

Autumn 2014



# The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

P.O. Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796 260-799-5869

<http://merrylea.goshen.edu/> [merrylea@goshen.edu](mailto:merrylea@goshen.edu)

## A Day in the Life of Merry Lea 2

*This is the second of three Merry Leaflets that will give each of our staff the opportunity to tell about their work-days. Four employees are featured in this issue: Kerry Goodrich, Jane Litwiller, Dave Ostergren and Jon Zirkle.*



### Kerry Goodrich Property Supervisor

“There’s not a whole lot that I do that’s worth writing about,” Kerry will say if you ask him. Nothing could be further from the truth. While individual days might involve mundane tasks like property checks and paperwork, the big picture is high drama. In his 35 years of service, Kerry has seen it all. Just get Kerry telling stories, and you realize that of all the interesting jobs at Merry Lea, his would get the highest ratings as a prime time television show.

### Athletic suspense

Kerry is usually on task by 6:30 a.m., but sometimes his day starts in the middle of the night with a call from a frantic graduate student. There’s a bat in the bedroom at Kesling House! In that case, Kerry will grab a butterfly net and head off for a lively game of hide and seek. “It’s a real challenge, because with that sonar, they can turn on a heartbeat,” Kerry comments.

The raccoon in the bathroom makes an even better story. This animal took refuge behind the toilet, and when Kerry booted it out of its hiding place with a shovel, it turned and attacked. Over the years he’s had to evict goats from the Goodrich House, skunks from the Learning Center, ground hogs from all kinds of places and a five-foot black rat snake from a silverware drawer.

### Mysteries

One morning this month, Kerry arrived at work to find that a Merry Lea van had a flat tire. He’d been planning to take that vehicle to town for new tires anyway, but he wasn’t eager to repair them first. When Kerry took the tire to the shop, he found nothing wrong with it. It was the sixth time this had happened since mid July. “Somebody’s playing with us,” Kerry explains with more patience than most people would display. The tire culprit has yet to be apprehended.

### Cops and robbers

Kerry is the only staff member at Merry Lea whose job includes confronting armed men. Hunting season is a challenge because Merry Lea’s borders aren’t fenced and poaching takes place. From November 15 to the end of December, Kerry can expect more than 40 phone calls from neighbors reporting suspicious activity on Merry Lea land. Within a two-week period this fall, he found three dead deer with the racks cut off of them. The hunters hadn’t even taken any meat.

“It’s discouraging to see how disrespectful people are of other people’s property,” Kerry observes. “Back in the 1980s, when I caught hunters on our land, they would hang their heads in shame and walk away. Today, they are just belligerent.” When instructed to leave, some people have threatened him and fired shots over his head. Hikers are advised to wear orange and refrain from hiking at dusk during hunting season.

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Dr. Luke Gascho

## Director's Desk Rural Meets Urban

by Luke Gascho

The setting that Merry Lea provides for environmental education is amazing. The diversity of ecosystems represented within our boundaries form the palette for designing and delivering programs with thousands of annual visitors. I marvel at the beauty and meaning of this place in rural northeastern Indiana.

I am also grateful that this setting is a springboard for learning beyond our boundaries. One of the ways this happens is through the integrative sessions in our collegiate programs—agroecology, sustainability leadership, and the masters in environmental education. We designed integrative sessions as field trips that are a day to a week in length and that explore interdisciplinary concepts. Students and faculty meet with people in work settings that illustrate how various environmental issues are being addressed.

Each December, our graduate students travel to a large regional city to experience environmental issues found in an urban context. For seven years we have gone to either Chicago or Detroit. I participated again this year in our two-day trip to Detroit to observe and converse with people in organizations that are tackling the challenges of this city. The session was designed around the themes of environmental issues and their history, leadership principles in organizations, and models of justice and peacemaking. These relate to the three courses students are taking right now.

Topics that we study in the rural Merry Lea context take on expanded meaning in the urban framework of Detroit. Here are several examples of the similarities and contrasts that we experienced.

### 1. Sustainable farming

We have gardens that are part of the agroecology program. In Detroit, we visited several large urban gardening programs that use similar practices and approaches. People in both settings enjoy getting their hands in the soil.

### 2. Planting trees

We have planted fruit, nut and berry orchards as part of our sustainable farm. In Detroit we interacted with

people who focus on planting much-needed street trees. We also learned how trees have been planted to aid in removing toxins from the soil at former building sites.

### 3. Wastewater treatment

We have installed wetlands that utilize natural systems to treat wastewater. In Detroit, we were shown a massive, aging sewage treatment plant with its incinerators. Whole neighborhoods are blighted from the resulting pollution.

### 4. Green buildings

The Platinum LEED® rating of Merry Lea's Rieth Village models an outstanding approach to sustainable buildings. In Detroit, we toured the Gold LEED visitor center for the Ford assembly plant. Our conversations with the director demonstrated the commonalities and differences in the ways we designed our buildings and interpret them to the public in our settings.

Our students observed carefully and asked great questions. Some of the issues seemed overwhelming, but we also met with determined people who have confidence that they are making a difference. The cross-pollination of ideas between the rural and urban settings yield visions of hope which is what we need for today and tomorrow as environmental educators. Ω

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.

#### ADMINISTRATION AND STAFF

Janie Beck Kreider, Associate Coordinator of Public Pr.  
Luke Gascho, Executive Director  
Kerry Goodrich, Property Supervisor  
Carol Good-Elliott, Environmental Science Educator  
Tom Hartzell, Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs  
Dale Hess, Director of Collegiate Programs  
Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator

Lisa Myers, Interim Pre-K to 12 Environmental Ed Coordinator  
Dave Ostergren, Director of Graduate Programs  
Jonathon Schramm, Assistant Professor, SEED  
Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Coordinator of Public Programs  
Maria Tice, Admin. Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator  
Lisa Zinn, Assistant Professor, SEED  
Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager

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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. Look online at [www.goshen.edu/merrylea/latest](http://www.goshen.edu/merrylea/latest) for more news.



# Summer Job Forges Long Term Bond

Heading back to his second year of medical school in the autumn of 1981 was not an easy transition for Randy Stoesz. It had been such a fun summer working at Merry Lea.

Each day, Randy and his co-worker, Greg Friesen, hiked past Cub Lake, Wilmer Meadows and Bear Lake Prairie in order to get to the house of their supervisor, Kerry Goodrich. Randy learned to love this landscape. He also found satisfaction in outdoor tasks such as maintaining trails and painting the Learning Center Building. Home-cooked Sunday dinners and softball games with the Goodrich family rounded out the experience.

“At one point I realized I either needed to plan to do something outdoors with my life or buckle down and study,” Randy admits wryly.

Randy continued with medical school and became a pediatrician, but he’s also found ways to remain connected to Merry Lea. For one thing, he has maintained a friendship with the Goodriches for over thirty years. He admires Kerry’s broad knowledge of both Merry Lea’s land base and all things mechanical.

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“Merry Lea got into my being. It permeated me.”

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In the past three years, Randy, his wife Ellen and their son, Connor, have traveled to Merry Lea several times to visit their older son, David. Following his graduation from Goshen College in 2012, David spent 15 months at Merry Lea as an agroecology intern.

More recently, in the summer of 2014, the Indianapolis couple came to see the Woody Perennial Polyculture Plot (WPPP) that they funded. The four-acre field was planted in May of this year and contains a mix of future overstory trees, fruit trees and brambles. It is also a test site



Photo by Dale Hess

**Above, left to right: Ellen, David, Connor and Randy Stoesz; Kerry Goodrich, Jon Zirkle, Robin Goodrich and Luke Gascho. The group visited the Woody Perennial Polyculture Plot south of Rieth Village in July 2014.**

for the Savanna Institute of Urbana, Ill., an organization that explores the economic and ecological viability of restoration agriculture.\*

The decision to make a donation grew out of the Stoesz family’s long, positive history with Merry Lea and with food production more broadly speaking. Ellen grew up on an 11-acre vegetable farm near Elkhart that at one point contained over 5,000 tomato plants. Randy’s father worked on hunger issues and international agriculture during his time as an administrator of the Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, Pa.

While the Stoeszes don’t claim to be serious gardeners, they have enjoyed the six acres of woods and shady pasture surrounding their home. Randy tends the pecan, persimmon and other native tree species that the former owner left behind. Ellen spends the most time in the family’s garden, which received a boost the year David gave his parents a gift of plant starts

from the agroecology program. They had not grown leeks, ground cherries or swiss chard before, but took pleasure in trying them. David also got them started raising a few chickens.

The Stoeszes asked Luke Gascho, Merry Lea’s executive director, about a project they could help with just as the WPPP was being planned. The idea of investing in a planting that might produce food for over 100 years appealed to them.

“I also liked the way this project combined local food production, research and teaching,” Randy explains. David and his older sister Laura were enthusiastic, as the gift fit their interests as well. David is planning a career in conservation biology and Laura works as an urban farmer and cooks for an organic grocery in Madison, Wis.

“Merry Lea got into my being. It permeated me,” Randy remarks. May the same be true of the agroecology students and summer workers who weed and harvest the WPPP for the next hundred years! Ω

\*See the Spring 2014 *Merry Leaflet* for more information, available at <http://merrylea.goshen.edu/news-events/merry-lea-newsletter>.

# A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...

## Jon Zirkle

### Farm Manager and Agroecology Instructor

Since I joined the Merry Lea staff in May 2013, my position has continued to evolve. It is a mix of farm management, agroecology and curricular development.

Dale Hess is my supervisor and closest teammate. Together, along with help from our colleague, Tom Hartzell, who plans field trip destinations and shepherds community life at Rieth Village, we carry out the Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI).

In 2014, I began instructing along with Dale and other guest lecturers in this nine-week undergraduate program. I gave lectures on soils, vegetable production and small farm management and marketing. I love teaching and seeing young people come to life when they get out in the soil, help raise food and eat food they've raised for the first time. Leading Sunday evening vespers for ASI or the Sustainability Leadership Semester on occasion is a special treat as well.

I think of my work here at Merry Lea as spiritual work. It's visceral. The life and death of chickens, composting, soil building, discussing food issues with customers—these matters of the daily farm life are tangible, personal, symbolic at times. The lessons I learn out in the field correlate with lessons for my faith. Every day I am outside in the elements with time alone to think, pray aloud, and sing while getting physical work done. If I am frustrated or stressed, I can work that energy out with a shovel or a hoe or by digging up Canada thistle rhizomes.

It dawned on me recently how rare it is in this culture to come in direct contact with manure, soil and animals *at work*. Despite having academic credentials, I get dirty and sweaty and experience the wild while on the clock. Many days I encounter snakes in the field, pick up frogs, shoo away



groundhogs, handle chickens, and see deer walking along the edge of the fields. Doing my laundry is a chore. I wouldn't have it any other way.

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**“I think of my work here at Merry Lea as spiritual work...The lessons I learn out in the field correlate with lessons for my faith.”**

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Being outside each day, I feel in tune with the weather and the seasonal lighting changes. I am discovering how physical work can sharpen the mind and teach me my limits. My back, shoulders, hands and feet are usually tired at the end of the day, and for that I am humbled and grateful. It reminds me of how useless my body felt when I had an office job in Chicago and that I'd rather be spending energy outdoors.

I have deep gratitude for the diversity of my job tasks at Merry Lea. I spend a good deal of time in the fields, pulling weeds, mowing, assembling vegetable baskets, driving rototillers and overseeing interns

and volunteers. I also sell produce at Goshen College and at the Goshen Farmer's Market. I blog, speak to community or college groups and try to find clear ways to communicate about topics like building the soil's organic matter.

Despite the fact that I probably work alone more than many on staff do, I greatly appreciate the team culture here at Merry Lea that makes this place tick. Our farm relies on help from undergraduate and MAEE students, volunteers and other staff to periodically feed chickens, water greenhouse plants or harvest sorghum canes for making molasses. My job could never be done alone. Others' hard work has enabled me to market our produce more broadly, tell Merry Lea's story and help shape facilities and procedures that others will find relevant for their future operations or homesteads.

My past jobs have been more outward, more public. This position is more reserved, though I feel that through my work here we will draw others to come experience the lessons learned by working in the soil, growing good food, sharing God's gifts, and being transformed by God's Creation. It's sometimes slow and hard work, but work I love and to which I am drawn. Ω



# A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...

## Jane Litwiller

### Environmental Science Educator

A “typical” day working at Merry Lea sometimes feels pretty atypical compared to other places. There have been numerous times I’ve had the thought “only at Merry Lea” when I’ve been working on something. I really should have kept a list over the years but haven’t. So here are a few recollections:

- Program preparations yield some interesting experiences. Most recently, I’ve had to pick living worms out of the inside of a trash bag because they crawled up into the bag after I had used it to cover a bucket of compost in preparation for a soils program. We didn’t want the compost to dry out, and yes, it was inside the building. Most of the worms were confined to the trash bag but I did find several dried out escapees on the floor.
- I frequently use pantyhose to make dip nets for the Wonderful Wetlands program. In my opinion, this is a more appropriate use of the pantyhose anyway.
- I get to use a variety of equipment and drive tractors, trucks, bigger trucks, and trailers.
- I have the opportunity to start and use fires. These might be cooking campfires or fires in woodstoves. I even assist with prescribed prairie burns if needed.
- I encounter expected and unexpected scat from both animals in our care and wild animals on the trails. We have some educational animals at the learning center and farm animals at the Farmstead in the fall.
- I have an almost constant opportunity to create. It can be creating curriculum, building models, solving problems or making



## Glacial Geology is Popular This Year

Jane Litwiller, center, shares a model of an esker with elementary children during one of about 20 Rock Cycle programs this fall. The program serves grades three through high school.

Children learn that an esker is a long, winding ridge of sand and gravel, formed by a river flowing underneath a glacier. They see a model of an esker; then, they hike along the top of Merry Lea’s esker and descend its steep sides. Finally, they gather rocks down in the gravel pit that bites into the side of the esker. Many of them have probably driven on a road that was built using rock from this pit.

an improvement custom to the programmatic needs of Merry Lea. It’s great fun going to home improvement and hardware stores and explaining that you’re trying to build a model of a glacier. I like to see what the salespeople will come up with. Usually when they ask if they can help me find something, they can’t.

• I am privileged to have colleagues who are always willing to assist with my wellness goals. They involve me in friendly games of lunchtime broomball

or hacky sack or invite me on a brisk hike.

And here is the craziest one of all:

• I get to play outside and explore the natural world with schoolchildren on a regular basis and call it “work.” Children always find new ways of looking at things in the woods, wetlands, or prairies. They keep me grounded in my sense of awe for the natural world that I could otherwise easily lose in adult monotony. Ω

# A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...A Day in the Life of Merry Lea...



## **Dave Ostergren** **Director of the Graduate Program** **in Environmental Education**

I direct the graduate program in environmental education at Merry Lea, and as is the case for many of us, there is no typical day in the life of a graduate director. Generally, I try to balance my multiple roles: administrator, researcher and teacher of PreK-12, undergraduate, and graduate students.

If I am very lucky, a day might include teaching a group of students something fun that energizes their desire to protect the environment for all peoples now and future generations. Often teaching also requires some sort of preparation such as developing a lecture or grading.

On many days, I also have a nice interaction with one or more of my colleagues. These interactions are often called meetings, but we usually have a good time regardless of the burden meetings place on a day.

Sometimes my meetings even mean solving a problem that makes life better for us all. I firmly believe the essence of directing is empowering others.

My job also requires that I spend about a billion hours on email—responding to requests, sending out instructions for classes, contacting people for future engagement and working with others to continue projects. On lucky days, I get to read stimulating articles or write something that will be published. Having time to read and write in airports and hotels is one benefit of traveling to conferences or other colleges and universities to recruit for our graduate program.

But on my very luckiest days of all, I get to take a walk across this beautiful place we call Merry Lea. Even 30 minutes is a blessing! Ω

Kerry Goodrich continued from p. 1

### **This Old House**

Windows that don't work, toilets that don't flush, garden carts that need tires, smoke alarms, washers and driers, heating and air conditioning systems, seatbelts and septic systems, serial numbers and safety procedures. All these things are in Kerry's job description, and he speaks about them with authority. Kerry makes maintenance sound like both an art and a science. The tile floors we so thoughtlessly walk over at the Kesling Barn require seven layers of wax. Who knew?

### **National Geographic**

The chance to be outdoors is part of what has kept Kerry at Merry Lea all these years. While fall color doesn't do much for someone who is color blind, late fall and early winter are a favorite time for Kerry because he can see contrasts and details that are hidden in other seasons.

"Just watching what God has given us" is a joy to Kerry. "Twice, back around Cub Lake, I have seen bobcats. You just catch a glimpse and then they are gone," he recalls. Another time, he observed a family of fox kits over a two-week period.

### **Trailer**

If Kerry's life were a movie, the trailer might show him building bridges. This is a job he finds especially rewarding. "It's always fun to build a bridge and know when you're done that a tractor can run over it and it won't collapse," Kerry says. He's built most of the bridges in this nature preserve, and some bridges between Merry Lea and the surrounding community too. Ω



# Guests Enrich Merry Lea's Culture



## WOOFERS

This fall, the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm joined an international movement by becoming a WOOFing site. WOOF stands for World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. This network links sustainable farms with people interested in volunteering outdoors. The farms provide food and lodging in exchange for labor. Length of service varies depending on the wishes of workers and hosts.

Four WOOFers have chosen to volunteer at Merry Lea so far. Rachel Drescher of Harrisonburg, Va., arrived in August and stayed until early November. Jean-Pierre Buisan of Tarbes, France, arrived in mid-November and stayed about six weeks. Buisan is pictured above preparing wooden signs for the gardens. Two other WOOFers volunteered for a week each.

Farm manager Jon Zirkle who supervised the WOOFers says that the fall harvest and animal care would have been hard to manage without them. Zirkle was also pleased with the way they enriched the community of the Rieth Village site. Ω

## PROWL

The Program for Outdoor Wilderness Learning is an after school adventure that Merry Lea offers to children at nearby Wolf Lake Elementary School. About 19 3rd to 5th graders and 26 K to 2nd graders visit one afternoon per week on alternate weeks in the fall and spring.

Environmental educator Tom Hartzell heads up the program and organizes graduate students to assist. The hikes this fall focused on exploring with all five senses and observing changes in the seasons.

Hartzell (far right below) says that the timing of the program makes it very different from school field trips. Students arrive at Merry Lea after sitting and listening all day, and they're hungry by late afternoon. "We feed them a snack and have active lessons," Hartzell grins.

The activity pictured below took place on November 19, the last day of the autumn PROWL series. Students were preparing for presentations that would introduce their parents to what they had learned in PROWL.

"We're going to be hibernating bears!" one group proclaimed proudly.

"We're going to show the different seasons," another group explained. Glue, construction paper, coffee filters, pipe cleaners and a little imagination make all things possible. Ω





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Environmental Learning Center  
of Goshen College

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Goshen, IN 46526

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"Where Earth and People Meet"

## Public Programs Coming Up at Merry Lea

### **Out of the Whirlwind: A Women's Spirituality Retreat**

**Friday, January 23, 7 p.m.  
to Saturday, January 24, 3 p.m.  
Farmstead Barn**

Step out of the whirlwind and make space to listen for God's voice. Gather together with women of all ages to rest in a beautiful winter setting and connect with nature on a crisp night hike. Learn from inspiring presenters and workshops. Jackie Wyse Rhodes will return to provide biblical input for this 3rd annual event.

*Registration:* \$50. All activities, lodging and Saturday breakfast and lunch are included.

*Early registration:* \$40 (by January 3)  
*Student rate:* \$30

### **Valentine Sunset Hike**

**Saturday, February 14  
Hike, 5:30 p.m.; dinner, 6:45 p.m.  
Farmstead Barn**

Enjoy a group outdoor jaunt with a loved one; then warm up with a hearty supper and dessert.

*Cost:* \$25 per couple.  
*Student rate:* \$15

### **Friends of Merry Lea Dinner**

**Saturday, April 18  
Farmstead Barn  
Hike 4 p.m.; dinner, 6 p.m.**

Meet others who care about preserving the natural world and enjoy exploring it. Donate \$25 or more now to receive an invitation, or pay at the door.

### **NatureFest**

**Friday May 1, 6:30 p.m. to  
Saturday May 2, 2 p.m., Farmstead**

Bring the whole family and camp overnight. Or just come for the hikes, nature activities, campfire, crafts... Kids are \$5, any time/the whole time. Adult pricing varies.

