

Autumn 2015



# The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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## Colorful Locations Await MAEE Graduates

When Merry Lea's faculty members talk with prospective students considering Merry Lea's **Master's in Environmental Education** program (MAEE), they sometimes hit a snag: Indiana has a bit of an image problem with nature lovers.

Loyal Hoosiers may find it hard to believe, but people who value landscapes are sometimes seduced by tropical rainforests, the Tetons or field stations in the Outer Banks. They

even choose these things over honest Midwest hospitality. We all do our best to describe the charms of Indiana wetlands and our unique glacial geology. But until people have actually arrived and seen the autumn sunlight glinting off of the little bluestem or come upon an unexpected patch of rose mallow, another tack is required.

"I tell people that you can take what you learn here anywhere you want to

go," explains Lisa Zinn, who teaches natural history in the MAEE program.

For this issue of *The Merry Leaflet*, we contacted several of our MAEE graduates to see what kind of work they were engaged in and where they were doing it. Our sampler takes us from mountains to deserts; from the woodlands of East Texas to a farm in Washington State and even to our own wetlands.

### Re-enforcement, Conviction and Confidence:

### Ken Merhege

#### MAEE Class of 2012

**Current Job:** Eighth grade science teacher

**Location:** Albuquerque, New Mexico

**What's best about his current location:** Big open country, deep cultural history and dramatic geography with several ecological transitions zones. Ken has access to mountains, canyons, deserts and lava beds. "We cherish the rain and the smell of wet creosote bush. Water is precious in the West, and my time in Indiana helped me appreciate that," Ken remarked.

#### **Favorite parts of living in Indiana:**

Ken says that living at Merry Lea offered him a striking contrast to the ecology of his home state that helped him appreciate both places more. The wet, lush forests of Northern Indiana provided enjoyable



While Ken Merhege is usually found in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he can also offer an informed opinion of the ecotourism options in South Africa.

distractions such as going out in the backyard, rolling over a log and finding a salamander.

Ken appreciates that his education opened his eyes to the issues present in a part of the country that was

unfamiliar to him. Often, the issues were similar to those faced by New Mexico, but somehow more intense because people in Indiana live closer together and can be harder on the land.

**continued on page 6**



Director's Desk.....by Luke Gascho

# Team and Teeming

It is an honor to hear people remark

about what a wonderful place Merry Lea is. This statement is often expressed to me following presentations such as the one I did with a retired group of people in Goshen last week. Two underlying reasons for this observation immediately come to my mind. One is the amazing *team* at Merry Lea and the other is that Merry Lea ecosystems are *teeming* with life.

What a good team of people work at Merry Lea! This is a central thought I reflect on at the end of many days. I see the team working hard to deliver our many different programs. The breadth and depth of the knowledge and wisdom that the group shares makes it possible for us to offer such quality programs. The program and support teams are stretched too thin in the midst of busy program seasons—which is the challenge of the PreK to 12 environmental education team this fall. Yet, each team joins forces with the other members to find a good way to create meaningful learning experiences for our students of all ages. We regularly check in with each other to see how we can be better equipped to meet the programmatic needs.

The Merry Lea team is a synergistic, living body of people. While we tackle the hard work of

programming, there is frequent laughter in team meetings that bolsters our spirits and reflects the joy we experience in working together in this setting. I have great gratitude for this team and am honored to be a member of it.

And how inspiring to see the abundance of life teeming across the Merry Lea landscape! Each ecosystem has a web of creatures that thrive together—forming healthy balances in the ebb and flow of the seasons. Our teaching trails meander through the array of ecosystems and provide views into the special qualities of each place.

The word, *teeming*, is often associated with creatures in the water. I was impressed with that again last week as Jane Litwiller, one of our environmental educators, presented her findings from her master's project. Her work focused on macroinvertebrates in three Merry Lea wetlands. Seeing the photos taken through the lens of a microscope illustrates the marvelous, distinctive structures that make up each species. The audience laughed as Jane described her attempts to identify these minute creatures. As she noted, the health of our wetlands depends on whether they are teeming with macroinvertebrates.

We are a team—and our land teems with life. The combination of those two concepts makes Merry Lea a great place to work and learn. §



Photo by Carol Good-Elliott

**Monya Weissert**, a volunteer in the Pre-K to 12 education program, points out the life hiding on the underside of a hackberry leaf during a **Trees are Terrific** program October 6. Hackberry leaves often sport nipple shaped galls about 3/16th inch wide and 1/4 inch high. These are home to the nymphs of several species of plant lice in the Psyllidae family. Tiny winged insects emerge from the galls in September.

In addition to plant lice, over forty species of butterflies and moths depend on hackberry trees for food or shelter. That sounds like a lot, but the “teeming with life” award actually goes to the oak genus (*Quercus*) which supports over 500 species of butterflies and moths.

The **Trees are Terrific** program introduces students to tree anatomy and physiology, tree identification and how trees fit into their ecosystems. §

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.

### MERRY LEA TEAM MEMBERS

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  
Kate Friesen, Assistant Farm Manager  
Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator  
Bill F. Minter, Director of Land Management

Dave Ostergren, Director of Graduate Programs  
Joel Pontius, Director of PreK–12 Programs  
Jonathon Schramm, Assistant Professor, SEED  
Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Coordinator of Public Programs  
Maria Tice, Admin. Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator  
Doug Yoder, Building Manager  
Lisa Zinn, Assistant Professor, SEED  
Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager

### MERRY LEA BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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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.



# Two New Staff Members Join Merry Lea's Team



## Doug Yoder

### Building Manager

Doug Yoder, Goshen, Ind., is the new building manager and assistant groundskeeper at Merry Lea. His hiring fills a vacancy left when Jane Litwiller's job description shifted to full time environmental education. It also enables Property Supervisor Kerry Goodrich to spend more time on outdoor tasks.

Doug is a renaissance man whose resume includes twenty years of teaching art, over a decade of collegiate level coaching and master's degrees in both art and business administration. He comes to Merry Lea from the Goshen College athletic department where he was the head coach of the men's and women's cross country teams and track and field teams. During his time there, he produced eight straight winning seasons in girls' cross country and qualified his team for regional and semi-state competition in each of his last six years.

Before that, Doug taught art at Goshen High School for 25 years. His days were full of time in the classroom, curriculum development, administrative duties as department chair and implementing graphic design projects the school needed. A mural he painted is still on display in the main entryway of the school.

Interestingly, one of Doug's class lectures anticipated current discussion at Goshen High School about the racial implications of the team name, the Redskins. About fifteen years ago, Doug mocked up an alternative mascot for a graphic design class. His "Red Rhinos" presentation demonstrated how one could transition away from a controversial image without losing brand language such as "Go Big Red!" Unfortunately, Doug didn't keep his Red Rhinos file, so the school officials are on their own as they seek an alternative to Redskins.

One thing that attracted Doug to the position at Merry Lea was the opportunity to work normal business hours instead of coaching hours. He also says that the variety his new job provides is wonderful. "Mowing those trails is a pretty nice gig!" he grins. §

## Kate Friesen

### Assistant Farm Manager

Meet Kate Friesen, the new Assistant Farm Manager at Merry Lea's sustainable farm. Kate has been keeping on top of farm care and marketing while Jon Zirkle serves as interim director of the agroecology program.

Kate is not a new face at Merry Lea; as a Goshen College student she studied ornithology with Lisa Zinn and land management with Bill Minter. Kate majored in English, but she spent her summers in South Central Idaho working on a family farm that marketed their crops through a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture.) Those summers were formative, and Kate learned to work with hay, pinto beans and 70 head of cattle.

"Working there was what got me interested in farming," Kate says. "People are so appreciative when you grow food for them, and in Idaho, there was a lot of community support."



After graduating from Goshen College in the spring of 2014, Kate spent a year at Jubilee Partners, an intentional Christian service community in Comer, Georgia. There she taught English to refugees, worked in the community vegetable garden and tended to chickens, cows and goats. She also learned more about food preservation and preparation which ended up being her favorite type of work there.

"The weather was awful in Georgia," she reflects. "I loved being at Jubilee Partners, but I wanted to look for a more familiar climate and landscape." Since Kate grew up in rural Northwest Ohio, Merry Lea seemed like a perfect fit.

"This is the work I want to do, but with a safety net," says Friesen. "I needed to learn more before I could start my own CSA, and this job is giving me experience in more than just field work. I am learning about marketing, financial management and coordinating students and volunteers that come to work at the farm."

"I've loved getting the chance to meet and talk with people who are also excited about this work—from students and interns who don't know the difference between a shovel and a pitchfork to experienced farmers who have been a part of the community for years." §

— by Janie Beck Kreider



### Growing Eyes for Dryland Beauty

## Carli Thompson

MAEE Class of 2012

Since graduating from Merry Lea in 2012, Carli has been farming and educating at Cloudview Farm in central Washington ([www.cloudviewfarm.org](http://www.cloudviewfarm.org)) along with her partner, Josh, and several other colleagues. Although the dry and sparse landscape in the rain shadow of the Cascades has taken some time to get used to, she has come to appreciate the many beauties that are there, from the deeply incised creek valleys to the fiercely verdant profusion of spring wildflowers.

In the last three years, Carli and her family have also developed a good rapport with the rural community of Ephrata, of which their farm is a part. Although small-scale, diverse, ecologically-minded farming is unusual in their area, they have nonetheless helped the community to connect to their landscape in new ways. Every year, hundreds of elementary-aged children visit Cloudview on field trips. There, they learn about the life cycles of plants and have the chance to taste some fresh vegetable goodness.

The farm also supplies the Ephrata schools with about 25 pounds of lettuce per week for salads in the cafeterias. Along with other market gardening and a robust CSA, this helps to keep the farm economically viable. In addition, Carli designs and leads a Fall Festival every year at the farm. This year, it enticed over 1000 members of the community out on a weekend to enjoy the farm and participate in a more sustainable way of living in this landscape. Both the school visits and the fall festival have grown from ideas that Carli worked on for her master's project while at Merry Lea; ideas that she is glad to be implementing so regularly.

Overall, Carli sees her work at Cloudview as helping people—especially children—to gain more perspective on the food choices they make every day and providing them with tools to keep them and the farming landscape around them healthier. In the coming years, she hopes to integrate the farm more tightly with Ephrata's 3000 K to 12 students, both through more produce making it to the cafeterias and through more connections across the curriculum. She and Josh will also be keeping an eye out for people to continue their good work at Cloudview as they prepare to return to the well-watered east with their nine-month-old daughter. They plan to take over operations at Josh's family's farm—Bair Lane Farm in Marcellus, Mich.—within the next several years. § — by Jonathon Schramm

### Not the Only Ones on this Planet

## Katherine Johnson

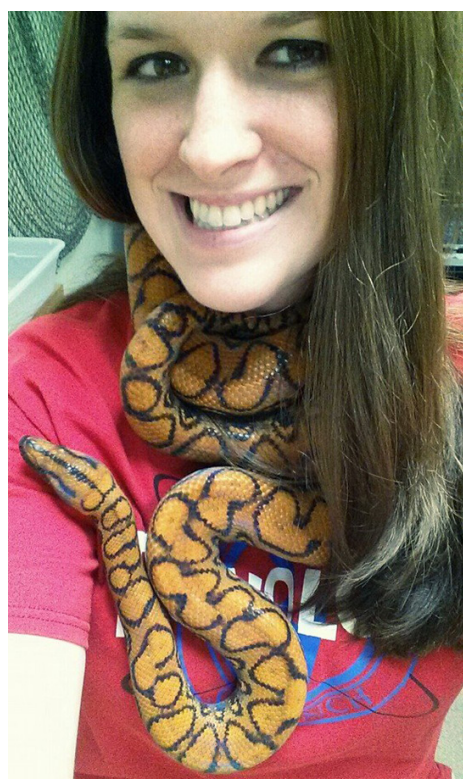
MAEE Class of 2013

**Current job:** Environmental educator working with school groups at Skyranch Christian Camp

**Location:** Van, Texas, midway between Dallas, Texas, and Shreveport, Louisiana

**Landscape:** Dry, flat woodlands with lots of pine, cedar and elm trees.

**How she got her job:** Katherine's current job teaching school groups is very similar to the practicum experiences she had at Merry Lea, so she was well prepared for the position. Not only that. Her MAEE research project on the educational effectiveness of instruction preceding field trips to Merry Lea was eerily similar to a project her supervisor had done at Skyranch. Another thing that clinched the deal was a well-placed great blue heron. Katherine surprised her supervisor by commenting on the bird while touring the property during



Katherine Johnson with one of the animals in her care—a rainbow boa.



her job interview. “Most people don’t notice things like that,” he told her.

**Responsibilities:** Katherine’s typical students are fifth graders on one-to-three-day field trips. She spends much of her time outdoors with them teaching topics like orienteering, tree identification, macroinvertebrates, ecological succession, animal behavior, Texas history and Native American history.

Overseeing the care of the animals in Sky ranch’s nature center is another favorite task. When she’s not outdoors, Katherine might be found feeding a desert tortoise or demonstrating the best way to hold one of the seven snakes. She also has sugar gliders, chinchillas, a bearded dragon, iguanas, cockroaches and a wide range of turtles under her care.

“I tell kids that when you get an animal, the choices you make will affect it for life,” she says.

**Most important contributions:** “My ministry is opening kids’ eyes to the fact that they are not the only ones on this planet,” Katherine says. “I teach students and staff alike that it is okay to touch and okay to get your shoes dirty. Some kids have very little experience outdoors and think you are a god if you can pick up a spider. It just rips me apart when children see something like a caterpillar and their first response is to kill it.”

Katherine recalls a time when she was teaching team building with a group of 15 to 18 kids and they found a snapping turtle. She decided to scrap the lesson plan and instead model how to respond to an animal. After carefully observing the turtle, Katherine showed the children how to move it to a safe place.

**A future goal:** Katherine really enjoyed the curriculum writing she did at Merry Lea and hopes to do this again as the need arises. §

## Combining Hands-On Learning with Academia



Jason Derry rests after a vigorous Colorado hike.

### Jason Derry MAEE Class of 2012

**Location:** Boulder, CO

**Current Studies:** Ph.D. candidate at the University of Denver, researching environmental communication.

**Landscape:** Jason moved to Colorado after completing his master’s at Merry Lea and has lived in Denver and Boulder. He loves seeing plants and animals he never saw while growing up in Michigan or hiking the trails in Northern Indiana.

“Yesterday, I hiked Mount Audubon and saw a pika for the first time,” Jason reports. These small mammals prefer the rocky slopes and cooler climates found on a mountain like the Audubon, which has an altitude over 13,000 feet. He also enjoys seeing marmots, elk and colorful magpies which he describes as “happy crows.”

**Research area:** Jason just finished his exams for a doctorate in communications in the subfield of ethics and rhetoric. He is now beginning a dissertation on how climate change is communicated to children and how they respond to this information in light of the fact that they can neither vote nor change policies nor purchase low emissions vehicles. “How do they handle this information?” he wonders. “And what can we as adults learn from children?”

#### On the value of a nontraditional master’s degree:

Most people planning an academic career choose an academic master’s. Jason says his experience in Merry Lea’s MAEE with time spent on trails and in interdisciplinary discussions was a beneficial alternative. It did not prevent him from getting into a Ph.D. program and in fact, enriched many conversations.

“The interdisciplinary nature of Merry Lea’s master’s degree enabled me to bring a wider vocabulary to the field of communications,” Jason says. It also prepared him to work on a dissertation that draws on many different fields. Since most research on environmental communication is done on adults, Jason depends on sources in other fields like psychology, education and health care.

**Publishing pursuits:** Jason recently started Oakenday Press, a children’s book company that publishes nature stories that treat animals authentically. The press’ first book is *My Backyard Elephant*, a story Jason began writing while at Merry Lea. The illustrator is a researcher who based her drawings on direct observation of Indian elephants in Thailand.

**On teaching:** “What I learned about teaching at Merry Lea has influenced how I teach college classes,” Jason says. “I treat the students like big kids.” Still a child at heart, he has fond memories of playing with kids on trails and doing puppet shows. §

## Litwiller Researches Wetland Health

While some master's graduates have taken their education to exotic locations in other states, others have found an exotic setting nearby. Three MAEE graduates are on staff at Merry Lea. Jane Litwiller (2015) and Carol Good-Elliott (2012) were already working here when they decided to pursue a master's degree through Merry Lea. Tom Hartzell (2012) was hired after he graduated.

Jane tailored her research project to fit her work at Merry Lea and presented her results to faculty, staff and students on September 17. As a member of the PreK to 12 education team, Jane frequently takes children dipping in the Kesling Wetland. Casual observation suggested that the diversity of macroinvertebrates in the wetland was declining. "Was this the result of frequent sampling or other human causes?" she wondered. Her master's research examined 11 sites spanning three different wetlands in order to answer that question.

Jane examined macroinvertebrate populations, dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, adjacent

vegetation and some chemical parameters of the water at each site. This required wading into wetlands in fall, spring and summer in order to test the water quality and collect macroinvertebrates. Still more challenging was the difficulty of establishing what a healthy Indiana wetland should be like in the first place. And what if the wetland in question was a restored wetland? The Index of Biological Integrity that staff used with school groups that were dipping for macroinvertebrates was actually based on rivers for lack of a better resource.

Jane says that what surprised her about this project was how much data one could collect and still not arrive at definite conclusions. Overall, however, her results indicate that it seems unlikely that Kesling Wetland is being disproportionately impacted by human activities that occur there. She recommended additional sampling over a longer time period to keep tabs on the situation and draw more definitive conclusions. §

### How Merry Lea improved his

**teaching:** At age 28, Ken was already a seasoned teacher when he entered Merry Lea's MAEE program. Today, he is back in the classroom enjoying the ability of eighth graders to tackle complex issues in group settings. His time in the MAEE re-enforced his conviction that learning is often best in groups and gave him the confidence to adapt his curricula to investigative, group learning strategies.

The project part of Ken's course-work was in peace education. Like environmental education, peace education is dedicated to creating better citizens, both as informed people who can make good decisions and as agents of change for a better life. The process for peace education involves cooperative, collaborative learning. Ken says his master's degree deepened his commitment to this kind of team learning.

**Best perks as a learner:** As he investigated environmental education, Indiana issues or his own research, Ken remembered how much he loves learning. He improved his ability to seek out and utilize diverse resources and enjoyed that the program was small enough to flex to his educational needs. He liked the small student to staff ratio, the holistic approach to environmental education and the breadth of material covered, from discussing big policy issues to individual learning styles.

**Regrets:** Ken would have liked a more intense winter while he was in Indiana. It was the mildest on record for years. Students were leading maple sugaring programs in shorts! Nonetheless, Ken looks back on his year at Merry Lea as one of his best years ever. §

– by Dave Ostergren



Above, Jane Litwiller collects samples at the Buttonbush Swamp on the northwest side of Merry Lea.



# Merry Lea Lives Dangerously: Lightning Strikes, Plane Crashes

Two lightning strikes and a plane crash kept Merry Lea staff members alert during the summer of 2015.

During a major storm on the evening of July 13, lightning struck the communications tower at the Learning Center Building. The hit was so direct that the power surge jumped all protection and grounding devices and damaged every piece of network equipment in the network room. The antennae on the tower was also damaged.

This required coordinating repairs with four different vendors, two of whom needed to round up tower climbers to put equipment back on the tower. All vendors responded promptly, but staff members still spent four days without internet.

Executive Director Luke Gascho found things to be grateful for despite the fact that the lightning strike interrupted his vacation. During the next staff meeting, he passed around a scorched piece of equipment to show just how close Merry Lea had come to a fire. And while no one would have wished a lightning strike on Goshen College just to save money, Merry Lea's insurance deductible was halved by another claim on the same policy. The college's radio station tower was struck by lightning in the July 13 storm as well.

On August 23, another severe storm interrupted a visit from Goshen College's new freshman class during their orientation. Defying the old adage, lightning struck the same place twice, wiping out antennae and radios on the Learning Center tower again but leaving indoor equipment unscathed. All students were safe, more tower climbers were called in and repairs were completed within a day.

As if that wasn't enough drama for one summer, four Merry Lea staff members witnessed a plane crash while carpooling home to Goshen in late July. Dave Ostergren, Carol Good-Elliott, Joel Pontius and Maria

Tice were just north of the intersection of county road 13 and route 33 when they saw a small plane flying so low they thought it must be a crop duster. Moments later, the plane pulled up abruptly and then nosedived into a cornfield.

"The way that plane dived, we assumed the pilot must be badly injured," Dave reported.

The carload called 911 and then Dave and Carol began pushing their way through the tall corn, trying to locate the crash. Before they found the plane, Joel and Maria, who had remained with the car, called them to report that somehow, the pilot had walked out unharmed.

So far, the autumn remains incident-free, but information from the Lightning Myths website (see box at right) suggests that Merry Lea's tower is due for another hit any day now. §

## Does Lightning Strike the Same Place Twice?

- Lightning data shows that for climates with moderate thunderstorm activity, lightning will strike a typical quarter-acre area of land once every 100 years.

- Tall communications towers and skyscrapers are hit far more frequently than that, and can expect multiple hits during a single intense storm.

- During a storm passing over Chicago in 2014, the Sears Tower was struck ten times; the Trump Tower eight times and the John Hancock Center, four.

- From "Lightning Myths,"  
[http://stormhighway.com/lightning\\_never\\_strikes\\_the\\_same\\_place\\_twice\\_myth.php](http://stormhighway.com/lightning_never_strikes_the_same_place_twice_myth.php)

## What is the Doctrine of Discovery?

Merry Lea and Mennonite Creation Care Network are sponsoring a series of events in November related to the Doctrine of Discovery. This term refers to a set of 15th century Papal bulls that gave European nations the right to conquer Indigenous Peoples and take their land. The original structures of the laws that allowed this practice are still encoded in international economic laws and continue to influence Indigenous Peoples.

The Doctrine of Discovery series includes a visual display, visiting guests and two Turtle Island experiences. **See page 8 for times and locations.**

**About the visual display:** This traveling historical exhibit traces the origins of the Doctrine of Discovery and the ways in which Mennonite settlers benefited from the theft of Indigenous lands. The display has been prepared with a Mennonite focus because it is a project of the Dismantling the Doctrine of Discovery Working Group of the Mennonite

Church USA. However, the story this display tells is a common one. Viewers are encouraged to make connections to their own heritages.

### About our visiting guests:

Erica Littlewolf and Karin Kaufman Wall will be present for the gallery opening November 3 and to offer the Turtle Island interactive experiences below on November 3 and 4. Both are peace educators with Mennonite Central Committee Central States.

### About the Loss of Turtle

**Island:** Turtle Island is an Indigenous name for North America. In this simulation, participants step onto blankets and are taken back in time, guided through the history of contact between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans.

"I think every teacher in the county should attend this experience," observed Dani Tippmann, Director of the Whitley County Historical Museum and a member of the Miami Nation. §



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Environmental Learning Center  
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## Upcoming Public Programs

*For the most current information on events at Merry Lea, see <http://merrylea.goshen.edu>. If you have questions, email [mlevents@goshen.edu](mailto:mlevents@goshen.edu) or call 260-799-5869.*

**Enchanted Forest**  
**Friday, October 23 and Saturday,**  
**October 24, 7 to 8:30 p.m.**  
**Farmstead Site**

This family activity is especially for children K through 3rd grade, but people of all ages enjoy it. Come for a night hike by lantern light and meet native Indiana animals. Your costumed hosts will tell about their diets, habits, fears, babies and favorite places. While you wait for a guide, enjoy live music and snacks. \$2.50 per person.

**Harvest Hymn Sing and Potluck**  
**Wednesday, October 28,**  
**5:30 to 8 p.m., Rieth Village Site**  
Bring a harvest-themed seasonal potluck dish and enjoy an evening of agriculture and song. The meal will be at 6 p.m., with brief garden and greenhouse walks before that. Singing in the barn will follow.

**Women's Spirituality Retreat**  
**Friday, February 26 to Saturday,**  
**February 27**  
Details are still coming, but mark your calendars for this weekend.

### Dismantling the **DOCTRINE** of *Discovery*

What's this about?  
See page 7 to learn more.

**Visual Display: November 2 to 18**  
Goshen College, Good Library

**Gallery Opening:** November 3, 7:30  
to 9 p.m., Gallery talk 8 p.m.

**Loss of Turtle Island Simulation**  
November 3, 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.  
Goshen College, Newcomer 19

**Loss of Turtle Island Simulation**  
November 4, 6:30 to 8 p.m.  
Goshen College Church Chapel,  
Room 306-307