

# Dallas Business Journal

August 5-11, 2005 | Dallas Business Journal | dallas.bizjournals.com



**BLOSSOMING BUSINESS:** Betsy Bates launched her interiors foliage company 20 years ago. She now oversees plantscapes in some of the market's top office buildings, including Providence Tower, shown here.

## SAVVY SOLUTIONS

Betsy Bates learned how to run her interior landscape business by doing the work, and sometimes the lessons weren't easy

# Starting out green

Christine Perez | Staff Writer

**A**fter 10 years as a landscape architect – first for the city of Dallas Parks and Recreation Department, then for Ben Carpenter as he transformed his 12,000-acre family ranch into what's now Las Colinas – Betsy Bates decided to move indoors and open her own interior plant company in 1985.

What started out as a one-woman show has since blossomed into a 30-person, \$2.5 million operation. Revenue was up 10% in 2004 over the previous year.

Bates' client list reads like a who's who in Dallas commercial real estate: Lincoln Properties, Crescent Real Estate Equities Inc., Trammell Crow Co., CB Richard Ellis Inc., Cushman & Wakefield, Granite Properties, Stream Realty Partners, Jones Lang LaSalle and CAPSTAR. In addition, her work is on display in many of the market's top commercial office buildings, including The Crescent, Providence Towers, Lincoln

Centre and 2100 Ross Ave. (formerly San Jacinto Tower) Fountain Place, Granite Preston Plaza and JPMorgan Chase Tower.

But getting started wasn't easy.

### Diving in

Bates gave herself six months to find success, living off a half-year's salary she had saved preparing for the launch.

"I started with just me, myself and I, and I had to learn as I went," she said. "My biggest challenge was figuring out how to do it all. I watered plants in the morning, marketed in the afternoons and did designs at night.

"I'd sometimes spend hours on designs then not get the account, which was devastating," Bates said. "But I had to go through it to get my bidding right and figure out how to best manage my time. I had to figure everything out on my own."

For months, Bates crammed plants into her compact car, not realizing that greenhouses delivered.

"They were probably laughing at me as I drove away," she said. "I even rented a U-Haul truck once."

In time, pounding the pavement and working seven days a week began to pay off. Through the years, Bates' business has grown solely through networking and word-of-mouth referrals, she said.

Corporate Green was launched just as property owners were beginning to pay more attention to interior plantscapes. Karrie McCampbell, vice president of management at Transwestern Commercial Services, said greenery has become an important part of leasing and tenant retention.

"It helps make a statement and leave a good first impression," she said.

McCampbell tapped Corporate Green to transform the lobby of Providence Tower two years ago. Bates' plan incorporated water and picked up architectural elements in the lobby, such as a large sculpture that hangs on the back wall.

"Before, the look was very dated," McCampbell said. "We really weren't going for feng shui, but Betsy came up with a rocky riverbed and copper elements and used water for its soothing sounds. The tenants love it."

Corporate Green waters 25,000 plants each week. The company takes a three-pronged approach to its service: design, installation, maintenance and seasonal color.

"We'll come in and change out plants, sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly, depending on the clients' needs and budget," Bates said. "I might use mums and sparklers for the 4th of July, incorporate pumpkins in the fall. Seasonal color is something Corporate Green is really known for. I call it the bang for your buck."

### Sharing knowledge

Bates continues to draw all of the designs and has employees go through a rigorous three-month training program. She said she's always tried to learn from her mentors and hopes to pass her knowledge on to others.

"At the parks department I learned the importance of keeping your word, doing what you say you're going to do," she said. "Mr. Carpenter taught me the importance of attention to detail."

Working in interior landscapes fits in with her heritage, Bates said.

"My granddad was a cotton farmer in West Texas, and my dad was an architect," she said. "It's like that Garth Brooks song, 'Blame it all on my roots.'"