

# STREET SCENE

Inside **S**

## No 'La Bamba,' please

They were riding high on the college radio circuit. Then came "La Bamba." The film was a hit and so was their music. Fine for some bands, but Los Lobos would rather start from scratch and recapture the "coolness" they once had. For more, See Page 3D.

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# The Whitcomb Conservatory:



photos by BILL HANSEN

In the showhouse courtyard, water dances merrily from the fountain.

*Orchids, cacti and palms give the eyes and nose a workout*

By Greg Kowalski  
staff writer

If trees could talk, what would the giant canary palm in the Belle Isle Conservatory say? That 65-foot tree has spent most of its past 100 years in the huge greenhouse.

And what would its neighbor, an equally impressive and nearly as tall East Indian palm add? How would their companion, an unusual fish-tail palm, feel?

"Well, they don't have to worry about hurricanes here," said Jim

Justus, the conservatory's horticultural supervisor.

The trees are well-fed and watered, and during the winter, can view the dreary snow from the steamy comfort of the glass structure.

"Here," Justus said, "you can go to Florida without going to Florida."

For nearly 90 years, Belle Isle, Detroit's "jewel on the river," has glowed with a spectrum of floral colors. The 15,000-square-foot Anna Scripps Whitcomb Conservatory, adjoining Lily pool, 10 acres of gardens

and 20 greenhouses, offer a lush variety of plants, flowers and trees, ranging from common caladiums to exotic cacti.

Lush, indeed. The conservatory walk takes you through the steamy tropics, past the desert and into a primeval fern forest. Here, you'll find the strange screw pine from Madagascar (now the Malagasy Republic), which grows in a winding corkscrew shape. And here are the representative trees from which we get lemons, bananas, coffee and, until synthetics, rubber.

BEYOND ARE the cacti. The room is not for the nervous. Spikes abound. Huge yucca plants grow here. Over there is a strange Saint Joseph's Coat with large floppy leaves. The owl's eye cactus watches with a cluster of spiny white orbs.

Other cacti have spines as feathery as gossamer, some present huge thorns. Different varieties of aloes abound.

And just as you leave the room, look for the gently jellybean plant.

In the fern room, you stand on a small balcony and look into an earl-ear age of Earth. A steady flow of wa-

ter splashes across the floor below and gives the room the steamy mugginess of a swamp. Straight ahead is an Australian lily fern — a real tree fern — standing nearly 20 feet tall.

All around are different types of ferns, one of the first plants to have appeared on the earth.

Enough of the heat. The conservatory presents six especially popular flower shows a year, beginning in January.

The winter show — held the second week of January to just before Easter — features cyclamen, cineraria, calceolarias and primroses.

The Easter show — from Easter to Mother's Day — highlights Easter lilies, tulips, narcissi, genistas, azaleas and rhododendrons.

THE MOTHER'S Day show — the first week of May to the first week of June — shines with wild hydrangeas, schizanthus and snapdragons, along with a Mother's Day favorite, Martha Washington geraniums.

The summer show — June to October — displays several varieties of fuschias, caladiums, glorioles, coleus and foliage plants.

The chrysanthemum show — the second week of November to the second week of December — glows with a spectrum of colors befitting the accompanying tall-stemmed giants and miniature button mums.

Finally, the Christmas show — from the week before Christmas to the second week of January — blazes with red, white and pink poinsettias and Jerusalem cherries.

Next to the conservatory is the Lily pool. About 30 feet by 90 feet, the recently refurbished languid pool is surrounded by a rock garden.

Also outdoors is the 10-acre formal gardens. The outer perimeter of the formal garden area is edged with boxwood.

Myriad flowers and a wide swath of grass separate the outer area from the inner sunken gardens. There can be found poppies, daisies, delphinium, phlox, narcissi, roses and other flowers.

ACTUALLY, THE outdoor gardens don't have anything exceptionally exotic, but they have a lot of enough variety to ensure a glowing pallet of colors.

Please turn to Page 6

## If you want to help

A key element in making the gardens bloom is the Belle Isle Botanical Society. This non-profit organization donates funds and does volunteer services, such as conducting tours. Here's how you can get involved:

■ For \$15 a year (\$25 for a family) you "help to improve the present gardens, conservatory and greenhouse, help in future garden beautification and to maintain and assist the volunteer program."

You can write to this address for more information:  
The Belle Isle Botanical Society  
P.O. Box 14693  
Detroit, MI 48214



Horticulturist Jim Piper, whose specialty is orchids, cleans debris from the clay pots used in the different floral displays.



Janet Harper gives the showhouse mums their daily drink of water.