazing material that you can use over and over.”

The photos are crucial players in Resendiz Brothers’ digital and print marketing materials, which include plant labels, seed packaging, brochures, posters, calendars and a book. They have also appeared many times over in nearly a dozen newspapers and magazines, ranging from trade publications to local, state and national periodicals, such as The San Diego Union Tribune and California Bountiful.

“Editors need high-resolution photos and the more options you give them, the better your chance at getting published,” Roy said. “Our photography has definitely given us a leg up with the press, which has put our name in front of thousands of potential customers throughout the country. It’s essentially free advertising.”

Roy estimates the value of media coverage in the past five years to be about \$1.7 million. That number includes high-profile hits such as a feature story in Sunset magazine, a popular lifestyle magazine with a total audience of 4.5 million. The December 2014 issue featured a Resendiz Brothers wreath on its cover, and the expansive story detailed the history of the farm and included page after page of breathtaking images taken by a Sunset photographer. (The editors loved the farm so much, they posted additional snapshots that couldn’t quite fit into the story in a behind-the-scenes post on their website.)

“That article tipped the scales for proteas, sparking a real interest in these fabulous flowers,” Roy said. “After it ran, we received numerous calls and emails from consumers who wanted to purchase them, as well as a lot of requests to visit the farm.” The coverage came about because the California Protea Association’s booth at 2013’s Sun ‘n Fun (the California Association of Flower Growers and Shippers’ annual convention) enchanted Sunset editor Kathleen Brenzel, who participated as a panelist that year. “She saw our display and said she was impressed by the extensive array of products,” Roy said. “She said she wanted to do a story about proteas and Mel and I offered to assist in any way possible.”

New AFE Videos Tout Floriculture Successes

Five new AFE videos were released to highlight floriculture successes through industry support and participation. They were created to bring young people to the industry, spread awareness of the Endowment and encourage industry collaboration.

The introductory video “Heard of the American Floral Endowment?” helps educate those who are not currently aware of AFE’s programs, while the remaining four segmented videos share how Endowment programs complement each group.



Watch all of the videos on our website, Facebook page and YouTube.

Learn how AFE helps all businesses profit through scientific research, educational grants, and programs bringing top talent to the industry through scholarships and internships. Download free resources and marketing reports to reach today’s consumers.

AFE is helping boost profits by tackling tough industry challenges from pests and diseases, technologies, care and handling, and more.

- **Heard of the American Floral Endowment?**
- **Retail Florists Share Why They Turn to AFE**
- **AFE Helping Growers Profit**
- **New Resources for Floral Wholesalers and Suppliers**
- **Students – Ready for a Career in Floriculture or Horticulture?**



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Social Skills

Many of the aforementioned photographs find their way onto Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest and the Resendiz Brothers' blog, “A Passion for Flowers.”

“We lean heavily on social media because it’s cheap, it’s easy and it’s where a lot of people hang out,” Roy said. “There’s no better way to reach consumers, particularly young people.”

She posts at least once a day on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter and averages five to six blog posts a month. That frequency may sound wearisome, but Roy has developed shortcuts to make social media marketing a simpler task.

With Instagram, for instance, she often taps into popular trending themes, such as Monday Motivation, Wedding (or Wellness) Wednesdays, Throwback Thursdays and Flower Fridays. On the first of every month, she shares a wreath — “a universal sign of hospitality” — with the word “welcome.”

Scrolling through her own feed, she takes screenshots of clever concepts and catchy captions and stores them in a folder titled “Instagram thoughts,” which

she consults when she’s not feeling creative. She juxtaposes informational posts (protea identification, seasonal availability, farm activities) with eye candy (jaw-dropping bouquets, wreaths and floral jewelry) and precious pictures that melt fans’ hearts (for example, animals around the farm and community, positioned next to proteas).

She also collaborates with Instagram influencers, such as Mud Baron, a Pasadena farmer and designer who has more than 22,000 followers — many of whom tune in to ogle his flower crowns, tagged #flowersonyourhead. These headresses frequently feature proteas and appear on both Baron’s and Resendiz Brothers’ pages.

Material that begs for more in-depth interaction with fans winds up on Facebook. This is a spot to promote blog posts, articles that reference Resendiz Brothers, full-length videos and events, both on the farm and in the community.

On Pinterest, Roy creates boards that group proteas by species, pinning variety close-ups and images from bridal magazines and blogs.

“A Passion for Flowers,” meanwhile, is her opportunity to call out specific proteas, going into detail on their classification, symbolism, care and handling needs and design applications. Roy also likes to share recent happenings on the farm and to highlight the work of other protea growers around the world. Sometimes, she’ll recycle posts — repurposing existing content with fresh, new photos. “You don’t have to always recreate the wheel,” she said. Writing inspiration often comes from her favorite cooking blogs. “Obviously, the subject is different, but good storytelling transcends genres,” she said. “When I find posts that really draw me in, I bookmark them and try to think how I can use a similar structure or style to talk about proteas.”

Digital Dominance

Geared for consumers and industry professionals alike, **Resendizbrothers.com** is a cornucopia of information, including farm history, growing practices, a comprehensive product list, design ideas, a credit application, an event calendar and an e-commerce shop (“The Protea Store”) that sells bouquets, plants and seeds, gift boxes and wreaths, as well as protea books, posters, calendars and greeting cards. The website also features links to all of the company’s social media sites, newsletter, media coverage, industry affiliations and videos.

“Everything we do goes on the website,” Roy said. “We update constantly.”

The never-ending adjustments have paid off mightily in terms of search engine optimization. Resendiz Brothers has achieved the coveted top ranking for “protea growers” with Google, Bing and Yahoo.

The company’s rising profile online has led to new opportunities that keep protea awareness going strong. Last spring, for example, the San Diego Water Authority approached Roy about a new campaign, “Brought to You By Water,” and asked if the farm would like to participate. Her response: a resounding “Yes!” followed by “How’d you pick us?” The SDWA official said Resendiz Brothers came up first in a Google search, and the videos on their site proved it would be a magical place to film. Through that campaign, which kicked off this summer,



PHOTO OPS EVERYWHERE Business manager Diana Roy has trained the staff to religiously photograph everyday activities, such as harvesting proteas, loading them onto a truck or completing a design, to provide endless fodder for social media.



PRETTY PRACTICAL By hosting the Field to Vase dinner tour in 2018, Resendiz Brothers promoted protea as an outstanding choice for event work, particularly alfresco affairs that require hardy products.

Resendiz Brothers teamed up with several prominent local industries, including a zoo, avocado grower, brewery and ship builder, and consequently saw an uptick in business from local customers. “It was yet another fabulous and free promotion,” Roy said.

Most Likely to Join In

Over the past 17 years, Roy and Resendiz have made a lot of industry friends. In addition to SAF, they belong to the California Cut Flower Commission, the California State Floral Association, CalFlowers, Certified American Grown, the Association of Specialty Cut Flowers, the Garden Writers Association, and the San Diego County Farm Bureau. Resendiz is also president of the California Protea Association and the

International Protea Association; Roy is the International Protea Association’s communication director. Locally, they partner with Muir Ranch, the University of California-Riverside Botanical Garden and the San Diego Water Authority.

“Every one of these groups has contributed to our mission of promoting proteas in some way,” Roy said. Latching onto movements with momentum via these organizations has exposed the farm to a larger audience and provided even more content for social media, helping Resendiz Brothers engage fans and maintain a successful website.

The California Cut Flower Commission, for instance, gave Resendiz Brothers entree into prominent events such as the Rose Parade. Through Certified American Grown, the farm has

been involved with the award-winning Field to Vase dinner tour and the First Lady’s Luncheon in Washington, D.C., since 2016.

The April 2018 Field to Vase dinner was especially memorable, said Roy. The event attracted more than 150 people to the farm for a dinner prepared by chef Teegan Smith, along with design presentations and demonstrations by René van Rems, AIFD, PFCI.

“It allowed us to showcase Proteaceae and the terrain where they grow here in California,” Roy said. “It also highlighted protea as a great ‘event flower’ — especially for outdoor affairs because they are very hardy and hold up well — and created even more interest in protea as a drought-tolerant landscaping plant.” Additionally, the



CHEERS The Field to Vase dinner brought 150 guests to Resendiz Brothers, where they enjoyed a behind-the-scenes tour of the farm and stunning protea décor, designed by René van Rems, AIFD, PFCI.

event provided Resendiz Brothers with a ton of gorgeous pictures, videos and marketing content.

Participating in SAF's Petal It Forward the past three years also boosted Resendiz Brothers' reputation, created awareness of proteas and netted the company more social media followers. During last year's event, a film crew from the TV program "California Bountiful" joined the Resendiz Brothers team for a tour of the farm's fields and showed viewers the emotional response ordinary people have to giving and receiving flowers.

And, as leaders in the protea associations, Roy and Resendiz have encouraged fellow growers to create their own social media accounts. "We're able to cross promote with farmers in, say, Australia or South Africa," she said. "It's helping us spread the love of proteas around the world."

You Get a Protea! And You Get a Protea!

Like Oprah Winfrey, Roy and Resendiz know that generosity pays off. They typically give away between \$10,000 and \$12,000 worth of product a year. In addition to Petal It Forward, they donate proteas for design competitions, design shows, photo shoots, parades, fundraisers and more. "When someone asks for flowers, we always comply — usually sending more than is necessary," Roy said. "We often get some beautiful, professional images in return."

Familiarizing designers with proteas, however, is the company's ultimate goal. "When they see them, they're amazed, and they want to use them more," Roy said. This, in turn, influences design trends. She smiles when she picks up bridal magazines, as these days, all the big players (Martha Stewart, Grace Ormonde, BRIDES, The Knot) regularly feature proteas. She has the same response when she sees florists' protea designs pop up on Facebook or Instagram.

"I remember when we started out, we'd hear that a designer or organization needed flowers and we'd look through the wish list and never see proteas," she said. "Lately, they're almost always on the list. When that became the norm, I really felt like we had moved the needle."



This summer, Texan designer Keith White, AIFD, creative director for the American Floral Trends Forecast, told "California Bountiful" that "proteas are the cool stuff" in floral designs. "People are always asking questions about them," he said. "It's amazing the influence that proteas have had on the whole floral design industry." One of the latest trends, "Tropical Nouveau," — spearheaded by Hitomi Gilliam, AIFD, EMD, founder of the European Master Certification program — involves pairing proteas and other exotic products with more "traditional" flowers, such as roses, hydrangeas, gerberas and carnations. (For more details and examples, visit safnow.org/moreonline.)

Recently, Resendiz Brothers received a call from a wire service eager to include proteas in some of its upcoming designs — which Roy considers a true

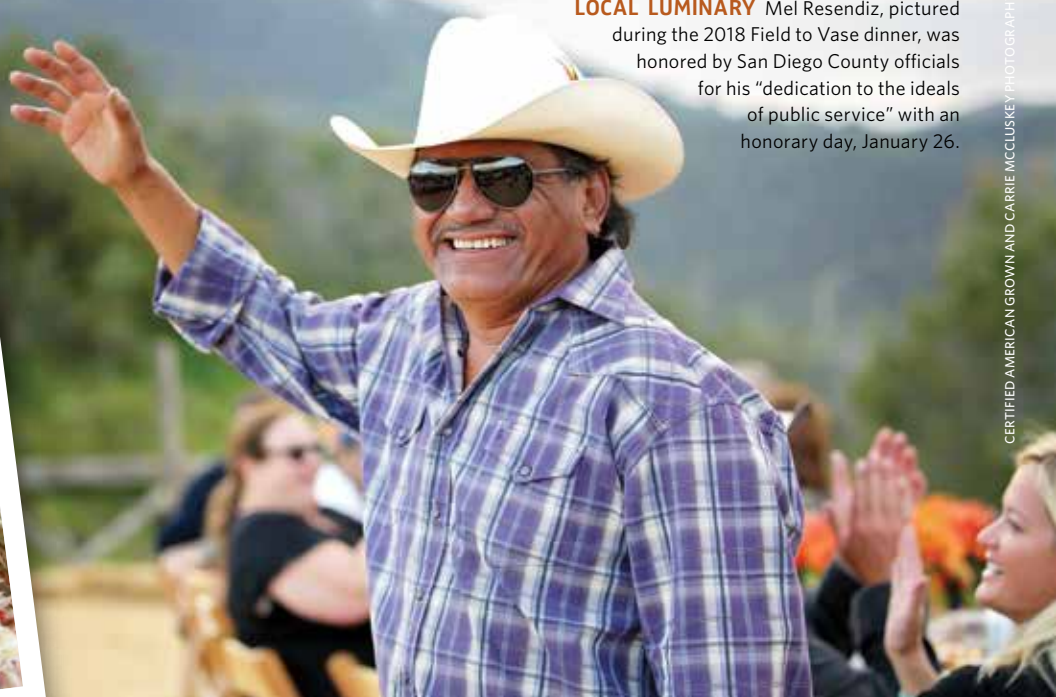
sign that the flowers have taken off. Years ago, a pioneer in California's protea industry broached that very idea with wire services, only to be turned down because demand for proteas was so paltry. "The attitude toward proteas has reversed!" she said. "This makes us feel very accomplished."

Meet, Greet, Repeat

Although the bulk (85 percent) of Resendiz Brothers' business is with the wholesale florist community, the company has also boosted sales locally through a variety of events, both on the farm and around the county.

An active member of the San Diego County Farm Bureau, Resendiz has had many occasions to meet and greet the public to discuss proteas and flower farmers' contribution to the local and national economy. In 2016, the county

LOCAL LUMINARY Mel Resendiz, pictured during the 2018 Field to Vase dinner, was honored by San Diego County officials for his "dedication to the ideals of public service" with an honorary day, January 26.



recognized his "dedication to the ideals of public service" by declaring January 26 as "Mel Resendiz Day."

Additionally, Resendiz Brothers regularly offers farm tours for agriculture groups and participates in plant sales with master gardeners, botanical gardens, universities, agricultural agencies and festivals.

Recently, the farm began leading workshops, priced at \$50 to \$75. Roy got the idea after reading about retail florists' success with terrarium classes. "I thought, we could do this — but with wreaths, which we sell all the time," she said. (Wreaths have become so popular with Resendiz Brothers' customers that the company incorporated one into its logo.) In addition to paying the admission price, "Most workshop attendees wind up doing a little shopping while they're here," Roy said. They're also very happy to pose for photographs, which — you guessed it — wind up on the Resendiz Brothers blog, social media accounts and website. "Workshops are fun activities that also help advertise the business," she said.

Going forward, Roy said the company will continue taking advantage of every occasion to promote proteas. "You never know where these things will take you," she said. "But we won't stop, because we want to see proteas everywhere!" 🌿

Katie Hendrick Vincent is the senior contributing editor of *Floral Management*. kvincent@safnow.org

A Quarter Century of Winners

Resendiz Brothers' win this year represents an important milestone for our Marketer of the Year award, too. We're 25!

Since 1994, Floral Management has invited retailers, wholesalers and growers to vie for this annual award, luring them with the prospect of a \$5,000 cash prize. For the 25th year in a row, that prize is sponsored by DESIGN MASTER color tool, inc. The judges, a panel of seasoned professionals from within and outside the floral industry, rate each entrant in the following four categories: effectiveness of campaign, originality, professionalism and overall excellence. Meet the judges and find out more about our past winners at safnow.org/moreonline.