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Alumnus Treats IWU To "Dinner at the New Gene Café"

"It's a debate so sweeping that it seems certain to dwarf any trade disputes since the advent of the World Trade Organization. What I observed was the formation of a new global politics of food."

Bill Lambrecht, "Dinner at the New Gene Café"

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. --In just a few years, a handful of companies have begun to genetically transform the food supply of the United States, and in their efforts, have created some highly unusual genetic combinations, like rhesus monkeys born with jellyfish genes.

Illinois Wesleyan University alumnus Bill Lambrecht will come to campus Monday, Jan. 28 to share such revelations and their implications on the environment, economy, politics and agriculture, as he discusses his book "Dinner at the New Gene Café: How Genetic Engineering Is Changing What We Eat, How We Live, and the Global Politics of Food."

Published in the fall of 2001 by St. Martin's Press, "Dinner at the New Gene Café" stems from Lambrecht's travels in 13 countries, including India, Peru and Ecuador. The book, which is ranked number six on Amazon.com's top ten list of non-fiction books in the United States in 2001, addresses the collision between politics and biotechnology, transformations in technology and people's resistance of genetic change.

Lambrecht, who received a bachelor of arts in political science from IWU in 1972 and a master of arts in public affairs reporting from the University of Illinois-Springfield, will address three classes at Illinois Wesleyan University, including Environmental Issues, Genetics and Social Movements/Political Protests on Jan. 28.

Lambrecht will then participate in a presentation and panel forum with Illinois Wesleyan faculty at 7 p.m. in the Anderson Auditorium in the Center for Natural Science, 201 E. Beecher St. He will be available to sign copies of "Dinner at the New Gene Café" following the presentation.

Lambrecht will join David Bollivar, IWU assistant professor of biology; R. Given Harper, associate professor of biology and co-director of environmental studies; and William Munro, IWU assistant professor of political science in sharing their thoughts on the economic, political, environmental and agricultural issues associated with genetically engineered foods. Based on "Dinner at the New Gene Café," each panelist will summarize key issues and questions from their respective areas.

Lambrecht's book has received rave reviews. "Dinner at the New Gene Café" "is whimsical, fun and filled with interesting facts," according to the Washington Post. "Lambrecht takes what could be a dry topic and dishes out a great read for those who wonder - or worry - what this brave new world is likely to yield."

"What I chronicle in these pages is a world-shaping debate about irretrievable changes to the environment; about the relationship between science and society; about what the world eats--and who controls it ... and about global economics," Lambrecht writes.

In light of the book, CNN host Larry King said, "If we are what we eat, everyone should be concerned about the story Lambrecht tells."

"Food sustains life and my view is that people should know the origin of what they eat. In a few short years, a handful of companies have swiftly organized the beginning of the genetic transformation of our food supply," Lambrecht said. "It has enormous implications politically, economically and, in many countries, culturally. People also should know that the United States and Canada are the world's only major democracies to be getting a choice in terms of labeling of modified food."

A Washington correspondent for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch since 1984, Lambrecht has covered every national political convention since 1980.

Lambrecht also co-founded his family-owned Bay Weekly, the largest weekly newspaper covering the Chesapeake Bay.

Lambrecht now specializes in environmental and resource issues, having exposed the widespread dumping of toxic wastes by industrial nations in developing countries unequipped to handle it in "Trashing the Earth," an award-winning newspaper series. For the series, Lambrecht reported from South Africa and Third World countries, and has since been credited for helping to end such exploitative practices. Cited on the floor of the U.S. Senate, "Broken Trust," a related newspaper series, chronicled the waste dumping on American Indian land from Arizona to Alaska.

In his journalism career, Lambrecht has won many honors, including three Raymond Clapper awards for Washington reporting--two of which were presented by U.S. presidents--the Society of Professional Journalists, Sigma Delta Chi's top award in the category of Washington correspondence and the Outstanding Alumni Award from the University of Illinois-Springfield.

"I'm a political writer by trade and there are too many fascinating topics out there, including the politics of water and emerging water shortages around the world," Lambrecht said of his future investigations on genetically modified food.

"The future of modified food will be rocky. Big companies aligned with big government believe that they can use political muscle to achieve any end. But I see an increasingly vocal organic food movement, and it's my sense that the United States one day soon will join the debate raging around the world about genetically modified organisms and force companies to tell people on labels what it is they're doing to what we eat."