



The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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

<http://goshen.edu/merrylea> merrylea@goshen.edu

Re-creating Experiences at Merry Lea: Pastors Link Ecological Questions to Church



Izaete Nafziger and Jan Rheinheimer share ideas during Goshen College's Pastors' Academy, held at Merry Lea September 21. The two pastor at North Goshen Mennonite Church, Goshen, Ind., and Lombard Mennonite Church, Lombard, Ill., respectively.

Outreach is a common topic when Merry Lea staff members gather to discuss purpose and goals. How can we best share our resources with our community? One such group is the faith community that Merry Lea is part of—because it belongs to Goshen College—a Christ-centered institution.

Several recent events have served these folks. In September, Merry Lea hosted a Pastors' Academy. In October, it offered a workshop that blended biblical and ecological insights around the theme of headwaters. And in November, registration opened for the January 2017 Women's Spirituality Retreat. (See page 8.)

Here is what happens when Christian leaders engage with each other on an 1,189-acre nature preserve:

Pastors' Academy

"The Church has power. Religious leaders have power. Are we using it well?" asked Haraldo Sergio Nunes, pastor of Salem Mennonite Church, Wooster, Ohio.

"How do we manage to see the beauty in diversity when it can be so messy?" wondered Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg, pastor at Zion Mennonite Church, Archbold, Ohio.

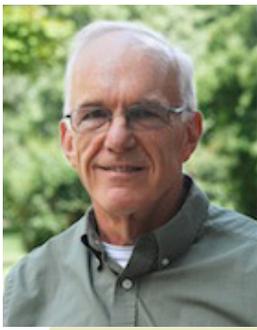
"My role is pastoral care," observed Jan Rheinheimer, pastor at Lombard Mennonite Church, Lombard, Ill. "My job is to bring hope and healing to those already hurting. How do you discuss disruptive issues in the midst of pain?"

Nunes, Schrock-Ringenberg and Rheinheimer were three of the eleven pastors who took a day away from the next sermon and the next hospital visit



Haraldo Nunes, pastor of Salem Mennonite Church, Wooster, Ohio, found a quiet spot to reflect during the Pastors' Academy. To learn more about Merry Lea's floating dock, see page 6.

continued on page 2



Director's Desk

Headwaters

by Luke Gascho

Where does all the water flow to when it leaves this place?

Flowing water has fascinated me since my childhood in northern Minnesota. I recall playing in the water in a small creek in our pasture. Sometimes I would try to redirect its flow, and other times I'd create a small dam to form a little pool. What fun! And in the process I learned basic concepts about how water functions. I was aware that all the water from our farm would flow down the Mississippi River, since we frequently visited the headwaters in Itasca State Park which was only 35 miles away.

In my orientation to Merry Lea 19 years ago, I quickly learned that we were on the north edge of the north-south continental divide. Being at the headwaters of the southern branch of the Elkhart River adds meaning to our place in the landscape. This fact was noted as important in the early purchases of land for Merry Lea—and continues to inform how we manage the land and create frameworks for programs.

It's amazing how such slight undulations in the landscape around Merry Lea can determine whether the rain that falls will end up in the Great Lakes or the Gulf of Mexico. A watershed consists of all the places from which water flows into a river. The curving patterns of topography form the edges of the watershed. I like these outlines and natural contours in contrast to the straight lines we typically draw when creating human boundaries for properties, counties, states and nations.

How might headwaters and watersheds inform our actions? How might they form our thinking about relationships between people, beliefs, practices and ecosystem care? What are the ways that we can extend welcome and hospitality by having our imaginations shaped by a watershed paradigm?

These are the kind of deep questions we explore as we develop programs that draw people into meaningful connections with nature. We believe that learning from nature and its patterns can be more life-giving than the mechanistic approaches we often utilize in solving problems. May our imaginations and the flow of water converge in ways that nourish our inner beings. Ω

to attend Goshen College's Pastors' Academy September 21. The retreat was a chance for pastors to reflect on their ministries in light of three broad themes: ecological regeneration, intercultural leadership and global Anabaptism.

Goshen College identified these themes in 2011 as areas of strength that were worthy of further development. This led to the founding of Merry Lea's Institute for Ecological Regeneration, the Institute for Intercultural Leadership and the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism. Each is devoted to research, analysis and sharing findings.

Merry Lea's Jonathon Schramm introduced the Institute for Ecological Regeneration which he directs. He described an encounter he had while on a field trip with students.

"If there's one thing I've learned from all my years on the river, it's that the river is a living being," the caretaker of a Sportsmans' club told them.

"I wanted to provide an eco-centric perspective and help people see creation as more than just a series of things," Jonathon commented later.

Waters of Eden, Waters of Elkhart

It may have looked like only 15 people, but the group gathered at High Lake on Saturday, October 22, was actually one outpost of a worldwide community of faith. The call and response prayer that workshop participants offered for the Elkhart River was drawn from the Sukkot liturgy, and thousands of Jewish communities were offering the same prayer that very day. While most Christians don't celebrate Sukkot, it is described in their scriptures and has much to offer those concerned about the creation.

Waters of Eden, Waters of Elkhart was the vision of Pastor Doug Kaufman, a
continued on page 8

ABOUT MERRY LEA

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

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

TEAM MEMBERS

Luke Gascho, Executive Director
Kerry Goodrich, Property Supervisor
Carol Good-Elliott, Environmental Educator
Tom Hartzell, Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs
Kate Friesen Kempf, Assistant Farm Manager
Jane Litwiller, Environmental Educator
Bill F. Minter, Director of Land Management
Dave Ostergren, Director of Graduate Programs
Joel Pontius, Director of the Sustainability Leadership Semester
Jonathon Schramm, Associate Professor, SEED
Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Communications Manager
Katie Stoltzfus, Public Program Coordinator; Environmental Ed.
Marcos Stoltzfus, Director of Environmental Education Outreach
Maria Tice, Admin. Assistant/Volunteer Coordinator
Doug Yoder, Building Manager
Jon Zirkle, Farm Manager

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Marcia McNagny, Chair
Heather Harwood, Asst. Chair
Jim McFarlin, Treasurer
Colleen Banta
Janeen Bertsche Johnson
Forrest Keefer
Fancheon Resler
John Yordy

Ex Officio:

Luke Gascho
Ross Peterson-Veach
Kenneth Newbold, Jr.



Living at Merry Lea

2006 - 2016

Gabby Castañon and Bekah Schrag “commute” between their classroom at the Farmstead and their living quarters at Rieth Village. Both are students in the 2016 Sustainability Leadership Semester.

Each autumn, undergraduates in Merry Lea’s Sustainability Leadership Semester (SLS) say goodbye to their friends on campus, let go of the freedom to join a late-night pizza run and settle in at Merry Lea’s Rieth Village. The largest town within ten miles is Wolf Lake—a village so small that the Census Bureau seems to have overlooked it.

In exchange, they receive the run of nearly 1200 acres, the freedom to cook their own food and a series of hands-on courses designed to teach critical thinking about a future that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. Some of that thinking is sparked by daily living at Rieth Village as much as through coursework.

Rieth Village was intended to serve as a teacher as well as a dwelling from the day its architects first scratched out a sketch. Today, ten years after completing construction, close to 300 people have lived on the property for periods anywhere from a week to nine months. Some came for a May term course, others for the Agroecology Summer Intensive or the SLS. Still others were interns or volunteers. Here are the perks that students appreciate most:

Community Meals

Despite the inconveniences of sharing a kitchen, students are nearly always enthusiastic about cooking together. The four Goshen College juniors and seniors taking this year's SLS are no exception.

“When it comes to practical skills that I learned in college that will help

me in the rest of my life, cooking is certainly up there,” commented David Leaman-Miller. His classmates report that he makes delicious pad thai. Curried chicken is a house favorite and so is

ceviche, a raw fish dish from Peru that Bekah Schrag introduced.

Students share a budget and weekly boxes of produce from the gardens.

continued on page 6



Connection with Professors: SLS students appreciate the chance to get to know their professors. Small classes and time spent on weekly field trips facilitate that. Joel Pontius, director of the SLS, reciprocates this sentiment. When his role changed to include undergraduate teaching, his family decided to move near Merry Lea to make it easier to relate to students informally.

Above, David Leaman-Miller, center, boots a beanbag ball to fellow SLS student, Bekah Schrag, left, during a game of hackysack. Former SLS director, Lisa Zinn, introduced this lively tradition and Joel, right, has carried it on. Hackysack games often erupt during classroom breaks. Ω

Exploring Merry Lea Sustainable Farm: Child Scientists Contrast Farm and Wild Ecosystems



by Jennifer Schrock
Communications Manager

The fall of 2016 marked the first season of the Environmental Education Outreach (EEO) team's new school program, Exploring the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm. The goals are to help children learn about where their food comes from and to show that farms are part of larger ecosystems. The surrounding landscape affects the farm and is affected by decisions farmers make.

For ten years, my office had been at Rieth Village, surrounded by the farm. Yet as I followed a group of first-graders on a field trip one morning, a familiar place became a fiesta for the five senses and a first step into a mysterious new identity called “scientist.”

When I learned that children were to arrive at the Kesling Farmstead and walk up to the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, I thought it was purely for practical

reasons. The Farmstead has gathering space and plenty of bathrooms. But the 20-minute walk past Kesling Wetland, over a prairie and through a fringe of woods is also a critical part of the learning experience.

“Is this a farm?” Mattie Herron, an MAEE student, kept asking her gaggle of children as they passed through each new ecosystem. No, it wasn’t, but how was it different? They stopped beside Kesling Wetland to make observations and fill in their data sheet.

What does first grade data look like? Maddy prompted the children to use their five senses. They noticed a muskrat house, frogs, algae, geese. The children drew pictures of what they had seen. I nearly cried when little drawings of the wind generator across the wetland turned up under “ecosystem study.” My mind jumped back to the days when we were designing Rieth Village and the goal was to fold human beings

into the ecosystem in such a way that it was as healthy with them as without them. Here, the vision was reflected back to me as reality. In the children’s eyes, renewable energy was a part of the ecosystem, along with muskrats, frogs and algae.



The children also learned to do a soil smear, wiping a smudge of wetland soil on the paper and noticing its color and texture. Later, they would compare soils at the farm and its compost pile.

When the farm finally emerged from behind the trees, even I felt like an explorer discovering a new continent. Other groups of children were already busy feeding the turkeys, exploring the gardens and digging in the compost pile. I wandered among them.

MAEE student Ken Bauer’s group (above left) was working on their recipe. Children were challenged to “make”



spaghetti by finding the ingredients that went into these familiar foods. Signs had sprouted all over the gardens to help orient leaders and groups. Children “picked” peppers, onions and tomatoes by gathering cards provided near the plants.

Carol Good-Elliott’s group was puzzled by tomatillos (page 4, bottom). A veteran environmental educator, Carol adapted to their interest by offering a taste of the new food.

“It tastes a little like watermelon,” one child thought.

Meanwhile, EEO Director Marcos Stoltzfus had children sniffing compost. They couldn’t agree on whether this was a good or a bad smell, but that didn’t diminish the mystery of how lowly decomposers could turn a rotting carrot into healthy soil.

Just then, Ellie Schertz, a farm worker, came by with a wheelbarrow of weeds. This allowed for a spontaneous moment of “meet the farmer.”

“So what are you doing?” Marcos asked. Ellie explained that she was dumping weeds she had just cleared, but she couldn’t put them in the compost because that would spread weed seeds.

I ended my visit over by the orchard with Environmental Educator Jane Litwiller’s group. They were discussing how the portable chicken coop helped keep the birds safe from predators. The children were curious about another shelter nearby. They’d found a bucket filled with sawn-off pipes: habitat for native bees (page 4, far left). Like the colorful strips of sunflowers the children had seen earlier, it encouraged the presence of beneficial insects.

“Where does food come from?” Like the children, I went home that day with a more vivid answer to that question than I’d had when I arrived. Ω



“Let’s be scientists and record some data!”



First-graders poke and prod the rotten things in a compost pile that mysteriously turn into rich soil. This is one of the stations in the Exploring Merry Lea Sustainable Farm program.

Making Room for Exploration

by Marcos Stoltzfus

Let’s be honest: there is a LOT to talk about on a working farm. Vegetables, compost, animal caretaking, food processing, food prep, nutrition... The list goes on. During the curriculum development phase of Exploring Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, our education team wrestled with focus. Eventually we just had to pick from a plethora of concepts for visiting students.

We took a two-pronged approach in dealing with this challenge. First, we prioritized key concepts as guidance for Merry Lea educators, and secondly, we created a program format that allowed for educators to facilitate flexible and rich exploration.

Space to Adapt

The most important thing we did right in planning this new program was our decision to create space for adaptation. In our new format, Merry Lea educators were provided the agency to act upon unexpected educational opportunities as they arose.

It was fascinating to watch our team of staff, volunteers and graduate students slowly embrace this approach. Early in our season, we were more rigid—ensuring we hit each station for the ‘proper’ length of time. As we became more comfortable with the new topics and setting, we adjusted our times to suit the given day and learners.

What did this look like? While a given school group may have spent less time than expected looking at our on-

farm processing room, this allowed the opportunity to pet an escaped chicken, explore a rotten okra pod or consider a dead mouse on the trail while walking to the farm. Although each group of students had subtly different experiences, I believe the value was made up in the capacity for pedagogical responsiveness.

As educators on a sustainable farm, we were actively learning how to react to each student group in that moment. We could respond directly to their curiosity and maximize their eagerness to learn. In addition to benefitting students, this approach nurtured our master’s students as well. What better way to demonstrate real-life environmental education than to require them to react to learners in real-time?

So what did we talk about on the farm? Everyone got to visit the gardens, see animals and dig into compost. Each person walked a little under a mile through varied ecosystems. Hopefully each child left with the message that “food comes from farms.” But this list misses the extras that each educator and group uncovered: A lonely tomato slowly decomposing, a Blue Heron flying over the farm fields or a snakeskin by the turkey pens. I know what our educators covered during their visit. But what did they explore? I have no idea. You’ll have to ask them. Ω

Marcos Stoltzfus began as director of environmental education outreach in July 2016. He headed the development of the curriculum described on these pages.



Merry Lea Team Member Tom Hartzell, looks for squirrels with second graders during an Autumn Adventures program. They continued their observations from the trail shelter in the background.

New Outdoor Structures Aid Nature Observation

A dock, four new trail shelters and a sprinkling of port-a-potties appeared on Merry Lea property during 2016. All of them will aid the comfort of school groups and weekend hikers alike.

Trail Shelters

These rustic hexagonal structures are all in the vicinity of the Learning Center Site. Visually, they cohere with the observation tower along the Onion Bottom and the seven-sided Cherokee council house by the Learning Center Building. Inside, they are lined with benches.

Here, hikers have a quiet place to rest, reflect or avoid an unexpected downpour. Visiting school groups can journal, create leaf rubbings or try other activities that would previously have needed to take place inside.

Perhaps the most striking of the four shelters overlooks the swamp along the lane leading to Rieth Cottage. This shelter has a ramp along one side, providing dipping access and a sense of being within this forested wetland.

“At one point, we wanted to build a boardwalk through the swamp, but that would have been expensive and disruptive to the ecosystem,” explains Environmental Educator Jane Litwiller.

The trail shelter and ramp are a good alternative.

Dock

The dock had been on the Pre-K to 12 team’s wish list for years because they saw a need to make wetland dipping accessible for program participants in wheelchairs and on crutches. Opportunity knocked when Jane spotted an ad for a floating dock that the City of Culver was selling.

The dock was installed on the east side of the Kesling Wetland this past spring. It is currently in storage for the winter, but throughout the summer, it proved a favorite spot for many visitors. Some people appreciate the dock as a place to sit without getting dirty. Others use it for photography or as a substitute for a hike that would be difficult or painful due to mobility challenges.

“It’s cool that you can get out over the water and look down. The water is really clear and you can see more fish,” remarks Jane. (See photo, page 1.)

Port-a-potties are now available spring through fall at each of Merry Lea’s trailheads and at Rieth Village. Ω

Continued from page 3: Living at Rieth Village

They eat breakfast and lunch on their own; then make a communal meal at suppertime.

Connection with Nature

Just walking to class every day gives students a nature fix. The paths from Rieth Village to the Farmstead Site pass by pocket prairies, old fields, wetlands and patches of woodland. “Hopefully I’m not late and can take time to listen to the birds chirping and look up at the sky. Here, every time I walk outside I’m in a really cool place,” says David. Jack Shomberg enjoys running the trails.

The SLS group also says that their professors do a good job of integrating nature experiences into their course work as well. In the Sustainability and Regeneration course they are currently taking, they are expected to sit in one spot outdoors every day for 30 minutes and observe.

Bekah, who holds the record for the longest consecutive time of residence at Rieth Village, appreciates the way the landscape is constantly changing. “I came the week after they burned the prairies and I’m going to be here until there’s snow on them,” she says. Bekah arrived in April for May term; remained in the summer for the Agroecology Summer Intensive and now is in the SLS.

Inspiration for the future

Students provided a grab bag of responses when asked what sustainable features of their current lifestyle are most likely to shape their futures. For Jack, the exposure to green architecture has stoked an interest he already had. He sees himself promoting sustainability in a small town or city and advocating for elements like the permeable paving he walks on at Rieth Village.

“I’ve been thinking about living in some kind of intentional community,” Gabby Castañon says. “I want to make sure I maintain connections with other people and share things instead of just having them myself.”

“Living here this semester has made me more aware of what’s immediately around me, of myself and of what my needs are. It’s helped me know how best to use my energies to make an impact,” David concluded. Ω

Enchanted Forest Runs on Volunteers

Merry Lea’s annual Enchanted Forest brought a robust crowd of 220 people to the Farmstead Site October 28 and 29. Children and their adult companions took a night hike and chatted with native animals such as a frog, a toad, a monarch butterfly, a beaver, an opossum, an owl and a raccoon.

The Enchanted Forest is Merry Lea’s largest public program. Not surprisingly, it requires more volunteers than any other program offered, making it a busy time for Volunteer Coordinator Maria Tice. Of the thirty or so people on duty each night this year, about two dozen were volunteers. The rest were students in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education program and staff.

Some Enchanted Forest volunteers have long track records. Columbia City residents Neil Case and Francis and Waneta Bundy are among those who have volunteered multiple years. Although Mason Stienbarger’s 2016 performance as a beaver was only his second, the high school student has history as a second generation volunteer: his mother was part of one of the first Enchanted Forests years ago.

Volunteer Feature: Chris Broni

The volunteer with the most distinguished record, however, is Chris Broni of Columbia City. Chris is a fourth grade teacher in the Allen County School system by day and—for some 12 to 15 years—an Enchanted Forest animal by night. Except when she was living out of state, she has participated in the Enchanted Forest every year since its inception.

It all started in 1991 while Chris was an education major at Goshen College. In the spring, she spent several weeks at Merry Lea taking a course that involved leading groups of children on hikes. That fall was the first Enchanted Forest. It consisted of “five little animals in not very interesting costumes,” Chris recalls. She was one of them.

Chris keeps coming back because she likes the interaction between children and the animals and the quality of information that is shared. She’s also a bit of an actor by trade.

“I’ve come to realize that there is a huge element of theater in teaching well,” she admits. Careful preparation goes into her performances. Chris watches videos of the animal she is assigned beforehand to learn how the animal behaves.

“They all have their own personalities and ways of moving,” she explains. It is fun for her to master the details that enable her to not just dispense facts but to create a character.

Over the years, Chris has played nearly every enchanted animal that Merry Lea can costume. Because she enjoys researching her role, Chris is willing to take on whatever creature is needed. Playing an opossum this year was challenging because the opossum costume, with its severe face and rat-like tail, sometimes frightens children. Perhaps the mood lightens when someone inevitably asks, “Do you hang by your tail?” The answer is, no, only in an emergency. One imagines a frightened opossum, saved from a fall as its prehensile tale wraps around a tree branch.

When she is not teaching or “playing possum,” Chris enjoys being outside with her horses. Hiking, working in her yard and other outdoor activities also give her pleasure. Ω



Photo by Volunteer Paul McAfee.

Volunteer Chris Broni prepares to become an opossum for an Enchanted Forest performance.



Photo by Volunteer Paul McAfee.

Enchanted animals await their guests. Volunteers also assisted as ticket sellers, parking and campfire attendants and refreshments servers.

- **Monarch butterfly:** Peg DeMott, volunteer
- **Beaver:** Mason Stienbarger, volunteer
- **Opossum:** Chris Broni, volunteer
- **Coyote:** Ken Bauer, MAEE student
- **Eastern Toad:** Maddy Herron, MAEE student
- **Great Horned Owl:** Kaitlyn Bradley, MAEE student
- **Bullfrog:** Jonathon Schramm, faculty
- **Raccoon:** Aly Munger, MAEE student



Merry Lea
Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

1700 South Main St.
Goshen, IN 46526

Non-profit
Organization
US Postage
PAID
Permit 71
Goshen, IN 46526

“Where Earth and People Meet”

Women's Spirituality Retreat Invisible Women, Invisible Earth

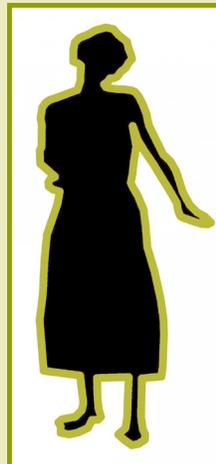
Friday, January 27, 7 p.m. to Saturday, January 28, 4 p.m.
Gatherings at the Farmstead Site; Lodging at Rieth Village

About the Retreat: This annual event includes encounters with biblical women, time outdoors with creation, conversation with peers and quiet time alone.

The 2016 theme: Women have often lived in the shadows or moved in and out of them. This weekend will explore backstage, behind-the-scenes women in the Bible—and in our own family trees and communities. Together, we'll train ourselves to notice the traces of these women that *are* recorded. We'll imagine their faces, their voices and what they might have to say to us today. Likewise, other-than-human species and ecosystems often go unnoticed. We'll explore strategies for making the natural world visible as well—both in the Bible and around us today.

About our keynote speaker: Jackie Wyse-Rhodes is an assistant professor of religion at Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio, where she teaches Old Testament. Jackie often seeks out intriguing artistic depictions of the texts she is discussing.

The registration fee of \$50 (\$20 for students) covers input, dorm lodging, breakfast and lunch. See <https://www.goshen.edu/merrylea> to register. Ω



continued from page 2, Pastors

conference minister for the Indiana-Michigan Conference of Mennonite Church USA. Doug has been interested in rivers ever since his congregation realized that baptizing in the Elkhart River was not always a good idea due to *E. coli* counts. Currently he is pursuing an advanced degree at the Elliott Allen Institute for Theology and Ecology at the Toronto School of Theology.

Doug worked with Merry Lea's Dr. Joel Pontius to create a learning experience that blended biblical study of the headwaters in Genesis 2 with an ecological look at the headwaters of the Elkhart River, some of which are on Merry Lea's property.

“I learned a lot working with Doug,” Joel observed. “For example, I hadn't caught on to the fact that the Bible begins and ends with rivers.” One of Joel's contributions to the event was a concluding prayer involving leaves. Those present each wrote a blessing on a leaf. The leaves were then scattered on High Lake, recalling imagery from Revelation 22 where the leaves of the trees by the river of life are said to be for the healing of the nations. Ω