

# The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College | P.O. Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796 | 260.799.5869 | [merrylea@goshen.edu](mailto:merrylea@goshen.edu) | [goshen.edu/merrylea](http://goshen.edu/merrylea)

## Fishing and chickens and puddingstones, oh my!

FOR ONE WEEK in July, a group of young outdoor enthusiasts gathered for Merry Lea's inaugural Junior and Teen Indiana Master Naturalist (IMN) summer camp. Offered in collaboration with Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site (Rome City, Ind.), this week-long program brought together eighteen 9-17 year olds to foster their common interest in learning about Indiana's plants, wildlife, and other natural resources. IMN campers spent time at both Merry Lea and Gene Stratton-Porter engaging in hands-on activities, outdoor investigations, and learning from local experts.

According to Merry Lea's Director of Environmental Education and Outreach Marcos Stoltzfus, "The goal of the IMN camp is to encourage young people's interests in the ecosystems and related issues that affect northern Indiana. [The program] helps them learn more about what's here, builds on what they already know, and gives them tools to engage more deeply with these topics."

The IMN camp is designed to ensure that there is something to spark the interest of every participant. This year the group explored topics such as geology, zoology, botany, sustainable community planning, agroecology, and more. While many programs in Merry Lea's school field trip lineup cover similar topics, IMN campers have the opportunity to be fully immersed in the content.

Learning to fish was a particularly big hit with IMN campers. Northern Regional Director of Indiana State



Indiana Master Naturalist camper harvesting berries at Merry Lea Sustainable Farm.

Museum and Historic Sites Tiffany Parker was struck by the care that campers took figuring out the mechanics of fishing. "Some [campers] had fished before but others had never done it. They all quickly learned the finesse of how your body moves during the process of casting."

One camper especially enjoyed interacting with the chickens at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm. This camper didn't hide her passion for poultry, wearing chicken t-shirts all week! Other campers were struck by their discovery of a puddingstone at Gene Stratton-Porter, a geological formation characterized by distinctly colored pebbles embedded within a larger rock.

In addition to engaging kids in a variety of environmental topics, the IMN program also helps campers explore connections among those parts of the natural world. "I really enjoyed watching the campers connect the exciting elements from one day to another," said Merry Lea Environmental Educator Rian

Bylsma. "We were in the woods talking about how different plants grow in different types of soil, and they made the connection to different plants growing at the farm. They jumped to that on their own."

The opportunity for campers to explore the natural world in such depth is what makes this program special. According to Marcos, "Some camps happen outdoors, but that's just the setting where things are happening. To [exclusively] focus on environmental topics is a bit less common. Students find something in this camp that is unique." Simply put, our IMN camp provides an opportunity for young people with an enthusiasm for the outdoors to share and explore their interests with like-minded peers, and to have a ton of fun while doing so!

If you know a budding naturalist, we will be offering another week-long IMN day camp in July 2023. More information coming soon! 🌱



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE  
DR. JASON MARTIN

# Looking towards a SURE future

**SIXTEEN YEARS AGO** construction of Merry Lea’s ecological field station, Rieth Village, was completed. The incorporation of environmentally conscious architectural design, locally sourced materials, renewable energy sources, and water conservation techniques into this facility reflected Merry Lea’s strong commitment to sustainability. True to our educational mission, Rieth Village was envisioned as a source of inspiration for all those considering the adoption of sustainable approaches to construction and building management.

Over the years, advances in green technology have resulted in modifications to Rieth Village’s infrastructure. It now serves not only as an example of what can be done, but also of lessons learned. For example, by today’s standards the original wind turbine was not as cost effective or productive as other methods of renewable energy production. When the turbine required expensive repairs last year, we chose to decommission it in favor of adding additional solar panels. This decision making process, along with our experiences navigating the COVID pandemic, revealed a need to reassess the approach that Merry Lea is taking in general to being a sustainable and resilient organization.

So how will Merry Lea approach its responsibility of being an exemplar of sustainability practices moving forward? Over the next year we will begin developing and implementing a Sustainability and Resilience (SURE) Action Plan to make certain that we remain a vibrant organization and can continue to pursue our mission regardless of what environmental, economic, or social pressures we may face. This plan will build on the foundation that Rieth Village has provided and extend to all corners of our 1,189 acres and all aspects of our organization. The ultimate product of this process will be a prioritized road map for achieving organizational sustainability and resilience through the next decade and beyond.

To kick-off the development of Merry Lea’s SURE Action Plan, we will be undertaking three keystone projects in the coming months. We have already completed the first of these: the installation of an electric vehicle charging station at the Merry Lea Learning Center, which is now available for public use at no charge. Later this fall, we will significantly expand our onsite solar energy production by installing additional solar panels on the Learning Center and Hess Barn roofs. These additions will respectively offset all energy used by the EV charging station and bring our onsite renewable energy production at Rieth Village close to 60% of energy consumed. Lastly, in spring 2023, we will be adding an electric vehicle to our fleet.

These significant strides towards a SURE future for Merry Lea were made possible by the generous support of the Redekop Family. Calvin Redekop (1925-2022) was, among many other laudable accomplishments, a sociology professor at Goshen College and Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. He was also a staunch advocate of solar energy. I never had the privilege of meeting Cal but his worldview has been, and will continue to be, a significant source of inspiration as Merry Lea moves toward a more sustainable and resilient future. I can’t thank the Redekop family enough for their support.

I invite you to engage in this work with us by adopting environmentally conscious practices in your own homes, such as recycling, utilizing energy efficient appliances, and installing solar panels. Share what you have done with others so that they too may be inspired to join us on this journey. Through our collective efforts we can guarantee a SURE future for everyone.

## 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. See the news tab at [goshen.edu/merrylea](http://goshen.edu/merrylea) for more updates.

## TEAM MEMBERS

**Rian Bylsma**

*Environmental Educator*

**Kaeli Evans**

*Farm Manager*

**Dinah Gilbert**

*Farm Hand*

**Kerry Goodrich**

*Property Supervisor*

**Carol Good-Elliott**

*Environmental Educator*

**Luke Kreider**

*Assistant Professor, SEED*

**Jason Martin**

*Executive Director*

**Anna McVay**

*Coordinator for Residential Undergraduate Programs & Environmental Educator*

**Bill Minter**

*Director of Land Management*

**John Mischler**

*Assistant Professor, SEED / Director of MLSF*

**Ruth Mischler**

*Assistant Professor, SEED*

**Jonathon Schramm**

*Associate Professor, SEED*

**Jennifer Schrock**

*Director of MCCN*

**Kaitlyn Sproles**

*Environmental Education Outreach Coordinator*

**Marcos Stoltzfus**

*Director of Environmental Education Outreach / Assistant Executive Director*

**Maria Tice**

*Office Manager / Volunteer Coordinator*

## BOARD MEMBERS

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*Ex Officio: Jason Martin*

*Ex Officio: Marcos Stoltzfus*

# Student research partnership paves the way for discovery

**MARY JANE RIETH**, Merry Lea's founding mother, always envisioned Merry Lea as a place where college students from across Indiana would come together to study nature. Her hope was that these students would experience deep and rich learning through interactions with Merry Lea's biologically diverse landscape and like-minded peers from other academic institutions. These types of interactions broaden students' perspectives and prepare them for the collaborative approach necessary to tackle our most pressing environmental and social problems in ways that traditional classroom learning cannot.

In 2021, Dr. Suzanne Beyeler (Director of Manchester University's Environmental Studies Program, Goshen College '95) and Dr. Jason Martin (Merry Lea's Executive Director) set out to realize Mary Jane's vision by initiating an intercollegiate student-centered research collaboration between their two institutions. This model partnership is providing insights for how colleges from throughout the region can collectively provide rich learning experiences for their students. By combining their resources, smaller institutions such as Goshen College and Manchester University can provide the type of top tier experiential research opportunities that are typically only available to undergraduates at larger universities.

"Goshen and Manchester are natural partners," said Director of Manchester University's Peace Studies Institute and Co-Director of Manchester's Center for Environmental Resilience and Social Engagement Dr. Katy Gray Brown. "Our Environmental Science and [Environmental] Studies programs grew from values that are shared by our schools' traditions: ecological stewardship, principled practices, and right relationship with our neighbors - both human and nonhuman. Bringing together students from different schools invites [them] to develop new understandings of themselves, not simply as classmates, but as co-researchers and colleagues. They sharpen communication and cooperation skills, and learn from

[each other's] strengths."

For the past two summers, pairs of students from Goshen and Manchester have been working together to study one of Merry Lea's more uncommon residents, the Blanding's turtle. Blanding's turtles are medium-sized reptiles with dark-colored, domed upper shells speckled with yellow flecks. Perhaps their most distinctive trait is their bright yellow chin and throat. During midsummer, gravid (the scientific term for having eggs) females can travel several miles from their home wetlands to dry upland habitat in search of a place to nest, sometimes crossing roads, open fields, and backyards in the process. This behavior makes these turtles extremely susceptible to habitat fragmentation and destruction. Consequently, Blanding's turtles are endangered throughout most of their native range, including Indiana. There have been occasional sightings of Blanding's turtles on the Merry Lea property over the years, but given its scarcity and secretive nature little is



**Willow Kenneda '25** and a newly discovered Blanding's turtle.

known about the size and habits of our resident population. The efforts of the Manchester and Goshen students are helping us better understand how to manage Merry Lea to support this species and the role that Merry Lea's

[see Student research, page 4](#)



**Liam Elias '23** and **Dr. Suzanne Beyeler '95** (Manchester University) attaching a radio tracker to a Blanding's turtle.

population of Blanding's turtles may play in supporting a more widely distributed regional population in northeast Indiana.

Liam Elias (Goshen College '23) and Tyler Hudson (Manchester University '22) worked together during summer 2021. Using live traps, they captured seven Blanding's turtles in five of Merry Lea's wetlands, four of which had no known prior records of this species. Liam and Tyler measured and weighed each turtle and etched a unique combination of shallow notches into the perimeter of their shells before releasing them back into the wild so that each turtle could be identified if re-encountered. Liam and Tyler also attached small radio transmitters to the shells of six of the turtles. These devices emit a pulsing radio signal which allows for the relocation of the turtles from a distance using an antenna and receiver. By repeatedly relocating each turtle, Liam and Tyler began to expand our understanding of exactly what habitat Blanding's turtles are using at Merry Lea.

During summer 2022, Willow Kenneda (Goshen College '25) and Ian Parslow (Manchester University '23) captured and released eight more Blanding's turtles, bringing our known resident population

to 14. Ian conducted an experiment to determine what type of bait would best attract turtles to traps, and Willow assessed the environmental health of wetlands being used by Blanding's turtles. They also continued to track the movements of the turtles that were radio tagged the previous summer.

The most exciting revelation from this year's research was the discovery that two of the radio-tagged females were carrying eggs, confirming for the first time that Merry Lea's Blanding's turtle population is reproducing. Ian and Willow tracked one of these turtles as it moved two miles from its home wetland through farm fields, forests, and wetlands to its nesting site, a journey that was completed in just two nights. After laying her eggs and resting for several days, she made the return trip. The other gravid female traveled ¾ mile in a single night to her nesting location, crossing a road and a corn field to get there.

One more pair of students from Manchester and Goshen will work together on this project during summer 2023. These students will continue the quest to increase our understanding of the habits and population size of Merry Lea's resident Blanding's turtle population. But more importantly, they will continue to fulfill Mary Jane Rieth's vision of collaborative undergraduate research and learning.

"It's been fascinating to see the ways that students from [Manchester and Goshen] have been working together these past two years," said Goshen College's Director of the Institute for Ecological Regeneration and coordinator of student research at Merry Lea Dr. Jonathan Schramm. "They've learned about each others' programs and campuses, but also shared in this joint discovery of amazing things around Merry Lea. I'm excited to see where the next years might take this [and other] projects." 



Tyler Hudson (Manchester University '22) checking a turtle trap.

## Thank you for your support

*Thank you to the following individuals for making recent gifts to Merry Lea. Your generosity has supported environmental education programming and habitat management efforts.*

Denver Beck  
Marla & Paul McAfee  
William D. Pletcher  
Samuel & Janet Schwartz  
Donna Smucker  
Ryan & Nisha Springer  
Kaitlyn & Michael Sproles  
Randall & Ellen Stoesz  
Evelyn & Roger zumFelde  
Jakob zumFelde

### *In memory of Mary L. Bontrager:*

Kathryn Aschliman  
Lucille Blue  
Wealtha & David Helland  
Vic & Irene Koop  
Barbara Lewton  
Nancy Miller  
Richard Oyer  
Lorena Penner  
Donna Smucker

Please consider joining these donors in support of the Merry Lea mission of environmental education and nature conservation by making a gift today:

[goshen.edu/merrylea/donate](https://goshen.edu/merrylea/donate)

# Merry Lea Team Updates



**Elena  
Flscher**

**VACATED**

**Associate Director of  
Communications and  
Marketing**

*B.A. Anthropology, Indiana  
University, 2017*

Elena first arrived at Merry Lea in August 2019 as an environmental educator and a seasonal recruiter for the M.A. in Environmental Education program. In 2020, she stepped into the role of Communications Specialist and quickly advanced to the position of Associate Director of Communications and Marketing. In this capacity, Elena managed Merry Lea's efforts to promote programs and events, and led our overall communications and marketing strategy. Elena has departed Merry Lea to pursue a graduate degree in Environmental Policy. As a consummate professional and team player, as well as Merry Lea's resident punster, she will be missed. We wish Elena all the best in her next endeavor.



**Luke Beck  
Kreider**

**NEW**

**Assistant Professor of Religion  
and Sustainability**

*B.A. Religion/Philosophy/Peace  
Studies, Goshen College, 2008*

*M.A.R. Ethics, Yale Divinity  
School, 2012*

*Ph.D. Religion/Religious Studies,  
University of Virginia, 2020*

Luke joined the Goshen College community in September in a faculty position jointly shared between the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department and the Religion, Justice, and Society Department. His research expertise focuses on the moral, religious, and cultural dimensions of environmental issues, and his teaching spans the fields of environmental studies, religion, ethics, and peace studies. At Merry Lea, he helps facilitate the Sustainability Leadership Semester, teaches in the M.A. in Environmental Education program, works with undergraduate students majoring in sustainability studies, and advises graduate researchers in environmental education.



**Anna  
McVay**

**NEW (TEMPORARY)**

**Coordinator for Residential  
Collegiate Programs and  
Environmental Educator**

*B.A. Sustainability Studies,  
Goshen College, 2022*

This fall semester, Anna will primarily be heading up efforts to support non-academic community aspects of our residential Sustainability Leadership Semester (SLS). She will serve as resident director for undergraduate students living at Rieth Village during the SLS program and oversee living/learning community meetings with this group. Additionally, Anna will provide logistical support for SLS field trips and other academic aspects of the program. As an environmental educator, Anna will help facilitate Merry Lea's Program for Outdoor Wilderness Learning (PROWL), an after-school program. Anna's appointment extends through December 2022.



**Dinah  
Gilbert**

**NEW (TEMPORARY)**

**Farm Hand**

*B.S. Environmental Studies/  
Peace Studies/Religious Studies,  
Manchester University, 2022*

Dinah assists with maintenance and management of the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, including planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, mowing, pruning, pest management, and livestock care. She also assists with farm-based public and environmental education programs. Dinah will be with us through May 2023.



## Sowing seeds of learning

**SEEDS PLANTED** IN the Teaching Garden at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm feed our students' minds in myriad ways. Through interactions with the garden throughout the growing season, students of all ages form deep and lasting connections with their food resources.

The first students that utilize the Teaching Garden each year are undergraduates enrolled in our Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) semester. ASI is a ten-week residential program in which students learn about sustainable agricultural practices. Through this experience, they come to understand how agroecology is an integral part of the growing global effort to make human activities more compatible with natural ecosystems. ASI students use raised beds in the Teaching Garden to practice sustainable agricultural methods such as companion planting, the practice of planting different crops in close proximity for mutual benefit. During summer 2022, each member of this year's ASI cohort designed, planted, and tended their own

garden beds to demonstrate principles of agroecology that they found personally meaningful. Beyond their own learnings, the fruits (and vegetables) of their labor will have far reaching benefits for many other students at Merry Lea.

Hundreds of PreK-12 students visit the Teaching Garden during the fall to learn about where food comes from as part of our Exploring Merry Lea Sustainable Farm program. In turn, these field trips are a vital part of the learning experience of our Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) students as these are among the first education programs that the graduate students deliver on their journey to becoming environmental education professionals. Even our adult learners get into the act. During public programs, like our Food Preservation Workshop, food grown in the garden is used to teach how to produce and process healthy food at home. Ultimately, the food harvested from the Teaching Garden feeds undergraduate students that live and learn at Merry Lea during



our Sustainability Leadership Semester, thereby helping them establish a deeper and richer sense of place.

It all starts with the intentional planning and careful execution of our Agroecology Summer Intensive students. The members of our 2022 ASI cohort are excited to share their work with you.

## Gonzi Barahona

Goshen College '24  
Biology Major

Gonzi designed his garden bed to leave a lasting impression by incorporating plants that may be unfamiliar to kids, such as purple tomatillos, rainbow beets, and purple bell peppers. Through their time at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, he hopes children will learn about where their food comes from and understand some of the challenges of food production. In particular, Gonzi highlighted how climate change is reducing plant viability and productivity.

Gonzi came to the Agricultural Summer Intensive program to learn about food systems. This experience has affirmed his career plans. After he graduates, Gonzi intends to move to a different country to learn more about agricultural practices. In particular, he wants to better understand restoration agroecology, which incorporates sustainable food production with practices to maintain healthy ecosystems.

## Glen Malast

Knox College '21  
Environmental Studies Major

Glen used companion planting techniques to create a garden bed that, in addition to producing food, would also benefit native bees. Many of our food crops are dependent on these declining insects for pollination. Native wildflowers interspersed among food-producing plants will hopefully attract bees to this area that will, in turn, increase harvest yield.

Living and learning at Merry Lea was a life changing experience for Glen. During the Agroecology Summer Intensive, they were able to gain a more holistic understanding of food systems by learning to consider natural ecology processes, such as pollination, as essential parts of agriculture. Ultimately, Glen wants to change the world by working as an educator and sharing knowledge with others.

## Juan Llama Chardón

Goshen College '23  
Sustainable Food Systems Major

Juan designed a garden bed as an immersive space for young children to interact with food-producing plants. He incorporated a wooden walkway through the middle and an arching tomato trellis to allow kids to fully explore this space. Juan's design also emphasizes the importance of using fresh foods to make healthy meals by incorporating crops that are often combined in cooking, such as tomatoes, onions, and basil. Juan wants to encourage visitors to his raised garden bed to see growing food as a joyful experience.

During the Agroecology Summer Intensive program, Juan enjoyed learning about a variety of environmentally friendly food production methods, including aquaponics, agroforestry, and soil regeneration practices. After graduation, he is planning on returning to his native Puerto Rico and pursuing a career in food production.



Top row: John Mischler (ASI Director), Gonzi Barahona, Kaeli Evans (Farm Manager), Juan Llama Chardon;  
Bottom row: Glen Malast, Ruth Mischler (ASI Professor)



# Merry Lea

Environmental Learning Center  
of Goshen College

1700 S. Main St.  
Goshen, IN 46526

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## Events

Learn more at: [goshen.edu/merrylea/events](https://goshen.edu/merrylea/events)

### FESTIVE FALL FLOWER ARRANGING

**WHERE:** Merry Lea Sustainable Farm

**WHEN:** Saturday, **Oct. 1** | 9 a.m.– 12 p.m.

Create your own flower arrangement in carved pumpkins using fresh flowers, vegetables, and herbs from our garden. Participants will get to pick their pumpkin and design a beautiful bouquet to take home!

**Cost is \$25 per person. Registration required on our website.**

### NATURE PREK OBSERVATION & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**WHERE:** Farmstead

**WHEN:** Monday, **Oct. 10** or Thursday, **Oct. 27** | 11:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Ever wonder what a Nature Preschool actually looks like in action? See for yourself with this guided observation and professional development opportunity. Leave inspired, with tangible steps for your own classroom or learning setting!

**Cost is \$45 per person. Registration required on our website.**

### ENCHANTED FOREST

**WHERE:** Farmstead

**WHEN:** Friday, **Oct. 21** & Saturday, **Oct. 22** | 7 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.

Join us for an “enchanted” night hike. Guides will lead groups by lantern-light to meet real “live” animals on our trails. These friendly creatures will tell you about their diets, habits, and favorite places. In addition, enjoy music, snacks, and hot cocoa around a campfire. This non-scary, family-friendly event is great for young children!

**Cost is \$3.50 per person. Ages 2 & under are FREE! Registration not required.**

### TAILS & TRAILS

**WHERE:** Luckey's Landing

**WHEN:** Tuesday, **Oct. 25** | 10 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Hear a tale and hike a trail with your preschooler to discover the natural wonders around you together! Children and their caregiver(s) gather for a short story that incites curiosity before exploring different places around Merry Lea. This monthly program is designed for children ages 3-5.

**Cost is FREE! Registration not required.**