



The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College

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Farm Becomes a Web of Connections

Recently an entry entitled “Logistical planning: Farm Usage this Fall” appeared on Merry Lea’s staff calendar. The meeting brought together team members from the Environmental Education Outreach program, the Sustainability Leadership Semester and the **Merry Lea Sustainable Farm (MLSF)**. They were sorting out how visiting school children might fit into the farm ecosystem along with the crops and resident college students.

This meeting highlights the fact that the farm has become a hub of activity that intersects with virtually everything else that Merry Lea does. The farm, which wraps around the Rieth Village site, has developed in multiple directions over the past 11 years. New crops keep sprouting and new programmatic connections have emerged as well. Below are the ways Merry Lea’s various programs intersect with the MLSF:

Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI):

Teaching undergraduates the complex ecological relationships involved in growing food was the original purpose behind developing a farm at Rieth Village. This year’s ASI students benefitted from a full decade of experience plus several new twists. To learn more, read ASI director Jon Zirkle’s blog on the Merry Lea website.

Sustainability Leadership Semester:

Students in this undergraduate program live at Rieth Village all fall and thus are surrounded by the farm. Learning to live cooperatively and cook their own meals is part of the program. They receive an orientation to the farm when they arrive and a weekly CSA bag of the farm’s food. Previous years’ students have often taken pride in using up every

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Kate Friesen Kempf, Merry Lea’s farm manager, and CSA member Adela Hufford, celebrate fresh summer produce.

Vegetable Santa Courts CSA Customers

“I feel like Santa,” says Kate Friesen, Merry Lea’s farm manager, as she describes the process of preparing CSA bags of fresh produce.

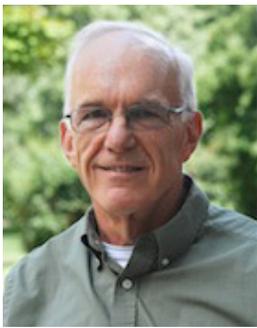
Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a model of farm marketing that connects farmers and customers by having customers invest in shares in the farm, season by season. Each week, CSA members receive a bag of whatever foods the farm is producing at the time.

At the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm (MLSF), that could be any combination of over forty foods. Tomatoes, mushrooms, greens, chickens, eggs, pork, squash, cucumbers, carrots, raspberries and green beans are just a few of the groceries Kate’s CSA customers have received.

The farm began offering CSA shares last fall. This year, it offered a CSA option from the beginning of May until the end of July. The fall CSA started August 30. Kate was able to fill it to capacity with very limited advertising. It helped that one summer customer photographed the contents of her CSA bag each week and posted it on Facebook. (See pages 5 and 6.)

“That’s been fun,” Kate says. “It puts the pressure on me to make sure people get quality, visually appealing things in their bags. I’ve been really pleased that people are excited about what they are getting and are telling their friends.”

The Vegetable Santa also sends her customers recipes that match their groceries each week. Sometimes she even adds a bouquet of flowers. Ω



Director's Desk

Visions from the Past

by Luke Gascho

What we pursue today has deep roots in our past!

Our focus in this issue of the Merry Leaflet is on the sustainable farm. Our team members radiate fresh energy to grow the sustainable farm and integrate it into multiple programs. The efforts of the team are flourishing in new ways each year.

I am inspired many times in our work at Merry Lea to recall how those who led before us had a vision of what we are doing today. The map on the right illustrates this. It was drawn in 1965 by the Audubon Society as a part of a plan they developed for Lee and Mary Jane Rieth. (This is the only document that uses the name "Rieth's Nature Sanctuary," as the name Merry Lea emerged in the following year.) In 1964, the Rieths purchased the first 80 acres of land – the land on which the Learning Center building is located. They sought good council on how they could best develop and implement their vision.

The map shows us many parts of the vision for Merry Lea:

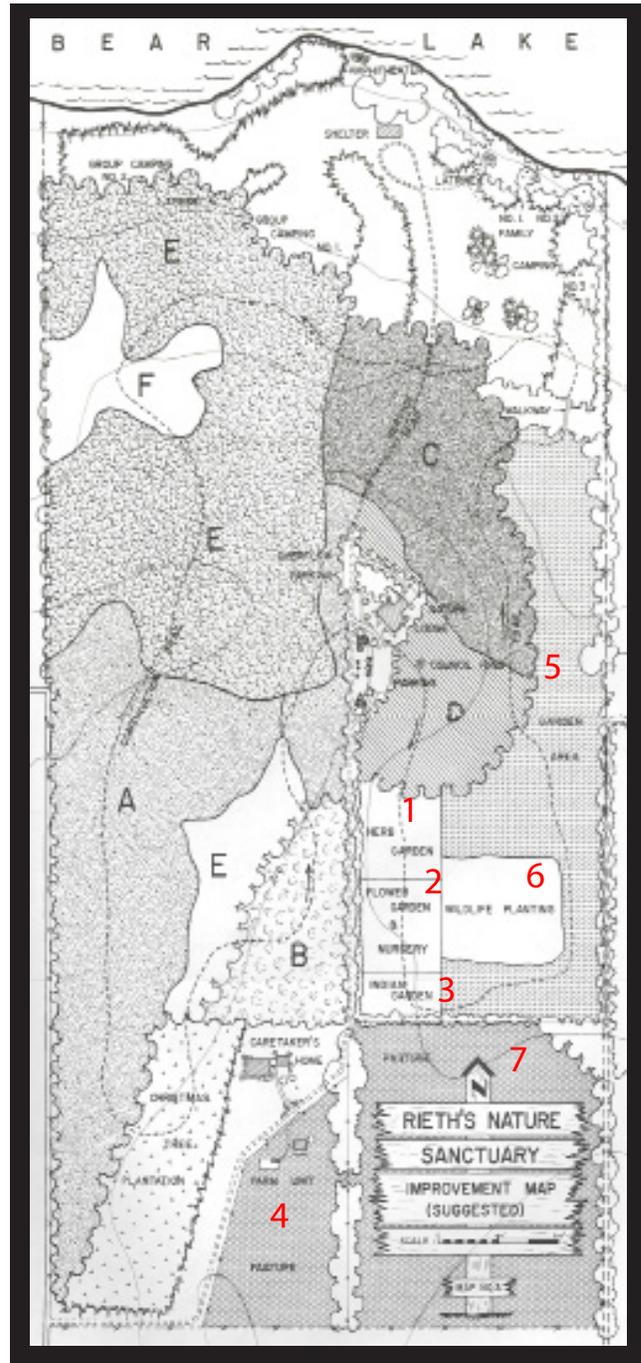
- 1 = Herb Garden
- 2 = Flower Garden & Nursery
- 3 = Indian Garden
- 4 = Farm Unit
- 5 = Garden Area
- 6 = Wildlife Planting
- 7 = Pasture

Are these not things we are doing today! When this map was drawn, the area for the programming goals above was an open field and pasture. Today, this is a forested area around the Learning Center Building. In the following years, many more parcels were purchased, providing the places where we pursue the farming vision at a larger scale.

I believe our farming efforts and the compelling educational objectives that relate to them will continue to have an impact on many lives. While the map doesn't say this directly, I know that teaching, learning and practicing sustainable farming will lead to a healthier planet.

We will pursue the vision! Ω

Read more about the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm at <https://www.goshen.edu/merrylea>. Click on the Sustainable Farm tab or find the Merry Lea blog under Agroecology.



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

TEAM MEMBERS

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

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- Marcia McNagny, Chair
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- Fancheon Resler

Luke Gascho, ex officio
Ross Peterson-Veatch, ex officio

vegetable they receive. Their coursework includes discussion of food systems as well.

Public programs: The farm hosts an annual open house in April to welcome the community. Other public programs at the farm have included a fall potluck-hymn sing and a farm tour for youth. This year, Jon Zirkle, Director of the ASI, opened some sessions of the ASI to the community. The students' canning workshop included five community members and students' final presentations were open to the public. New signage will benefit wandering hikers exploring the farm.

Pre-K to 12 programs: In the spring 2016 *Merry Leaflet*, we announced the launch of a new fall program called Exploring the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm. This replaces the longstanding Farmcraft program held at the Kesling Farmstead. The new program focuses more closely on the ecological processes that provide the food we eat than Farmcraft did. The presence of a working farm on Merry Lea's property inspired this transition. Thirteen schools with a total of 852 students will visit the MLSF this fall.

Master's in Environmental Education: Current MAEE students have had a chance to think about farming more than any of their predecessors. They need to: they will be teaching Exploring the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm to children for their practicum this fall. In their natural history course, they spent a class period investigating the farm as an ecosystem. Other coursework also delves into food production as an environmental issue. Some MAEE students have provided animal care in exchange for farm produce and others have selected farm-related research projects.

Research: The MLSF is also a site for summer research. One ongoing project studies cattle grazed on prairie grasses. The objective is to discover whether this is suitable fodder for beef cattle. If it works as well as the cool season grasses typically used, then farmers can grow food and restore habitat on the same land at the same time.

Eight Lowline Angus cattle spent the summer munching on the restored prairie near the Goodrich House on the west side of the property. Their owner was pleased with the condition of the cows when they returned home. Several have already been butchered and were on par with livestock grazed on cool season grasses. The opinion of the cows was mixed. They spurned goldenrod but gobbled sunflower heads.

Another long term research project seeks to document the bird species associated with the Woody Perennial Polyculture field as it develops over time.

Land Management: One of the unique aspects of Merry Lea's farm is that it is part of a nature preserve. Bill Minter, Merry Lea's land manager, works with the farm staff to consider how new land uses fit with existing land uses. He helped select a location for the nut orchard and advised on the best site to graze cattle. Bill also does the initial site preparation when a new project such as the WPP is being developed. Ω



The Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI)

wrapped up July 29 with a luncheon and remarks from each student. Pictured left to right are Bekah Schrag, Josh Nyce and Stephan Rauh.

Bekah is a rising senior at Goshen College. Josh is a recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite University and Stephan came by way of Wheaton College and a year of voluntary service in Elkhart, Ind. As this cohort illustrates, not all ASI members are in college. Those who no longer need credit for the four undergraduate courses can earn a certificate instead.

One addition to the curriculum this year was a night lab where students observed wildlife activity and collected microclimate data after dark. Another new experience was a visit to a soil testing laboratory.

All three students continued their agricultural interests in August: Bekah volunteered at Merry Lea, Josh joined a beef and dairy operation and Stephan worked on a vegetable farm. Ω



Research

Josh Stoltzfus (left) and Isaac Godshalk (right) evaluate the nutritional value of forage growing in the Woody Perennial Polyculture field. The two Goshen College students were research interns this summer. The plan is to graze cattle between the rows of trees and brambles in this area next summer. Ω

200 S runs just north of this map.

Merry Lea Sustainable Farm

1. Memorial Tree: A white dogwood commemorates the life of Dale Hess, who developed so many elements of the farm between 2005 to 2015.

2. Oshtemo Orchard: Peach, pear, apricot, plum, cherry and apple trees grow here. They arrived in 2012 and should begin bearing fruit next year.

3. Kitchen Garden: This fenced area surrounding the wind generator was part of the original Rieth Village design. It has served ASI students as a learning laboratory ever since. Annual vegetables grow here, such as okra, cauliflower, broccoli, sweet potatoes, green beans, potatoes, soybeans, carrots, beets, rutabaga, onion, garlic.

4. Barn: The barn was built in 2014 to house livestock and equipment. Turkeys, broiler chickens and four hogs live here.

5. Bee Hives: Andy Ammons, a Goshen College biology professor, specializes in bees and maintains these hives. Sustainability Leadership students have a chance to process honey during their stay.

6. Hoop House and Greenhouse: These buildings demonstrate two methods of extending the growing season. The greenhouse on the right has cement walls and a cement sidewalk down the middle. The hoop house on the left is an inexpensive alternative consisting of plastic stretched over metal hoops. Currently these shelters contain 15 varieties of tomatoes. Last's year's final greenhouse tomato was picked January 10.

7. The Head House is used to prepare food for market. A walk-in cooler and washing station were installed in 2016.

continued next page

Kesling Wetland

13

12

14

8. Egg-mobile: Former intern David Stoesz built the egg-mobile in 2012 to provide a home for the farm's first domestic animals. This chicken coop on wheels migrates around the property, and the birds graze within portable fencing. Presently it contains 28 laying hens.

9. Market Garden: This is a two-acre fenced area used for growing annual vegetable crops. Pollinator strips contain flowers and herbs that bloom all season. Cover crops come and go.

10. Mushroom Logs: Oak logs are inoculated to grow shiitake mushrooms in the spring and fall. The activity is a popular part of the 1-credit Sustainable Living Skills course offered for Goshen College students during a weekend in March.

11. Lower Fields: This soil is in recovery, as builders dumped subsoil from the construction of Rieth Village in this area. Sorghum is planted here and is made into molasses in the fall. Some of this area will be used to grow demonstration crops for the pre-K to 12 program. Future uses may include student research plots or community gardens.

12. Woody Perennial Polyculture Plot (WPP): The five-acre plot is a test site for the Savanna Institute of Urbana, Ill., an organization that explores the economic and ecological viability of restoration agriculture. When the planting is mature, it will resemble an oak savanna, once the dominant ecosystem between the forests of the east and the prairies of the west. The area was planted in 2014 and is beginning to produce berries. To learn more, find the Spring 2014 *Merry Leaflet* on the Merry Lea website.

13. Permaculture Garden: Small fruit trees, berries and shrubs grow here in a circular design with meandering paths. This is an example of a perennial garden that can produce food with minimal care and watering. It is one of the earliest agroecology plantings.

14. Nut Orchard: Chestnut, walnut, pecan and hazelnut trees grow here. They are proud survivors of the drought of 2012. The hazelnuts should bear next year. Ω

This map represents an old style of farm architecture where land uses are mixed and crops are interlaced with non-crops. The forest in the middle of the farm harkens back to an earlier era when farmers preserved woodlots for firewood. The patchwork of fields contains a smaller scale patchwork within it that includes things like strips of perennial herbs that support pollinators. Most of a diet could be found here.

— Jonathon Schramm, professor for the ASI's course in agroecology

Why Diversify?

by Kate Friesen Kempf

One of the biggest reasons I'm a proponent of diversified farming is that it creates healthier soils. Crop rotation patterns don't deplete the soil as much as planting the same thing in the same place year after year, and cover crops add more organic matter, suppress weeds, increase water holding capacity and prevent erosion. Because we have animals on our farm, we also have a local fertilizer supply! We compost the chicken and hog manure and use the remaining organic matter to build our soil.

Diversified farming also provides a greater habitat for wildlife and native or beneficial insects. Planting several things together makes host crops less apparent to pests, and having pollinator strips in the garden brings a variety of beneficial wasps, butterflies, bees and hummingbirds to our flowers, veggies and orchards.

A variety of social benefits come along with the ecosystem services diversified farming creates. Having dozens of different plant species and a variety of animals on the farm mean that the students who come through Merry Lea get a lot of unique learning opportunities, such as pasturing chickens and caring for orchards and nut trees. Customers get exposure to new foods, like ground cherries and okra. And, we on the farm benefit directly from having a financial safety net. Some crops may fail this year, but others will flourish. It's extremely unlikely that we'll have a total crop failure when we plant crops with different needs.

Finally, animal and crop diversity makes our work more interesting and extends our working seasons. We can start on cold hardy brassicas first thing in spring, can plant for a fall garden in the heat of summer and can still bring in squash, kale, and root crops in November. Overall, diversity brings us regular returns on our inputs, new foods for our customers and students and a varied and beautiful habitat. Ω

Photo by Deanna Risser

Volunteer Feature: Doug Vendrely



Doug Vendrely picking ground cherries at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm.

Summer is an off-season for most Merry Lea volunteers, but not for Doug Vendrely, a retired teacher from New Paris, Ind. The past two years, Doug has contributed a morning each week to the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm.

“I really enjoy gardening and I know they need the help,” Doug says. His first year, he spent Tuesday mornings planting, weeding and getting the ground ready for use. This year he comes on Fridays, so he is busy picking and processing food that will be sold at a Saturday farmer’s market.

Volunteering on the farm is an avenue for Doug to share knowledge gained through years as a home gardener.

“Not long ago I showed Kate tomato hornworms. She had not seen one before. We fed them to the chickens, and they loved them!” he grins.

The farm is also a great place to learn something new.

“Merry Lea gives me exposure to so many crops I would never grow at home—like ground cherries, tomatillos and lovage,” Doug says. The first is a squat plant in the tomato family that produces a tasty yellow berry that makes good pies. Tomatillos, also in the tomato family, are native to Mexico and a staple in Mexican cuisine. Lovage is an herb that looks and smells like celery.

Access to a greenhouse is intriguing for Doug. He enjoys being part of the early spring start that a greenhouse enables. Another new experience has been getting acquainted with heirloom varieties. He is now trying heirloom tomatoes at home.

When not at Merry Lea, Doug works part-time as an administrative assistant at College Mennonite Church, Goshen. In his spare time, he enjoys biking, quilt design and geocaching. Geocaching is a kind of high-tech treasure hunt similar to the current Pokemon-hunting craze, except that participants are using the Global Positioning System to find physical sites, not anime.

Since Doug combines geocaching with vacation travel, he has found caches in a wide variety of locations. For him, part of the appeal of this activity is the chance to get off the beaten path and learn local history. One year, he wandered the back roads of Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut. Another year, Doug went geocaching in Germany, France and Switzerland while getting acquainted with his ancestral roots in these countries. One memorable attempt to find a cache took place at the Tauferhoehle--or Anabaptist Cave--near Baeritswi, Switzerland. This cave was a worship site for early Anabaptists and hence is a favorite travel destination for people with Mennonite roots.

For now, Doug’s free time remains focused on plants, soil, weeds and freshly grown food. There is a geocache site on Merry Lea property, but it is not at the farm. Ω

- *Want to help with the sorghum harvest in September? Call Maria at 260-799-5869 to volunteer.*
- *Read more about the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm at <https://www.goshen.edu/merrylea>. Click on the Sustainable Farm tab or find the Merry Lea blog under Agroecology.*

What Comes in a CSA Bag?

photos by Deanna Risser



See page 1 for more information.

Merry Lea Adds Two New Team Members

In July, Merry Lea added two new employees. Marcos Stoltzfus will serve as the director of Environmental Education Outreach (EEO)—a new entity that encompasses both Pre-k to 12 programs and public programs. He is returning to his alma mater after a decade working in Colorado and Minnesota.

Katie Stoltzfus will also work with EEO, dividing her time between coordinating public programs and teaching PreK to 12 programs. She is a Michigan native who graduated from Merry Lea's Master's in Environmental Education program in 2016. Despite the same last name, they are not related.

About Marcos

Marcos' history suggests that leadership energizes him. In his last job, he was the manager of learning and instruction at the Science Museum of Minnesota, and he recently completed a master's degree in nonprofit management. Former colleagues describe him as a great thinking partner and an applied academic at heart.

A colorful array of experiences as a science educator complement these more abstract qualities. Need to assess the LEGO load-bearing capacities of a zipline? Marcos is your man. Not sure you can tell a thorny devil from a jungle nymph? Don't worry; he owns an insect mount of each. And should you want to hold a tarantula, Marcos can guide you. He's helped over 500 people hold one while working at an invertebrate zoo.

Life at Merry Lea might sound ordinary in comparison, but Marcos is glad to return to the ecosystems he studied as an environmental science major at Goshen College. "It's been very refreshing to get back to a place that understands the importance of experiences in natural settings. Here, I have a window!" he laughs. He looks forward to get reacquainted with the local natural history.

Marcos is also enthusiastic about the way his new position combines his key interests: environmental education, nonprofit management and farming.



Marcos Stoltzfus

Marcos is a person who suffers when he has no garden due to having moved in the summer. He's served as the volunteer director of a nonprofit dedicated to sustainable agriculture and his master's thesis investigated how and why nonprofits grow food. Developing environmental education related to the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm should suit him well.

Marcos lives in Goshen with his wife, Jess and two-year-old daughter, Lillian.

About Katie

Katie earned a bachelor's degree in conservation leadership from Lake Superior State University in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich. Before beginning Merry Lea's master's program, she spent a year at the Appalachian Forest Heritage Area in Elkins, W. Va., serving as an Americorp volunteer with the U.S. Forest Service. Despite the staff changes going on around her, Katie carried out responsibilities related to invasive species control and environmental education. One nail-biting adventure involved planning an event for over 600 people without a supervisor. Eyewitnesses say she did it with aplomb.

So far at Merry Lea, Katie has



Katie Stoltzfus

organized a Wilderness First Aid public program and has spent many hours with the PreK to 12 team as they prepare for their new program at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm. Another big part of Katie's job is working with teachers to schedule school programs. She is grateful for her MAEE practicum experiences which have given her a good sense of what a given program entails, how many volunteers it will require and what she can expect from the MAEE students.

"I've been surprised by how much time goes into Merry Lea's many moving pieces. Everything is carefully planned and executed. Now I have an insider's view into what the staff does to enable groups to have a great experience here," Katie says.

The part of Katie's job that has proved most rewarding so far is relating to the new master's students and being a source of information and support for them. "It is nice to reflect back on my own experiences," Katie explains.

Neither Marcos' nor Katie's predecessors have left Merry Lea; they've just shifted roles. Check the staff box on page 2 to see what Joel Pontius, Carol Good Elliott and Jennifer Schrock are up to. Ω



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Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

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“ Where Earth and People Meet ”

Next Public Program:

*Firsthand Fest**

Friday, September 30, 6:00 - 9:30 p.m.

Where: Merry Lea's Farmstead Barn

Cost: \$10.00 adults, \$5 students

Hear from people who have experienced environmental problems and solutions firsthand. Also enjoy brick oven pizza and a dessert bar. Featured speakers include:

- Mike McCoy of Fox Trail Farm:
Stories from a Noble County Farm
- Sustainability Leadership Students
Stories from Local Watersheds
- Neil Case - Stories about Fracking:
A Birder Revisits North Dakota

Also:

Enchanted Forest, October 28 - 29

Women's Retreat,* January 27 - 28

* Please register for these public programs in advance. Visit www.goshen.edu/merrylea/.



Photo by Jon Zirkle

Students & Community Members Learn Canning Together

Pressure canners, water bath canners, freezing techniques, lid lifters, jar cracks...

Roberta Miller (right) of Goshen, Ind., covered it all. The former Merry Lea employee now has a unique volunteer niche as canning teacher. Six community members joined the three students in the Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) for a canning and freezing workshop July 19. They put up some dilly beans and froze broccoli.

Also pictured above: Sher King, public program guest; Josh Nyce, ASI.