

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



(Left) Kerry and his wife Robyn in the 1980s. (Right) Kerry Goodrich

Celebrating 40 Years at Merry Lea

“GOOD LUCK,” A COLLEGE STUDENT worker told Kerry Goodrich on his first day of work at Merry Lea. He handed over 30-some keys and left Kerry to figure things out for himself.

What planned on being a temporary job became 40 years of service to Merry Lea as the property supervisor. “Nobody said a word, so I just kept working,” Kerry said half-jokingly about how his temporary position became permanent.

When Kerry arrived at Merry Lea the first week of August in 1980, not only was he the only employee, but none of the equipment ran: the lawn mower didn’t work, old machinery were overgrown with weeds and he had very few tools.

“For his first ten years, he WAS the physical plant,” Bill Minter, director of land management, said during Goshen College’s employee recognition event in early December. Bill has supervised Kerry for the past 30 years of Kerry’s 40-year tenure.

Regardless of the few tools and

personnel at the time, Kerry maintained trails, planted trees, built structures, gave tours to the community, and pulled Mary Jane Rieth’s, wife of founder Lee Rieth, car out of the mud when she got stuck. Apparently, this happened frequently enough that Kerry emphasizes good, high, dry roads throughout Merry Lea’s property to this day.

A Land’s Story and Legacy Through the Generations

Living and working on Merry Lea’s property for decades produces a wealth of stories and knowledge about the place, but Kerry’s story with Merry Lea doesn’t begin 40 years ago. It starts much earlier when he was growing up in Wolf Lake.

Kerry and his family moved to Wolf Lake when he was four years old. In the 70s, his uncle sat on the Merry Lea Board and his father was a local township trustee. Kerry would volunteer at Merry Lea with his father, helping maintain trails and plant shrubs when he wasn’t swinging from grape vines or riding his banana seat bicycle.

Down the road from his house along 650 W in Wolf Lake, Kerry’s grandparents owned and farmed 99 acres that they bought during The Great Depression. After Kerry and his brother would mow lawns and deliver mail in Wolf Lake, they’d ride over to grandma’s and grandpa’s to spend the weekend in their

woods and help them farm.

Not only was his grandparents’ property good for farming, but for quarrying gravel as well. Behind the house is a unique hill where Kerry tobagganed countless times in the winter growing up. This hill is called an esker: an s-curved hill created by Indiana’s last glacier 10,000 years ago.

Due to its glacial geology, the sand and rocks that make up the esker are nicely layered by size. This made it ideal for excavating gravel. Many of the county roads in the area were built using gravel from this esker.

After Kerry’s grandfather passed, his own father didn’t want to continue to farm or lease the property. So, Mr. Rieth bought it in 1971, becoming a part of Merry Lea.

This piece of Merry Lea’s land is known as the Goodrich tract in honor of the previous landowners: Kerry’s grandparents. Their house still stands there today, providing on-site housing for graduate students in Merry Lea’s Master of Arts in Environmental Education program. Growing up, Kerry would sleep over at the Goodrich House; if it snowed overnight, he would often wake up to inches of snow inside the bedroom due to poor insulation. Thankfully, the house was remodeled years ago, so the graduate students don’t experience the snowy nights Kerry once did.

School groups who participate in Merry Lea’s Rock Cycle program arrive to the Goodrich tract and learn about how rocks and physical landscapes tell a story. They explore glacial geology through models and hike out to the esker to discover what’s unique about this hill. Native prairie grasses and flowers that fill the landscape between the Goodrich House and the esker, are part of an ongoing research project that studies

see 40 years, page 3



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE
DR. JASON MARTIN

A Glimpse Behind the Scenes

I LOVE GOING FOR WALKS AT MERRY LEA when there is snow on the ground. The number of tracks left behind by our resident critters never ceases to amaze me. They serve as a reminder that even during the heart of winter, when short days and cold temperatures make it feel as if all life is in a state of suspended animation, bustling activity ensues. Deer form trampled highways of heart-shaped hoof prints. The dainty five-toed prints of squirrels, complete with tiny claw marks, connect the dots between trees. Racoons' larger palm prints mark their progress in search of food. And the dog-like paw prints of coyotes trace their predatory pursuit of mice and voles tunneling beneath the snow.

Although the heart of winter signifies the "slow" time of year at Merry Lea, we are still busy behind the scenes just like our wildlife neighbors. We take advantage of this seasonal lull in our programming to plan and prepare for the upcoming year.

Our Environmental Education Outreach group is hard at work updating their strategic goals, revising curriculum and scheduling public programs for the upcoming months. Undergraduate faculty in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department reflect on lessons learned for tweaking course content for the next Agroecology Summer Intensive and Sustainability Leadership Semester programs. The Institute for Ecological Regeneration crew is developing biodiversity monitoring studies for the spring and summer, including our bird banding research as part of a Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship program. A sizeable "to do" list for the next year has been assembled by our Land Management team for maintaining facilities and restoring ecosystems. And to ensure everything is in place for the growing season, the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm team busily plans their planting schedule, ordering seeds and prepping spaces. Even our resident goats, Ruby and Diamond, are preparing for the upcoming year... we're excited to announce that they are both pregnant and expecting kids in early May!

Soon the snow and ice will be gone, the spring woodland flowers will be blooming, the birds and frogs will be calling, and school children will hike our trails once again. And the annual rhythm at Merry Lea goes on. Although there are times when it may not be apparent to those outside of our walls, we continue to form bustling highways of interaction, connect the dots between communities and track progress in pursuit of our single-minded passion for providing high-quality educational experiences to our "PreK to gray" community. We look forward to learning alongside you throughout the upcoming spring, summer and fall, and for years to come! 🌱



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. Elena Fischer is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at goshen.edu/merrylea for more updates.

TEAM MEMBERS

Chad Agler

Building Manager and Grounds Assistant

Kaeli Evans

Farm Manager

Elena Fischer

Communications Specialist

Kerry Goodrich

Property Supervisor

Carol Good-Elliott

Environmental Educator

Tom Hartzell

Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs

Jason Martin

Executive Director

Bill Minter

Director of Land Management

John Mischler

Director of Agroecology

Ruth Mischler

Assistant Professor, SEED

David Ostergren

Director of the M.A. in Environmental Education

Joel Pontius

Director of Sustainability Leadership Semester

Jonathon Schramm

Associate Professor, SEED

Jennifer Schrock

Leader of MCCN

Marcos Stoltzfus

Director of Environmental Education Outreach / Assistant Executive Director

Maria Tice

Administrative Assistant / Volunteer Coordinator

BOARD MEMBERS

Heather Harwood, Chair

Melissa Kinsey

Colleen Banta

Reena Ramos

Fancheon Resler

Andy Rieth

Ryan Sensenig

Jerry Sweeten

Ex Officio: Ann Vendrely

Ex Officio: Jason Martin

the potential for sustainably grazing domestic livestock on prairie plants.

Kerry got to be part of the process of transforming the Goodrich tract, planting trees with former Executive Director Larry Yoder. Even though seeing his grandparents' land change throughout the years has been an interesting process, Kerry said that "It felt good. I saw that it was of value long term."

But the land isn't the only legacy of Kerry's grandparents upon Merry Lea: their influence extends into Kerry's own work.

His grandparents had chicken coops, a granary, a barn and fruit trees surrounding the house, but Kerry described his grandmother's garden with the most fondness. He recalled that "she

had a huge garden and grew everything." "Grandma could tell you any wild food, tree, flower," said Kerry. "She'd take you out and test you, too." Kerry described how she would point to a plant and ask if it was edible or not, and if you said it was, "you had better be sure you were right, because she would tell you eat it."

This knowledge of local plants and the land came in handy years later when Kerry taught school groups as a Merry Lea employee in the 80s.

"I taught what I learned from my grandmother and from high school." Kerry enjoyed leading small groups of students on the trails, teaching them to identify trees, salamanders, snakes and even how to cross-country ski. Volunteers and Goshen College students also helped teach environmental education alongside Kerry.

Teaching wasn't always a regularly scheduled event for Kerry, though.

Sometimes Kerry hopped off his mower last minute to greet an unexpected school bus.

Executive Director Larry Yoder arrived to Merry Lea after the Rieths donated Merry Lea to Goshen College. "It was the Kerry and Larry show," said Larry with a chuckle. "I taught [school groups] and Kerry took care of the grounds."

Larry had an office at Goshen College and received a phone call from Kerry one day. According to Larry, Kerry asked, "So boss, are you planning on coming down today?" Larry told him no, that he was going to finish his office work up in Goshen; Kerry responded, "Okay, so what do you want me to do with this school bus?" Larry laughs as he recalls how he forgot a school group was coming down for a field trip. His reply to Kerry was, "Well, I guess you're teaching today!"

see 40 years, page 4

Thank you for your support

Thank you to the following people for donating to Merry Lea during this quarter. Your support has contributed to delivering safe environmental programming, maintaining facilities and upkeeping hiking trails.

- John & Barbara Allyn
- Roelif Badertscher
- Kerry & MaryBeth Beck
- Mary Berghoff & Neil Meyer
in memory of Jason Farren
- Janeen Bertsche Johnson & Barry Johnson
- Arlene Bohnke
- Jon & Deborah Byler
- Lee & Patricia Casebere
- Don & Marie Clemens
- Sean & Caryl Collentine
- Daniel & Mary Ann Conrad
- Kathy Cruz
- Julie Davidson & Barry Dupen
- Deana Davis
- Carol Endsley
- Steve & Pam Etheridge
- Shirley Friesen
- Brook & Barbra Frymier
- Eric & Jaime Garton
- Luke & Becky Gascho
- Mary & Glenn Gilbert

- Barbara Good & Dwight Stewart
- Drs. Cripe, Stephens, Stickel & McGuire of Goshen Eye Care
- James & Suzanne Gunden
- Bob & Christine Guth
- Mrs. Arlan C. Haase
- Fred Habegger
- Jean Hartzler
- Roy & Lois Hartzler
- Patricia & Daniel Heath
- Thushan & Jill Hemachandra
- Angela Herrmann
- Ruby Hochstedler
- Jesse & Marla Hostetter Kropf
- Edith Hurst
- International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local Union 305
in memory of Robert L. Grawcock
- Katie Jantzen
- Dawn Kaczor & Steve Lantz
- Allen & Suzanne Kaczor
- David & Lou Ann Kanagy
- Christie Kane
in memory of Carl Diemling
- Debra & Bob Kauffman
- Doug Kaufman
- Mark & Pushpa King
in memory of Esther Landis
- LaDene King & Gretchen Nyce
- John & Kristal Klehfoth
- Kathleen Kremer & Rich McFall

- Max Lake
- Michael & Jan Landis
in memory of Esther Landis
- Tim & Jan Lehman
- Marjorie & Russel Liechty
- Glen & Ann Linvill
- Doug & Angie Lucker
- Kristen Mast
- Lois Maust
- Terry May & Diane Ebert-May
- Paul & Marla McAfee
- Tom & Erika Meyer
- Jim & Eleanor Miller
- Kenneth & Doris Miller
- Marty Minter
- Jill & Roger Morphey
in memory of Robert B. Ritchie
- Laura Moyer & Robert Knappman
- Lisa Myers
- Craig & Charlotte Oswald
- Joe & Madeline Noll
- Clifford & Lisa Lee Peterson
- Michael & Amy Phend
- Roger & Pam Piper-Ruth
- Reena Ramos
- Jill Reedy & Andrew Martin
- Vic & Marjorie Riemenschneider
- Jeff Rosswurm
- David & Beth Rupp
- Mark & Val Rae Sadler

- Andrew Schiedel & Karen Martin Schiedel
- Jonathon & Katie Schramm
- Jim & Mary Shearer
- Gretel Smith
- Bill Smith & Sally Garrett-Smith
- Kaitlyn & Michael Sproles
- Miriam & Loren Stauffer
- Phyllis Stutzman
- Amanda & Chuck Thomson
- Amy Thut & Greg Imbur
- Maria & Adam Tice
- Doug & Jane Vendrely
- Patrick & Ann Vendrely
- Melvin & Marilyn Voran
- Eric & Tiffany Waldo
- Peggy & David Wihebrink
- Bud & Phyllis Wulliman
- Wayne & Roveen Yoder
- Don & Marceil Yoder
- Larry Yoder & Roberta Miller Yoder
- John & Dorothy Yoder Nyce
- John & Winnie Yordy
- Max & Carol Young
- Evelyn & Roger zumFelde
- Jakob zumFelde
- Anonymous
in memory of Blair & Martha Rieth and Lee & Mary Jane Rieth

And Kerry hung up the phone to pick up the baton and teach environmental education for the day.

Larry described this story with laughter and sincere gratitude for Kerry's helpfulness. "Kerry...supported me in many, many ways throughout my time and you can see now, what has resulted in [his] good labors."

Teaching – whether planned or unplanned – was some of the most meaningful work to Kerry. Kerry described how those first 25 years he maintained Merry Lea's land and facilities all on his own. He taught with Larry, worked on trails, mowed lawns, moved picnic tables, upkept buildings, built bridges, cooked steak and mushroom meals for college students, and much more to keep Merry Lea a place where Earth and people meet.

Not only did Kerry build all of the bridges on Merry Lea's property – bridges that have held foot traffic and hay wagons – but he also serves as a bridge between the local community and the Merry Lea team.

Where Earth and People Meet

Even before Merry Lea became part of Goshen College, the tagline "Where Earth and People Meet" was created and used by the organization. Kerry recalls first seeing it on a letterhead from Merry Lea around 1977-78, but its exact origin date remains a bit of mystery.

Larry believes the phrase to be "inspired and serendipitous – it must have been," he said. Larry explained how Merry Lea

is both a physical place where anyone can connect with our diverse ecosystems, as well as an embodiment of the different ways people can "meet" nature. He described the sentiment behind the phrase well, "Much like being at a social party and introducing mutual friends, 'Oh come, you gotta meet Merry Lea.'"

Kerry has been that welcoming personality to introduce people to Merry Lea since he first started, showing great hospitality to community members.

"Kerry is a terrific coworker!" wrote Maria Tice, administrative assistant and volunteer coordinator, during Goshen College's employee recognition ceremony over Zoom. "He often goes out of his way to help employees and students alike."

"He is the face of Merry Lea and Goshen College to resident students and neighbors of the property," said Bill. He is one of the first to greet undergraduate and graduate students living at Merry Lea, helps them settle in, trains them on how to use the tractor or wrestles raccoons out of bathrooms. He chats with hikers passing by and answers calls from concerned neighbors in the middle of the night.

Even though his days teaching with Larry are no longer, Kerry continues to be key in providing opportunities for people to meet the surrounding ecosystems of Merry Lea.

One of these opportunities Kerry provides involves upkeeping trails for hikers and school groups to safely be immersed in nature. Kerry built bridges that cross ditches and provide a higher walkway over trails that often flood. The first bridge he built sunk in quicksand, but since then, all these walkways have provided hikers and the general public

easy access to nature.


Kerry and Luke Gascho, former executive director, built the Michael Yoder Dome together in 1998: a geodesic domed building where students in Merry Lea's Rock Cycle program are introduced to fossils, burning peat and impressive rock samples. "When you run into a problem, Kerry is great at helping to solve that problem," Luke said. When they came across a connector that would not fit, Kerry took it to the shop and measured, cut and welded it to fit.

Kerry built an outdoor shelter for Nature Preschool students to store their backpacks and various supplies. After rainfalls consistently flooded a trail that preschoolers use to pull their supply wagons to and from the outdoor classroom, Kerry built it up to remain dry and traversable for the little explorers.

There are many, possibly countless, projects that Kerry has completed throughout the years that help make Merry Lea run as smoothly as it does. But throughout it all, his love of the outdoors remains true.

"I'm an outdoors person. I don't like being couped up inside all the time," Kerry said, which suits his very active job indeed. He's gotten to witness dozens of grey foxes scamper in out and out of 37 dens from atop a hill, spend a whole fall season watching a golden-colored coyote raise five pups, catch a massasauga, an endangered rattlesnake native to Indiana, (safely) with Larry to observe and take pictures up close.

But his favorite place at Merry Lea is the south savanna at Luckey's Landing. It's a low, old wetland that used to be filled with Tamarack trees. Now their bare stumps give way to the bog smell of mulch and ferns. "I like to watch the birds as they start to set in for the evening. That's who I am. I like to be in the environment." The seclusion and quiet of the space can be felt in Kerry's words.

The Merry Lea team recognized Kerry's 40-year anniversary by inviting former colleagues to join via Zoom. One of the attendees was Randall Stoesz, a former employee of Kerry's years ago. He said, "[I am] always impressed about how [Kerry] can give back what he has learned. Over the years, the property has really become part of who Kerry is and vice versa." 



(Left) Kerry stands in a ditch, working on the parking lot electrical wiring. (Right) Kerry helps Carol Good-Elliott (an environmental educator) prepare the Nature Preschool shelter.

Where Does the Farm Food Go?

MERRY LEA SUSTAINABLE FARM (MLSF)

provides many types of environmental education opportunities for engaging with food and the food ecosystem. But what happens to the tomatoes, stevia leaves or chicken eggs that are grown and collected? The farm not only nurtures human health by providing fresh food, but also nurtures human relationships with the land.

Tasty Education

The education garden is a plot of land at MLSF that sees students in each stage of learning throughout the year: from preschool to graduate school. This space is designed, grown and maintained by collegiate students, providing an interactive space where PreK-12 students taste their way through this ecosystem.

Food for College Students

Community Supported Agriculture baskets (CSAs) are provided to students living and/or working on the farm each week. CSAs are a food-sharing system where the community (in this case, students) buys into the farm ahead of time, receiving a portion of whatever food is in season. Throughout the semester, students share in the abundances or failures of that season.

The farm provides a wide variety of goods including vegetables, fruits, eggs, meat, dairy, herbs, flowers and preserved foods. Students who work on the farm include interns and undergraduate students in the Sustainability Leadership semester or Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI), where they cook and share meals together in communal living.

Food Exchange

Work shares (a "share" of the harvests) are given to volunteers, students and staff that contribute labor, rather than money, to the farm.

Gifts


Farm products are part of gift contributions to volunteers, various Merry Lea program graduates, such as the master's students or ASI students, and Goshen College scholarship awardees. Gifts may include jams, dried herbs or other ingredients. The farm provided the lard that was used to make soap for volunteers this year.

For Vendors

Periodically, the farm has seasonal sale days on the Goshen College campus, selling both produce and meat. Before COVID-19, the college's dining hall (AVI) bought pork from the farm for their meals. Now, pork can be used for 2021 programs, CSA shares and sales.

The farm also donates food to local food pantries, especially fresh produce.

Other Internal Operations

Sometimes a ground cherry pie, fresh vegetables and fruits, or a simple cheese spread are provided for various Merry Lea team events. They make a great snack during long meetings. 

Want to bring MLSF into your kitchen? Try these recipe favorites. Put them together and eat with crackers!

Hot Pepper Jam

Makes 8 half-pints/250 ml jars

Customize types and ratios of sweet and hot peppers based on personal preferences. Requires about 2 pounds of peppers total.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup hot peppers (jalapeños), finely chopped**
- 4 cups sweet peppers, finely chopped**
- 1 cup white distilled vinegar (at least 5% acidity)**
- ½ cup apple cider vinegar**
- 1 box (1/3 cup) powdered pectin**
- 7 cups sugar**
- ½ teaspoon butter (optional)**



DIRECTIONS

1. Wash, stem and remove seeds from peppers, protecting hands with rubber gloves. Finely chop and measure peppers into cooking pot.
2. Stir in vinegar and pectin. Add butter to reduce foaming, if desired. Into separate bowl, measure exact amount of sugar.
3. Bring pepper mixture to a full rolling boil (a boil that doesn't stop bubbling when stirred) on high heat, stirring constantly. Stir in sugar quickly.
4. Return to full rolling boil and boil exactly 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and skim foam from surface. Ladle quickly into jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace.
5. Tighten lids and process 10 minutes in boiling water bath.

Ricotta Cheese

INGREDIENTS

- 2 quarts whole milk**
- 3 tablespoons white vinegar***
- ¼ – ½ teaspoon salt (to taste)**

**instead of vinegar, can also use ¼ cup of fresh, strained lemon juice*

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat whole milk (can also use whey) to 200°F. Add the white vinegar (or lemon juice). Bring the temperature back up to 200. You will see very tiny white particles (the albumin protein) floating in the whey.
2. Remove the pot from the heat and set it, covered, to rest undisturbed for about 15 minutes.
3. Line a colander with very fine cheesecloth, called "butter muslin." Place the colander over a big pot to save the whey (if desired) and carefully pour the whey into the colander. Careful of the hot liquid.
4. Tie the ends of the cheesecloth together and hang the ricotta to drain for an hour or so (the longer you hang it, the "drier" your finished cheese will be). When it has drained, place the ricotta in a bowl, break up, stir and add salt to taste.

This ricotta will keep for about a week in the fridge.



Volunteers Make us Merry (Lea)

FASHIONED WITH RUBBER GLOVES and large safety goggles borrowed from the Goshen College Chemistry Department, Maria Tice, administrative assistant and volunteer coordinator at Merry Lea, carefully poured dissolved lye crystals into melted lard and oil.

One ordinary winter morning at Merry Lea became a quick chemistry lab as Maria, Jason Martin, Merry Lea executive director, and Marcos Stoltzfus, director of environmental education, gathered in the Farmstead kitchen to make bars of soap.

The soap bars were gifts for all of the 36 volunteers who devoted time and efforts throughout 2020 to Merry Lea. Volunteers helped on the farm, land management projects, teaching PreK-12 programs, administrative tasks, bird banding research and more.

In 2020, volunteers gave 241 hours of support to Merry Lea. From an estimate calculated by the Independent Sector, these volunteer hours are the equivalent to a donation of \$6,562!

In a typical year, Merry Lea staff and volunteers would gather at the end of the year for an appreciation dinner to celebrate the volunteers and their contributions. Due to public health concerns about COVID-19, the dinner was canceled.

Despite the change in plans, Merry Lea's appreciation for the volunteers never wavered. Rather, our appreciation grew because of their ongoing support during the pandemic.

"At Merry Lea, we have reimagined how to provide meaningful environmental education in the midst of a global health crisis," said Maria about the many adaptations Merry Lea underwent for various opportunities and events.

"This year, I really appreciated the flexibility of our volunteers. Some traditional volunteer opportunities just have not been possible, or were unusual [due to the pandemic]...but volunteers were flexible as we figured out how to proceed."

Maria also described how we had very



(Left) Maria pours dissolved lye crystals into melted lard and oil for making soap. (Right) A finished bar of soap with a list of ingredients, sent to all of Merry Lea's volunteers from 2020.

willing volunteers who reached out and stood by in case we had any need for their efforts or unique projects.

Some of those special projects included sewing face masks for our summer farm interns, when buying masks was not a viable option in the beginning of spring.

Other projects were more familiar. Returning and first-time volunteers helped run our annual Enchanted Forest event successfully with safety modifications, leading families along lantern-lit trails or dressing up as an animal.

"We definitely need volunteers to help us achieve our goals for our broader mission," Maria said, touching on how volunteers help us provide environmental education to people of all ages and provide habitat for Indiana wildlife, whether directly or indirectly.

Volunteers contribute to all facets of Merry Lea: from plant surveys to teaching, sewing to harvesting produce. As Merry Lea programs and projects shift year to year, Maria finds it exciting to match volunteer interests and skills with those emerging projects.

"It's fun to get to know people and what their interests are, how they connect to the natural world and what inspires them to volunteer."

One unique factor about Merry Lea's volunteers is the diverse mix of people in backgrounds, ages and time spent volunteering at Merry Lea. Some people volunteer one day a year, while others have volunteered regularly for over ten years.

Julie Davidson has been volunteering at Merry Lea for 20 years.

When Julie and her family first moved to Indiana, someone recommended they visit Merry Lea. So, she drove over with her two-year-old daughter and was immediately drawn towards the focus on preserving nature.

"How can I become a member?!" Julie recalled saying as she walked around the exhibits in the Learning Center. A couple years later, she started volunteering in an education program for elementary students.

She began teaching Weisser Park Elementary School students in a former Merry Lea field trip program called Farmcraft. Merry Lea educators led students around the Farmstead to different stations, discovering what life was like 100 years ago before there was electricity or gasoline on an Indiana farm.

The first time she helped with Farmcraft, she taught at the fiber station with her mother-in-law. Julie

lives on a farm with goats, sheep, ducks and chickens, so she would bring her two goats, some wool and her spinning wheel from home. They talked to students about how goats provide fiber that can be cleaned, twisted and spun to make yarn, and her mother-in-law would knit with the yarn to make various items as they taught students.

After Julie participated in that program once a year for a few years, she branched out to teach other Farmcraft stations once a week to more schools. Eventually, she began teaching more field trip programs for schools that introduced students to glacial geology, seasonal changes, wetland critters and turning sap into maple syrup at former Executive Director Larry Yoder's sugar bush.

Since then, there's almost nothing Julie hasn't done for Merry Lea.

She has helped with public programs like Enchanted Forest and Nature Fest, starting seeds in the greenhouse, bird banding, teaching undergraduate students how to shear sheep and manipulate fiber, sewing bird bags for bird banding and more.

Around 10 years ago, Julie started volunteering with the bird banding program with her daughter, who was around 10 or 11 years old at the time.

"There's something so amazing about being able to hold the birds that we kept coming back early in the mornings," Julie described, laughing at how neither she nor her daughter were morning people.

They would arrive at Merry Lea at 6 a.m. to open the nets that safely caught flying birds before sunrise. Every half hour, volunteers like Julie and her daughter would check the nets and bring back any birds for Carol Good-Elliott, a Merry Lea environmental educator, to record each bird's age, sex, measurements and other data.

Currently, Julie helps teach in our Nature Preschool program with Carol. Since the start of the school year in August 2020, Julie has come to Merry Lea twice a week to help facilitate outdoor exploration and learning for 15 preschoolers.

It wasn't until Merry Lea educators Krista Freel and Marcos Stoltzfus put together a four-day workshop on forest school philosophies and Merry Lea's practices in Nature Preschool, that Julie wanted to be directly involved.

At first, she wasn't too thrilled about the workshop being held on Zoom, but it was an enriching experience for her. The workshop included guest speakers, meaningful discussions and interesting content about kids benefitting from nature and how they learn. "So now I'm a nature preschool volunteer," Julie declared.

"[Nature Preschool] really ties together a lot of things that are important to me," Julie said. "It keeps me young."

The preschoolers remind her of what she was like as a kid growing up in upstate New York: clambering up big boulders, making shelters and wading in streams with her father.

"One of the things I've been doing a lot [during the pandemic] is reminiscing, and I've been reminiscing about my family." Her father was a college professor at a small college in New York, and he took her outside with him a lot.

She and her father waded in streams and turned over rocks together, but his main purpose for being in the water was to collect data or creatures for his classes. "His purpose wasn't to teach us about the caddisfly larvae and what they do, but he told us about them. We shared knowledge, shared stories. We were living it, not being taught it."

To Julie, that's what Nature Preschool is about: being in nature with the children and living those experiences together. This becomes a much more powerful experience – for children's learning, development and care for nature – than simply putting knowledge into their heads.

Julie doesn't teach the ABC's or numbers using worksheets with the preschoolers, but they practice counting every day as they talk about the weather and chart cloudy or sunny days.

Allowing Nature Preschool to stir up childhood memories can produce a fond nostalgia, but time in the pandemic also gives space to reflectivity and find connections.

"My fondest [childhood] memories are wading in streams with Dad. Now, my fondest memories are waking up early and capturing birds with my daughter."

There's a nice linear continuation of connection through the generations, as Julie created outdoor experiences with her daughter like her father did for her. But the connection is also somehow circular as the past and present reflect upon each other, blending together.

Julie said, "One of the things I love about volunteering at Merry Lea is working with the staff. They're so knowledgeable, passionate about what they do, and they're all fun in their own ways."

But the same could be said of our many volunteers: they are also so knowledgeable, passionate about what they bring to Merry Lea and are all fun to work with.

Thank you to all of our volunteers for demonstrating adaptability, creativity and a willingness to support Merry Lea in new ways throughout 2020. 🌱



Julie (left) talks with a Nature Preschool student during community circle time.



Merry Lea

Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

1700 S. Main St.
Goshen, IN 46526

NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT 71
GOSHEN, IN 46526

Events

Learn more at: goshen.edu/merrylea

Seed Starting for Beginners

WHERE: Merry Lea Sustainable Farm

WHEN: Saturday, **March 20** | 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Join Farm Manager Kaeli to learn how to demystify seed starting at home! Get an overview of garden planning basics then learn how to grow plants from seeds by starting your own micro herbs, winter-sown flowers and container lettuce to take home.

Cost is \$15.

Registration required by March 18 on our website.

Tales & Trails

WHERE: Learning Center

WHEN: **Last Tuesday each month** | 9 – 10:30 a.m.

Hear a tale and hike a trail with your preschooler to discover the natural wonders around you together! This is a 1.5-hour monthly program designed for children ages 3-5 and their caregiver(s), led by a Merry Lea educator.

Cost is free. Registration not required.

See our website for more details.

Merry Lea Adventure Challenge: The Acer Gambit

WHERE: Learning Center

WHEN: Saturday, **March 20** | 1 – 3 p.m.

Does your family have what it takes to tackle the Merry Lea Adventure Challenge? Families with elementary-aged kids work as a team to solve puzzles, use treasure maps to navigate a Merry Lea property never before opened to the public and race to the finish!

Cost is \$3.50 per child and \$5 per adult.

Registration required by March 18 on our website.

Incorporating Emergent Curriculum Virtual Workshop

WHERE: Virtual

WHEN: Tuesday, **March 30** | 4 – 5:30 p.m.

Learning in the outdoors inevitably brings along unexpected surprises and discoveries! Educators can intentionally incorporate student's shifting interests into lessons through the use of emergent curriculum. Learn what this actually looks like in practice.

Cost is \$15 per person. Registration required on our website.