



Spring 2015



# The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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## Sustainability Education Permeates Merry Lea

Resource use is said to be *sustainable* when it meets the needs of the present without borrowing from what future generations will need.

*Sustainability* was one of the guiding ideas that shaped the design of Rieth Village and Merry Lea's Sustainability Leadership Semester for undergraduates. This emphasis continues to develop at Merry Lea in smaller ways as well. Three events over the past several months explored the concept:

### Sustainability Summit

In February, Merry Lea welcomed about 30 undergraduates from regional Christian colleges to its second Sustainability Summit. The annual event aims to connect and empower students who are already involved in sustainability initiatives on their campuses.

Christian economics was the theme this year. The weekend kicked off with a plenary session by Rachel Lamb who chairs the Steering Committee of Young Evangelicals for Climate Action. Rev. Brian Sauder, executive director of Faith in Place, also spoke. Faith in Place is a Chicago nonprofit that inspires religious people of diverse faiths to care for the Earth through connection, education and advocacy.

During one particularly engaging break-out session, students from the 2014 Sustainability Leadership Semester (SLS) returned to discuss their experiences. In addition to sharing their enthusiasm, the SLS students introduced a resource allocation game they learned in the program. The game involves a communal pot containing M&Ms. Players take turns removing candy from the pot and eating it, knowing that the M&Ms will



Above, Stefan Baumgartner clowns with an apple peel during a session on drying fruit at Merry Lea's Sustainable Living Skills class March 21 to 23. Meanwhile (left to right) Becca Schragg, Elizabeth South and David Zehr work industriously in the background.

Below left, homemade noodles for lasagna take shape. Below right (left to right) Ashley Brugh, Anna Costanza and Kayla Gray get their hands dirty in the agroecology greenhouse. All those pictured are Goshen college students or recent graduates.



## Director's Desk.....by Luke Gascho The Sustainability Match

Why has sustainability become a major theme at Merry Lea? What is the

intersection between environmental education and sustainability? Is this really part of the mission of Merry Lea? These are good questions to reflect on as you read the *Merry Leaflet*. You will find the word, *sustainability*, used 20 times in this issue, not counting this article.

Sustainability has become a more frequently used word since the Brundtland Commission of the United Nations in 1987. This document states, "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This concept has permeated many aspects of life in the 21st century, from building processes to food systems. I find it fascinating to go back to the significant planning that was done at Merry Lea in 1973-1974 and examine the statements that were made regarding the purpose of Merry Lea. The following is from The Master Development Plan for Merry Lea Environmental Center (1974):

*The education at MERRY LEA will focus on man's attitude toward his world and himself. If removed from natural systems, man cannot acquire the understandings and attitudes essential for responsible, thoughtful behavior. Thus, as people become concentrated in urban complexes, it is more than ever necessary to develop an ecosystem ethic for man's survival. The nation's formal education system of schools and churches has done*

*little to produce a citizenry informed and motivated to cope with basic environmental issues.*

Embedded in this statement is the importance of humans choosing healthy ways to interact with all natural systems. This is the intent of environmental education. Congruently, this is the reason we also include the focus on sustainability education in our programming. Merry Lea was intended to provide a different setting and approach to learning, as is elucidated so well in the following quote from the 1974 Master Plan:

*To supplement conventional learning, reaching beyond formalized intellectual approaches by using recreational, aesthetic, cultural, philosophical and, in the broadest sense, religious potential of a fine natural setting-- this is the Foundation's (Merry Lea) goal.*

The wise planners—Lee and Mary Jane Rieth, the Merry Lea board members and staff—knew that an interdisciplinary approach and innovative pedagogy were needed for quality environmental education. This is what we believe is also critical as we design and deliver all our programs today. I have great admiration for this historical work – and the work of the current Merry Lea board and team. May we always pursue our mission with the spirit embodied in this sentence from the Master Plan:

*The primary objective is to lead people to accept their full responsibility for the preservation and wise use of their cultural and natural inheritance, and to appreciate and enjoy life. Ω*

be replenished at a certain rate. Will people find a way to draw on this communal resource fairly? Or will a few greedy chocolate addicts take control? Try this at home and see.

Other sessions explored personal finances, stewardship investing and creating communities where people are accountable to each other for their actions.

### Sustainable Living Skills Class

Many people who are enamored by the idea of sustainability are still helpless when it comes to feeding or clothing themselves without the help of the local Walmart. In March, Merry Lea offered a weekend class for Goshen College students that gave them a chance to learn the skills that turn raw materials into the necessities of life.

Students gained experience with fruit drying, seed saving, noodle making, fiber spinning and dying, inoculating mushroom logs, making solar growing boxes and wiring a solar panel.

### Agroecology Open House

This April event was a quick introduction to the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm and the methods used to grow food there. Over 50 people attended, many of whom were community folk who had never been to Merry Lea before. Interim Director of Agroecology Jon Zirkle explained the nutrient cycling that is possible when chickens are pastured outdoors and explains how he uses leaf litter from Merry Lea's trees in his potting soil mix. Guests also visited the woody perennial polyculture plot where a mix of fruit and nut trees grow together, mimicking Indiana landscapes. "Now that's a hundred year project!" Zirkle remarked. 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  
Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator  
Bill F. Minter, Director of Land Management

Lisa Myers, Interim PreK-12 Environmental Ed Coordinator  
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  
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.



# Bridge Builder Joins Merry Lea Staff

Merry Lea welcomed a new member to its team on May 1 when Dr. Joel Pontius arrived from Bloomington, Ind. Pontius is now the Director of PreK-12 Environmental Education. In addition to overseeing PreK-12 programming, he will teach an undergraduate course in environmental education for future teachers and the MAEE teaching practicums in which graduate students hone their education skills.

“My last name means ‘bridge-builder,’ and I take that identity seriously,” Pontius says. He understands his vocation as providing a bridge between people and nature—an insight that first came to him in late childhood.

“I spent a lot of time in nature as a child and developed a love for the diverse inhabitants of the forests, fields and waterways,” Pontius explains. “But many of my friends didn’t know anything about the woods and didn’t go there. They had never caught a crayfish or a painted turtle, and I thought such experiences were endlessly fascinating, so I would take my friends and show them.”

Pontius’ vocation continued to develop in high school when he had a semester-long internship with Jim Lauck, the director of the Martin State Forest, south of Bloomington. This encounter with the relationships between plants, animals and the landscape deeply moved him. It was as if he was being let in on a secret language that allowed him to read the land.

From there, Pontius studied outdoor recreation and natural resource management at Indiana University. He continued his studies at the Teton Science School and then the University of Wyoming, where he earned his Ph.D. Along with his studies he also served as an environmental educator and guide in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. He also served as the Science Coordinator for Albany County School District in Laramie, Wyoming, where he developed and implemented place-based environmental education

curricula in the public schools. Additionally, Pontius developed and taught courses centered on environmental and sustainability education at the University of Wyoming.

Most recently Pontius, his wife, Laura and their daughter, Emerson, lived in Bloomington, Ind. Pontius began a consulting business there, but discovered it did not offer him enough daily engagement with people. So far, the people at Merry Lea have been a pleasant surprise for him.

“I have deep respect for the wealth of knowledge that lives here at Merry Lea,” Pontius explains. “The Merry Lea community knows so much, and the regenerating landscape is a powerful source of ecological understanding as well,” Pontius adds. He recalls a hike with Bill Minter where Minter pointed out a native plant that had made a sudden return in the oak savanna on Merry Lea’s west side. Somehow the plant “knew” when it was safe to return.



Dr. Joel Pontius

Listening to Pontius talk about an ecosystem, whether in Wyoming or Indiana, one gets the sense that the land is profoundly alive and is a place where the Creator continues to speak. Ω

## Master’s of Environmental Education Program Graduates Eight



The Master’s in Environmental Education program completed its seventh year on May 29. The graduates are (left to right): Corinne Grossmeier, Jacob Mulder, Jon Hagen, Jake Shapley, Ming Charoenmuang, Judy Miller, Jane Litwiller and Brandon Ihnen (not pictured.)

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



Janie Beck Kreider (standing) consults with worship leaders at a women's spirituality workshop. Merry Lea offers this public program annually in January. The most recent workshop was titled *Out of the Whirlwind* and focused on the book of Job.

## Janie Beck Kreider

*This is the last in a series of Merry Leaflets that give our staff members the opportunity to tell about their workdays.*

I look out my office window at springtime in bloom. Maples are budding, dogwoods are flowering pink and white, and a sparrow sings, but there is neither wetland nor LEED® certified cottage in sight. Instead I see gentle peaks in a gray-blue ridge off in the distance, and my "office" is right next to the living room. These days I work from home, at-a-distance, in Charlottesville, Virginia.

After two years of working at Merry Lea as associate coordinator of public programs, in August my partner Luke and I moved our lives east so that he could begin a Ph.D. program at the University of Virginia. I was fortunate to bring work that I love along with me, and I continue to work on many of the same projects I have been doing for the past two years.

Like so many other staff members at Merry Lea, I wear multiple hats. Alongside Luke Gascho and Jennifer

Schrock, I help coordinate the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN). I manage the website, gather news and stories around the Mennonite Church for a monthly creation care newsletter and help network members connect over environmental issues they are passionate about. This summer, Mennonite Church USA will hold its bi-annual convention in Kansas City, and MCCN is preparing a "group learning experience," for this event. Right now I am planning a canoe trip that will enable attendees to get outside and actively explore local ecosystems. During our trip, they will connect with conservation groups working with local water issues.

Another part of my job is to help coordinate Merry Lea's public programs and plan events. I work closely with Jennifer Schrock on various communication pieces, helping to get the word out about our events and helping put together our quarterly newsletter, the *Merry Leaflet*. One of my favorite projects is planning and hosting a Women's Spirituality Retreat every January, an event I created during my first winter on staff. This year it was even better because I got to travel back to Merry Lea for the week leading up to the retreat. In between simmering big pots of soup, choosing hymns for worship and planning a spiritual practices workshop, it was great to reconnect with staff members on the frozen wetland during lunchtime broomball.

While I miss the flocks of wild turkeys and interacting with coworkers and students face-to-face, I continue to love my work at Merry Lea. I feel a deep connection there. I understand my work with Public Programs and the Mennonite Creation Care Network as an outgrowth of my faith, an expression of hope and a small way of seeking peace "where earth and people meet." Ω

## What to See at Merry Lea this Summer

- **Young ducks** and geese on the wetlands.
- **Yellow warblers** and common yellowthroats are easy to see. They nest in shrubs surrounding wetland areas.
- **Woodfrogs** emerge from their tadpole state in late June. Watch for tiny frogs all over the trails around the vernal ponds.
- **Berries** brighten the woods in July. Look in the Learning Center area for a knee-high shrub called white baneberry or doll's eyes. Its berries are white with a black scar at the base. Jack-in-the-pulpit berries are bright red. They form where the spadix, or jack was. Look opposite the bird blind for starters.
- **The prairies blaze** in late July. Look for gray-headed coneflower, black-eyed susans, cup plant, rosinweed and liatris near Kesling Wetland and Rieth Village. Ω



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

## Lisa Myers

Interim PreK to 12  
Environmental Education  
Coordinator

I knew when I accepted the job as interim preK-12 program coordinator that there would be no typical day at Merry Lea, since I had just spent 11 months here pursuing my master's degree. I had been involved in some of those atypical days already. What I didn't expect, however, was just how much I would keep learning after joining the staff. Every day, I gain some new experience or bit of information. It's very cool and never boring.

For example, one day last fall in the midst of school programming at the Kesling Farm, our two little piglets were sick. Let's remember that I was born and raised in Boston, Mass., and have only owned cats, hamsters and goldfish. Luckily, my co-workers knew enough to direct me to call a vet. They couldn't do it themselves because they had 100 first-graders to teach that day. So I called, guesstimated the weight of our young swine, went to the clinic and picked up the injections of antibiotic.

"And how do I administer these shots, exactly?" I naively asked. I learned that you grab some skin around the neck and quickly give the shot under the skin.

Then in November, I learned that Yoder's Department Store in Shipshewana is a veritable treasure trove for the supplies we need to conduct our programs. This store provides one-stop shopping for wicks for our kerosene lamps, mash bags we use in the cider press, enamel dishes for Farmcraft programs and rubber-coated thermal gloves for working in the geology stream tables when the temperature drops to freezing. Across the street at a game store, we bought an old-fashioned wooden marble game also



Lisa Myers prepares to take first graders on a hay ride on a balmy day in May. Driving a tractor is another one of those diverse skills staff acquire at Merry Lea.

for Farmcraft. I learned there is some great shopping in a little Amish town just north of here.

And what about the time in December when I did a library after-school program about insects? I had to go outside and collect leaf litter in time for it to thaw so the kids could rummage through it to look for signs of life. When everything, including some rotting logs and branches, was splayed out over a tarp on the floor, I was surprised when some youngsters asked me if all the stuff was real! I learned that thawed leaves contain lots of crawling insects that you shouldn't let loose inside a library.

Sometimes, nature keeps me guessing. Did you see those fascinating formations on the ice at Onion Bottom in January? How did they get there? What caused those ridges in those particular spots? Why didn't the snow blow off the ice in other places? We still don't know.

This spring, I learned something important about *myself*: I learned that I was ready for a big, new challenge. Beginning in mid-June,

I will be the program manager for Urban Connections, an education and outreach program run by the U.S. Forest Service's Eastern Region. The program connects urban youth with Forest Service resources. I will supervise Urban Connections staff in Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Detroit and Boston.

Two experiences at Merry Lea come to mind as I think of what has prepared me to supervise a program that covers a large region. One involved a project I did for the leadership class in the master's program. We needed to imagine and design our own nature center. Mine was set in my home town of Boston and utilized city parks. It had goals similar to the Forest Service program I will supervise.

The second experience involved working with the college students studying environmental education in the May term class I taught. It was so exciting to watch them developing their outdoor teaching skills.

So, I learn from coworkers, I learn from children, and I learn from nature. There's so much more to learn. Ω

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



Jonathon Schramm checks on a natural history question with the help of a display at the Learning Center Building.

## Jonathon Schramm

Assistant Professor, Sustainability and Environmental Education Department

It's a wonderful gift to be able to work at Merry Lea. With all of its unpredictability and variety it is easy to stay engaged! As a professor, I spend most of my time working with college students in both the classroom and the field. Large pieces of my time are used creating and improving material that hopefully brings the sometimes abstract ideas of ecology or sustainability to life for my students. This "head" work is balanced by a healthy dose of post-program dishwashing, garden weed-pulling and trail hike-leading to keep me firmly connected to the water, soils and life of this beautiful place. But rather than tell you more about my work in prose, I'm going to try my hand at a little verse. Read on if you dare!

Counting plants and pulling weeds  
sometimes for research, sometimes so that  
visitors & students learn what they need  
to live softly on earth, like it's old hat.

In my office all through the long winters  
comes a non-stop parade of articles and books  
some that I'm writing, more that I'm reading in nooks.  
Each helps keep my thoughts from turning to splinters.

Sprinkled throughout most days are meetings and plans  
with folks both inside and out of team Merry Lea.  
In these we dream and work in ways to help the world be  
more healthy, more joyful, more productive of flans.  
(The Spanish dessert...It is hard to rhyme with plans!)

In the midst of building connections, helping us to see  
some of earth's needs, and our piece to contribute.  
I still relish the chances to walk as if mute  
through the woodlots and wetlands, the prairies' grassy  
sea.

Admiring their beauty, drawing strength from God's love,  
filling the ground beneath and the sky above.  
To learn there a new species or a brand new story  
to teach others to see earth's grandeur and God's glory. Ω

## BAKING: A SUSTAINABLE LIVING SKILL

One of the unexpected joys of my time at Merry Lea has been baking bread as an occasional part of my workday. When students want to learn a bit about making their own bread, I fire up the oven in the summer kitchen and get busy kneading doughs.

Here's a recipe for a simple dough that can be used to make tasty crackers quickly while more complicated loaves are rising. I borrowed the recipe from *The Bread Baker's Apprentice* by Peter Reinhart —an excellent resource!

Stir together until they form a rough ball:

13 oz. bread flour	2 tbsp. honey
1 tsp. salt	2 tbsp. vegetable oil
1 tsp. instant yeast	7/8 cup of water

Turn out onto a floured counter and knead for 10 min. until the dough is smooth and a small piece can be stretched without breaking. Return the dough to an oiled bowl and allow to rise for 45 min. to 1 hour.

Pound down the dough and separate into two pieces. Roll each piece into a very thin sheet (<1/8 inch thick) and lay on a baking sheet. Spritz with water and top with salt, pepper, poppy seeds or cumin seeds. Place into a preheated 400 degree oven and bake for 4-5 min. until crisp. Ω



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



### **Bill Minter** Director of Land Management and Assistant Professor of Environmental Science

After more than 23 years at Merry Lea, I find myself engaged in an increasing variety of activities. Much of what I do is in response to the time of the day, the season of the year, the daily weather conditions and academic schedules.

In the spring, for example, I am busy with woody invasive species control, prescribed burning and teaching a course in the environmental education graduate program. Summer brings herbaceous vegetation management, site preparation for prairie plantings and teaching a portion of a soils course in the Agroecology Summer Intensive program. In the winter, I catch up on office work and woody invasive species control. When the weather permits, I also work at oak woodland restoration activities.

As I look back at my schedule, I would highlight Monday, October 6th as a day that represents many of the constraints and opportunities that I respond to on a daily basis. My day began at 7:15 a.m. in my home office, preparing a lecture for my 9 a.m. Forest Resources class on campus and grading Advanced Field Ecology field lab reports. After class was over, I dropped off invoices at the business office. Then I stopped at the physical

plant to reserve a vehicle to take students to a field lab site in Michigan later in the semester. I then began my drive down to Merry Lea to meet a group at Rieth Village.

At 11 a.m. I met with a group of landscape architecture students from Ball State University who were interested in learning about the design, installation and maintenance of the sustainable native landscape I had done at Rieth Village.

At 12:30 p.m., after returning to my office in the Learning Center Building, I met with a master's student while I ate lunch. At 1 p.m. I had my weekly meeting with Merry Lea's property supervisor, Kerry Goodrich, to review physical plant-related issues from the prior week and provide feedback on planned tasks for the week ahead. After checking the weather forecast for the third time that day, it appeared the rain was to hold off until 7 p.m. Taking advantage of that, I drove a tractor and attached rototiller five miles to the Goodrich tract on the west side of the property.

At the Goodrich tract, I tilled firebreaks around a 13-acre prairie

restoration that I planted in 2012. I was planning to do a prescribed burn (gambling that weather conditions would be suitable) next spring. Knowing that I was going to be on the west side of the property, and the weather conditions were to deteriorate over the next several days, I brought along the materials to set up Thursday's field lab in the Byers Woods tract. After emerging from the Byers Woods, I still had enough daylight, so I drove the tractor to the REA Woods tract in the very northwest corner of Merry Lea.

Though the sun was beginning to set as I walked into the REA Woods, there was enough canopy leaf drop to visually relocate and re-flag the 20 plots we were monitoring for garlic mustard invasion. The regional ecologist from the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and I were planning to measure them on Friday.

I emerged from the woods at dusk. Fortunately, the tractor had a strong pair of headlights for my travel back to the Shew Shop, and the air was not too chilly yet. It was much better than working in the cold rain yet to come. ☺



Bill Minter uses a sunny day to control reed canary grass in the Wilmer Meadow between the Learning Center and Rieth Cottage.



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Environmental Learning Center  
of Goshen College

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“Where Earth and People Meet”

## Public Programs Coming Up at Merry Lea

*Please register for Merry Lea programs at least one day in advance. Email [mlevents@goshen.edu](mailto:mlevents@goshen.edu) or call 260-799-5869.*

### **Family Frog Hike** **Tues., June 23, 9 – 10:30 a.m.** **Meet at the Learning Center**

We'll look for wood frogs on our woodland trails and bullfrogs and other amphibians at Onion Bottom. All ages are welcome. Bring a water bottle. A snack will be provided. \$5 adults, \$2 children.

### **Family Prairie Hike** **Tues., July 29, 9 – 10:30 a.m.** **Meet at Rieth Village**

We'll set out with a hand lens and a couple of bug nets and explore

Merry Lea's grasslands at peak bloom. All ages are welcome. Bring a water bottle. A snack will be provided. \$5 adults, \$2 children.

### **Take-a-Hike Tuesday** **August 11 until 8:30 p.m.**

Take a Hike Tuesdays are an initiative of the Noble County Convention and Visitor's Bureau. They encourage county residents to explore natural areas by hiking or running on trails. Merry Lea is the August site. Trail maps will be available in the Farmstead and Learning Center trail heads for self-guided walking. A one-hour guided hike will be available at 7 p.m. beginning at the Farmstead Site. Restrooms at the Farmstead will be open until 8:30 p.m. No charge, no pre-registration expected.

### **Wilderness First Aid** **Thurs. & Fri., August 27 – 28** **8:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m.**

What do you do when a medical emergency happens in a remote location? Would you recognize the signs of hypothermia in your scouting troop? How would you handle a sprained ankle on a family backpacking trip? Instructors from the SOLO School of Emergency Medicine and Rescue, Conway, N.H., will teach the 16-hour course. Participants earn a two-year certification recognized by the American Camping Association, U.S. Coast Guard and various guide licensing boards. The cost of \$175 includes instruction, certification and lunches. Ω