

Newly discovered corn has science A-Maized

A weird variety of weed he discovered down in Jalisco, Mexico, ought to be enough to make a very happy man out of University of Wisconsin botanist Dr. Hugh Ilits.

It hasn't. The plant is Zea Diploperennis. It is not noteworthy because it sounds so much like a touring motor car built in Kenosha in 1912. It is noteworthy because it is the fourth, and so far, the most primitive true species of corn yet uncovered.

Isolated since Adam in a remote mountain range 10,000 feet above sea level, Zea has all kinds of unique germ plasma. Cross-bred with existing strains of corn, this terrible sounding germ plasma could create new hybrids with greater resistance to disease than current models.

Zea Diploperennis is also a perennial plant. Perennial corn could be raised on future farms with fowling near the energy now required each spring to plow, disc, harrow and fertilize fields. That kind of diesel-fueled, tractor-powered cultivation now takes about nine calories of energy to produce one calorie of food.

IN LAS VEGAS, that is what is known as a losing proposition.

"That's interesting," said Ilits. "I think they



Mike Scanlon

might get it (perennial corn).

Still, Ilits isn't happy. You already know that. What you don't know is why — especially since his trip to a nasty, tropical jungle has netted him exactly the kind of thing botanists go into nasty, tropical jungles for in the first place.

One of the least pressing things that has Ilits worried is that Zea only grows in three separate, very small plots.

"A herd of cows in there could wipe it out overnight," he said. That's not his only worry: "Somebody gets some advice from the Peace Corps and says, 'Hey, let's plow this up. It's nothing but a

bunch of weeds.' It can't really be used for anything by the people down there."

The plant grows in a mountain range. "It's gorgeous. It's just beautiful, beautiful — cold mountain streams and all that."

"And the lumber trucks roll in and out of there all the time. Mostly for broom handles."

Like the eye of a hurricane, Ilits remains in relative repose over his discovery even as other experts find themselves unable to conceal their excitement over it.

"We're right now testing this new species and we're finding for the most part that it's remarkably resistant to these viruses that are causing crop damage worldwide. I think we're going to know rapidly whether this thing will work. People are excited because it is corn — if it were horseradish, nobody would care. But it's corn," said Lowell "Skip" Nault, a professor of entomology ("that's the study of bugs") at the Ohio State University Agricultural Research and Development Center.

Nault thinks it may actually be easier to create a Zea cross-breed that is perennial than to make it into plain old corn. Crop rotation benefits and the economic cheap price of seed itself minimizes the economic benefits of perennial corn, although it still offers a lot of energy-saving potential.

A touch of Broadway's excitement comes to Jewish Community Center

First you have to stifle the urge to say to Chris Black ZeVan when she gives her age, "Look, if you're 38, then I must be 92."

Her eyes sparkle, her hair shines, her figure is lean and trim, and she talks in an animated style like water rippling over soft earth.

She shed a lot of tears when her husband Barry ZeVan (they have since been divorced) was transferred to Detroit.

"I thought of it as a lunch box town," said the lady who is now one of Detroit's strongest boosters. Her knowledge of Detroit came from living in a hotel while performing at the Fisher Theater in the troy of "Sweet Charity" and "How to Succeed..."

But, once here and on her own to keep alive a successful career as actress, dancer and choreographer, the city's image brightened.

She became active in the local Screen Actors Guild, picked up voice-over roles in commercials and recently did the choreography for the Metro Chevy Dealers commercial and the "Berlin to Broadway" production at the Meadow Brook Theater.

She will soon be teaching courses in dance at the Jewish Community Center and later this summer for one week at Oakland University.

"What I teach," she said, "is a little different. It's a musical theater style of dancing — a poppurr. I try to take some of the styles of choreographers I have worked with...and give a flavoring of what it's like to be a dancer on Broadway."

While she will draw from four or five of the major choreographers, Bob Fosse, with whom she has worked many times, heads her list of greats.

"He's like a living legend. He's a favorite of so many kids and he had a major influence on me. He has a philosophy of less is more — with one simple

gesture you can say 10 or 15 things to an audience."

She expected to have a mixed group of housewives, students and aspiring dancers in both the beginning and intermediate-advance classes at the Jewish Community Center.

Ms. ZeVan, who grew up in Minneapolis, where there are some fine professional theaters, said her tears about coming to Detroit dried when she found "a combination of Eastern hipness and Midwestern friendliness — it's a strange duality. Now, I feel I've been here forever; it's that comfortable."

She was full of compliments for the quality of theater here.

"The Attic Theater has been tremendously innovative and the educational theaters like the Hilberry, Marygrove

and U of D are doing an excellent job."

Her praise was equally warm for the rapidly expanding interest in dance in the metropolitan area. However, if any further change was needed in her feelings about Detroit, it took place during the filming of the Chevy dealers' commercial.

"Everywhere we went, the civic spirit was marvelous. When we were filming in Grosse Pointe, all the people on the street started dancing."

While she likes performing, she has found another special satisfaction in the creative end of the business.

"It is very exciting to create something for other people and watch it grow — it goes on and on and is passed around."

of all the roles she has played and danced, the one that may stay with her the longest is the little tomboy, Anybodies, in "West Side Story."

For two months the company did "West Side Story" in the Niese Theater in Japan after the film had run there for two years.

"The theater was jammed every night. They wore head sets for the translation," she said. "They just loved the show."

Now living in Oak Park with her daughter, Michelle, 11, who is studying ballet and "reading in the direction of dance by osmosis," Ms. ZeVan has a firm hold on a career in the performing arts that goes in many directions.

ADF appoints new chairman

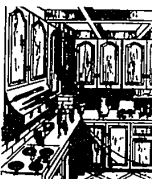
Charles F. Donnelly of Birmingham is serving as general chairman of the 1979 Archdiocesan Development Fund (ADF). The annual appeal is now underway in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit.

Donnelly is vice chairman and chief

administrative officer of the Bendix corporation. He is directing the 1979 drive with Msgr. Edmond Fournier of Sacred Heart Parish, Grosse Ile, who is serving as priest chairman.

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