

The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College | P.O. Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796 | 260.799.5869 | merrylea@goshen.edu | goshen.edu/merrylea

MAEE program focuses on hope

Spirits can sag mid-way through a demanding graduate program—especially in the winter. It doesn't help when your field of study requires you to prepare presentations on topics like microplastics and nuclear disasters. Between the workload, the weather and the state of the world, life can seem pretty grim.

Nevertheless, students in Merry Lea's Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) program say their studies keep them "mostly hopeful." Below are some of the strategies their professors use to shift the focus from what's wrong to what can be done.

Meet inspiring mentors

One boost for MAEE students is a February course that takes place on Andros Island in the Bahamas. But it's not just the beaches and sunny weather that make this experience memorable. The hosts for the group are Peter and Gabrielle Douglas, whose lifetime experiences on the island are an inspiration.

"It quickly becomes apparent that these two people have invested large chunks of their lives to improving the environmental health of Andros Island, and have made a difference," observes Executive Director Luke Gascho, who teaches in the MAEE program and has accompanied the group.

The Douglases are founding members of the Andros Nature Conservancy and Trust and provided key leadership for

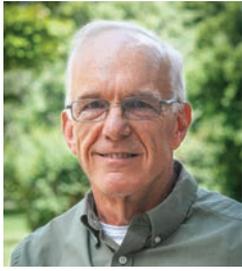


Ali Sanders, a student in Merry Lea's master's program, gets to know a marine species with two Bahamian children.



Josh Crawford, Dave Ostergren and Vicky Benko spot Bahamian birds in a pine forest.

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DIRECTOR'S DESK
DR. LUKE A. GASHCO

Rootedness undergirds a vision for the future

I arrived at Merry Lea about 22 years ago—30 years after Lee and Mary Jane Rieth began the Merry Lea Nature and Religious Foundation. Seventeen years before I came, the “original” Merry Lea was donated to Goshen College. As I dug into my new job, I realized how significant and robust the mission and vision were for this place. The vision was the result of many people imagining, investing, evaluating, implementing and laboring around worthy goals. I was—and still am—inspired by this foundational work.

As I prepare to retire from my role at Merry Lea on June 30, 2019, I am grateful to have worked with many people who have contributed to the exceptional programs we deliver—and have continued to invest in a well-imagined future. Every five years, the team members and board have created a strategic plan to guide the next steps. As we worked on a strategic plan for 2019–2023 that would strengthen all of our programs, we pondered the deep roots of prairie plants which form a tangled net growing well over ten feet deep. This image inspired us.

Through an iterative process, we identified the following four roots. They summarize our plan:

Root A: Educating with Relevance and Influence

The diverse landscapes of Merry Lea provide an educational springboard for people of all ages to develop knowledge, behaviors and skills that will contribute to a healthier world. The reality of climate change informs the interdisciplinary learning and research within the regional watershed and the global context.

Root B: Strengthening Relationships

The 50-year history of Merry Lea generates an extensive array of relationships in the community, the region, and beyond. Nurturing mutually beneficial relationships with local schools, Goshen College, other organizations and individuals will create ongoing vibrancy in the field of environmental education.

Root C: Shepherding Resources

The team members, land, facilities and financial base of Merry Lea enable a healthy pursuit of the mission. Careful balancing of these resources will guide the decisions needed to achieve realistic, credible and attractive programs.

Root D: Communicating Effectively

The robust distinctives of Merry Lea invite people to engage in the array of learning experiences offered. Ongoing work on communication, marketing and recruitment will fill programs with a diverse set of individuals passionate about ecology, global realities, faith and the connections between them.

We have articulated a set of aspirations and desired results for each root. Like the vigorous roots of prairie plants, our roots are hardy and interconnected. No program stands alone! We remain committed to purposeful, interdisciplinary programs.

I am filled with gratitude for my 22 years at Merry Lea—and know that the future is filled with opportunity, vitality, and relevance that will represent the deep-rooted mission. 

ABOUT MERRY LEA

Merry Lea was created with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and through the generosity of Lee A. and Mary Jane Rieth. It is operated by Goshen College. The center provides a comprehensive program of environmental education and recreation.

The Merry Leaflet, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. Jennifer Halteman Schrock is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at goshen.edu/merrylea for more news.

TEAM MEMBERS

Chad Agler | *Building Manager and Grounds Assistant*

Luke Gascho | *Executive Director*

Kerry Goodrich | *Property Supervisor*

Carol Good-Elliott | *Environmental Educator*

Tom Hartzell | *Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs*

Krista Freel | *Environmental Educator*

Bill Minter | *Director of Land Management*

John Mischler | *Director of Agroecology*

Ruth Mischler | *Asst. Professor, SEED*

Dave Ostergren | *Director of the Graduate Program*

Joel Pontius | *Director of Sustainability Leadership Semester*

Ellie Schertz | *Assistant Farm Manager*

Jonathon Schramm
Assoc. Professor, SEED

Jennifer Halteman Schrock |
Communications Manager/MCCN

Katie Stoltzfus | *Public Program Coordinator, Educator*

Marcos Stoltzfus | *Director of Environmental Education Outreach*

Maria Tice | *Admin. Assistant / Volunteer Coordinator*

Jon Zirkle | *Farm Manager*

BOARD MEMBERS

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establishing national parks which now preserve about half of the island. Peter served as a leading dive master on the island for decades and has observed the local coral reefs for over 30 years. He is able to show students examples of both decline in coral health due to climate change and the regeneration that positive actions can call forth. The couple has also worked on community recycling and protection of mangrove ecosystems.

Serve others

The master's students' time in the Bahamas parallels Goshen College's Study-Service Term in that it includes a practicum component. The visitors from Merry Lea teach in five local elementary schools that do not have expertise in environmental education on staff. While the MAEE students need to learn about island ecosystems from their Bahamian co-workers and the children, they are able to bring fresh perspectives from the field of environmental education.

"I feel that what we are doing with our graduate students represents some of the best of carbon on-setting," Luke says, alluding to the carbon footprint required to fly to the Bahamas. "The genuine appreciation and enthusiasm of the schools is hopeful for all parties."

In addition, the Bahamas is an integrative experience that draws on all of the preceding courses: research methods, pedagogy, natural history, environmental issues and of course the teaching practicums students do at Merry Lea. This too is hopeful: Students have the satisfaction of re-engaging with what they have learned and applying it to a new setting.

Take local field trips

Assistant Professor Joel Pontius has a challenging job: he teaches the Environmental Issues and History course that the MAEE students take in January. He admits that the course is "a lot to process." His approach is to stress workable solutions on multiple scales. He enjoys crafting field trips that feature



MAEE students were asked to help others experience a place they had spent time outdoors. *Left to right: James Austin, Emily Hayne and Delanie Bruce help a classmate recreate the sounds heard at her sit-spot using the props provided.*

people who are solving environmental problems at all levels, from the household to businesses, from NGOs to government offices.

"A dominant narrative in our society is that solutions are impossible, and we don't have what it takes to act. But *we* visit people who are taking action," Joel says. "When we are open to taking action, even in small ways, it proves to us and others that change is possible. A main goal of the course is to empower students to continue making changes in their everyday lives that benefit the health of the world socially, environmentally and fiscally."

For Joel, it doesn't get much better than visiting the Warkentien home in Mishawaka, Ind., where electricity, heating and transportation all run on sunshine. Its owners, Dave and Vicky Warkentien, redesigned the home based on passive house principles so that it requires a fraction of the electricity most houses its size use. Rooftop solar panels also supply the Warkentiens' electric cars.

"Actions like these can normalize such lifestyle decisions. When enough people are involved, it can lead to shifts at the policy level," Joel observes.

Delanie Bruce, Snyder, Neb., found the field trip to the Indiana-Michigan Power Company in Fort Wayne hopeful. "They told us that by 2030, all of their coal-fired power plants will be decommissioned because there are less expensive sources of energy: renewable energy, nuclear power and natural gas," she said.

Restorative time outdoors

Students also complete a different kind of assignment in their issues class: claiming a "sit spot" outdoors. They are asked to spend a half an hour there for 20 days at many different times of day and night, in all sorts of weather. The sit spots provide a way to wrestle with material that is hard to understand and painful to think about. They are also a place to regenerate and receive healing from nature. At the end of the course, students present a creative project that represents what they have learned in their sit spots.

In these everyday interactions with places around Merry Lea, students orient themselves to the wonder and complex beauty of the land in winter, oftentimes finding hope in the simple act of paying attention. 🌿

Merry Lea Team finds dialog partners in new places

Schramm Prepares for May Term in India

Every three years, I take a class of Goshen College students to the plains and mountains of northern India to study the ecological foundations of human sustainability and the stress that modernity puts on them. It is a place of unparalleled diversity, density and beauty.

It's one thing to talk about the concept of an ecological footprint. It's another to stand on a hillside in the Himalaya and look across at a village on the other side, seeing the zones of agriculture radiating from it and realizing that 95% of the materials those villagers need for decent lives come directly from that hill. That helps us think more clearly about the lives of Indians living in the cities, not to mention our own lives back in North America with their supply chains stretching across the globe.

After leading this course in 2016, I realized that a working knowledge in Hindi would strengthen my interaction with the many people who help with our trip. It was also clear that working directly with contacts here could create better opportunities for my students when we return in May.

Thanks to funding from Goshen College, I've been able to work on both of those goals during the month of February. I spent the first three weeks of language study in Jaipur, followed by



Jonathon Schramm in Jaipur, India

another week in Delhi and Mussoorie, meeting with colleagues. The latter includes meeting the leaders of formal environmental education programs from all of the Indian states, touring conserved and restored forests in the metropolis of Delhi, and planning details for the upcoming Goshen trip with friends at the Hanifl Centre in Mussoorie. Combined, the trip is giving me many ways to strengthen this occasional international partnership, something which should benefit many students in the future.

Jonathon Schramm is an associate professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department at Merry Lea.

Indiana Educators Visit Southern Forest Schools

Carol Good-Elliott and Katie Stoltzfus of Merry Lea's Environmental Education Outreach Team spent February 7 and 8 visiting Kinderforest programs in Tennessee and Georgia.

They joined 10 other educators in the region for the trip which was organized and funded by the Dekko Foundation, Kendallville, Ind. Jean Lomino, founder and director of Wauhatchie School, Chattanooga, Tenn., hosted the group.

The educators visited multiple forest schools in Southeastern Tennessee and Northern Georgia. They observed teachers and students during forest school days, talked in-depth with teachers and school administrators, conversed via Skype with a researcher and practitioner in Seoul, South Korea, and reviewed research related to the benefits of forest schools. They also lived, traveled, brainstormed and debriefed together as a group, cementing relationships formed in Indiana.

Both Katie and Carol frequently teach in Merry Lea's Kinderforest programs. Neither needed convincing that learning outdoors has physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual benefits. Still,



Katie Stoltzfus reflects with other teachers after a day packed with forest school visits in Georgia and Tennessee.

there were many moments that inspired them.

"I saw a two-and-a-half-year-old open a field guide, flip to a picture, compare it to the creature on the ground and exclaim, 'worm!' I witnessed disorderly behavior change after the teacher asked, 'What other choice can you make in this situation?'" Katie remarks.

The Merry Lea educators were also encouraged by seeing and hearing how the Noble County classroom teachers responded to the different Kinderforest models they saw. The experience increased self-confidence, momentum and passion for outdoor learning.

"The teachers were curious and excited to see how other classroom teachers are implementing Kinderforest in their schools. It will be interesting to see where the Kinderforest movement takes Noble County and Northeastern Indiana in the next few years," Katie said.

The other Indiana organizations that sent representatives to the training were Chain O' Lakes State Park, West Noble Primary, Central Noble Primary, Oak Farm Montessori, Prairie Heights Elementary and the Dekko Foundation. The visit should go a long way toward establishing a cohort of like-minded Kinderforest educators in Northeast Indiana, which was one of the Dekko Foundation's goals for the trip.

Mischler Joins Amish at Grazing Conference

On February 2, I attended the Northern Indiana Grazing Conference in Shipshewana, Ind. I went because Sarah Fleck was giving a workshop called the Art and Science of Grazing. She has a farm in Northern Vermont and is a consultant for grazing farmers. Her particular expertise is working with 100% grass-fed animals.

Animal agriculture often gets a bad rap because overgrazing is an environmental problem. Most commonly, farmers use continuous grazing, where the animals are left in a pasture for an extended period. If livestock remain in a field too long, the plant species they prefer will be overgrazed, resulting in bald patches, while less desirable species remain unchecked.

Sara Fleck discussed management-intensive grazing systems, where the farmer makes careful decisions about when to move the animals to a new field based on the condition of the plants. If you are managing the animals well, grazing can actually improve the land. You're building up soil organic matter and creating plant diversity. Good grazing practices create an ecosystem that is highly productive.

Management-intensive grazing is also better for the animals. They are able to eat higher quality forage, and because they are not cropping the plants so low to the ground, they are not ingesting as many parasites.

Not only did I enjoy the speaker; it was interesting to be part of a conference where the participants were predominantly Amish. A number of Amish farms in this area who direct-market their milk or sell to Organic Valley are interested in 100% grass-fed practices.

Ruth Mischler is an assistant professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department. She oversees livestock at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm.

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Lisa Reiff, a participant at Merry Lea's nature journaling workshop, describes what she noticed during an exercise outdoors. *Photo by Stuart Fakhoury.*

Nature Journaling: Try this at home

"Nature journaling is about noticing: colors, where the moon is rising, the contour of a leaf or antler," Carol Good-Elliott told the dozen people who attended Merry Lea's nature journaling workshop February 2.

The visitors ranged in age from teen to elder. They came to sketch, write, slow down and take time outdoors. Carol, who has kept a nature journal for many years, shared a few of her sketches and provided ideas that could jump start a beginner or inspire a new angle.

Here are two exercises to try at home:

- 1. Blind contour drawing:** Choose an object with an interesting outline and try drawing it without looking at your paper. This will slow you down and force you to look carefully as you attempt to follow the shape. Your drawing may not be beautiful, but you will have trained your eye to see.
- 2. Observing with a partner:** Split up and each find a spot outdoors that you find appealing. Record it in some way—through photographs, notes, sketches, color swatches, species lists—or just observe carefully. Then trade spots and do the same. Share your experiences.

Staff transitions:

Farm manager reflects on six years

Farm Manager Jon Zirkle will conclude his employment with Merry Lea at the end of March 2019 after nearly six years.

Looking back over those years, Jon has a long list of favorite things about his job: Tree pruning, cover cropping, watching students be transformed by working with their hands. Hearing the birds, seeing the seasons change, working with volunteers and co-workers.

The Merry Lea Sustainable Farm (MLSF) has developed a good deal since Jon arrived. “When I first got here, the Hess Barn did not exist. Bill Minter was pulling roots and tree stumps out of what is now pasture for the cows, and the Woody Perennial Polyculture (WPP) was still a conversation,” Jon recalls. Now the barn hosts pigs, goats and turkeys and some of the trees in the WPP are ten feet tall.

“I’ve seen the gardens really improve too. In our market garden, we have permanent walking paths and beds. They look sharp and are consistent,” Jon says. This makes tending the garden easier from year to year and enables groups of children to move through the garden. Jon was part of the team that brought the Exploring the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm program into existence in 2016 and participated in “meet the farmer” interviews with the children.

The Merry Lea Sustainable Farm began marketing food during Jon’s tenure. This included sales at a booth at the Goshen Farmer’s Market, to Goshen College, to undergraduates studying at Rieth Village and to customers on the Goshen College campus via a community supported agriculture model. Jon found it particularly meaningful to provide farm fresh food to students since it has the potential to make buying local food a habit throughout their adult lives.

One critical role that Jon played during his time at Merry Lea was his service as interim director of the Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) following the



Jon Zirkle

illness and death of Dale Hess, the former director, in 2015.

“He was the man of the hour,” observes Executive Director Luke Gascho, referring to Jon’s ability to gracefully bridge multiple roles during a transition. “In the midst of all those challenges, he managed to be a compassionate and caring person,” Luke adds.

John Mischler, current director of the ASI, describes Jon as a jack of all trades, stepping in and stepping up as needed. “He’s someone who is really passionate about building connections across multiple communities. It reassures me that he plans to stay involved with the Elkhart County Food Council and sustainable food systems in the area,” John said.

Jon looks forward to a future that includes writing and adopting a child with his wife, Adrienne. He will return to Merry Lea in the summer of 2019 to teach Crop and Soil Management in the ASI. ☺

dialog partners, continued from page 5

Farm Team Talks Shop with Perennial Farmers

In December 2018, John Mischler and I attended the Perennial Farm Gathering hosted by the Savanna Institute in Madison, Wis. The Savanna Institute is a non-profit organization that supports the development of restorative, savanna-based agricultural systems. In 2013, the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm partnered with the Savanna Institute in order to plan and plant our five-acre Woody Perennial Polyculture.



Aronia berries

The Perennial Farm Gathering was a great opportunity to meet and make connections with other farmers who grow perennial crops. The sessions offered valuable information and good conversations about managing perennial systems and marketing the crops, some of which are unfamiliar to most people. It was definitely fun and energizing to be with a subset of the population who know what currants and aronia berries are!

The Farm Team is already harvesting currants, raspberries, blackberries, and aronia berries from the WPP. In future years, it will also produce apples, paw paws, persimmons, pears, hazelnuts, chestnuts and more. ☺

Ellie Schertz is assistant farm manager.

Resource:

Land Management Webpages Inform Hikers

Merry Lea fans may be unaware of the wealth of information available on Merry Lea's website, goshen.edu/merrylea. One area of particular interest to Northern Indiana residents is the land management tab on the top right corner of the site. These pages describe the ecosystems that make up Merry Lea and the restoration projects underway or completed.

Director of Land Management Bill Minter prepares the content for these pages. Bill has a long history with Merry Lea's landscape. He has been employed at Merry Lea since 1991 and has consulted here as early as 1981. Since restoration projects may take decades, the land management pages often describe how the land was used in the past and what challenges arose during a restoration.

Hikers may be surprised to learn how many years of work and attention lie behind areas that appear natural today. For example, a visitor to the page about the North Sandhill Savanna learns that this restoration began in 1994. Fourteen years later, in 2008, Bill celebrated the appearance of hoary puccoon, a flower species endemic to black oak savannas.



Hoary puccoon, *Lithospermum canascens*, a wildflower associated with black oak savannas.



In this 1994 photograph of the Shew Wetlands Complex, muck excavated from a wetland basin is formed into waterfowl nesting islands.

Bill says his primary audiences are his co-workers and Merry Lea's post-secondary students. Making land management pages available online is helpful to each new group of master's students as they prepare projects for their natural history course. The pages also keep staff informed on land management activities that may impact their programming.

Treasure hunt

Community members can benefit from this public information as well. Put yourself in the shoes of the people described below. Can you find webpages that would help them at goshen.edu/merrylea?

1. You're planning to come for a day hike and you're a person who likes to know what you're looking at.
2. You recently bought a ten-acre property with some weedy areas you'd like to turn into prairie. You wonder what's involved and how long the process might take.
3. You've never come to Merry Lea because you are physically disabled,

but you are a donor. You want to know more about what makes this nature preserve deserving of your dollars.

4. You're the father of a home-schooled geology buff. She's preparing a school project on kames and you'd like to show her what one looks like.
5. You're an environmental science undergraduate with an interest in field biology. You're trying to learn to identify different wetland ecosystems.
6. You're a researcher from another institution who studies sedge meadows. You're curious whether any sedge meadow restoration has been done at Merry Lea.

Extra Credit

What factors led to the disappearance of the oak savannas that were present on what is now Merry Lea before European settlement?

What is the difference between shrub-carr and a swamp? 



Merry Lea

Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

1700 S. Main St.
Goshen, IN 46526

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Events

Learn more at: goshen.edu/merrylea

Spring Break Day Camp

WHEN:

Monday to Friday,
April 1-5 | 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

WHERE:

Farmstead Barn:
K – 2nd grade students
Learning Center Building:
3rd – 5th graders

DESCRIPTION:

A week of outdoor learning including hiking, orienteering, nature crafts and other springtime explorations.

COST:

\$30 per child.
Register on Merry Lea's Events webpage.

Friends of Merry Lea Hike and Dinner

WHEN:

Saturday, April 6 | 4-8 p.m.

WHERE:

To hike, meet at the Learning Center Building at 4 p.m. Dinner begins at 6 p.m. at the Farmstead Barn. A program will follow at 7 p.m. in the same location.

DESCRIPTION:

This event will look at both the past and the future with gratitude for the capable leadership we've enjoyed during Executive Director Luke Gascho's tenure, August 1998 to June 2019.

COST:

The dinner is open to all at no charge. Register on Merry Lea's Events webpage or call 260-799-5869 by April 2.

Retirement Reception for Luke Gascho

WHEN:

Saturday, June 15
2-5 p.m. with a program at 3 p.m.

WHERE:

Farmstead Pavilion

DESCRIPTION:

Join the Merry Lea Team for homemade ice cream, lawn games, canoing and stories.

COST:

No charge.