

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 | goshen.edu/merrylea

Conservation Leadership School Reflections

EVERY JUNE, high school students from across Indiana and surrounding states join us for Conservation Leadership School (CLS). During this week-long program, these students make Merry Lea their home while connecting with like-minded peers and explore what it means to conserve natural resources and be “sustainable.”

Our goal is for our CLS students to leave the program having gained greater insights into the science of conservation and sustainability, exposure to related career options, and increased confidence as future leaders in the field.

On the first day of CLS, we asked the cohort of 11 students what sustainability meant to them. Their answers included “ways of life that do not significantly alter the environment,” “helping reduce the negative impacts of society on our planet,” “keeping our ecosystems stable,” “the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time,” and “being able to repeat an action or process without damaging the natural ecosystem.”

While their definitions varied, they all came into the program knowing that sustainability involves conservation and maintenance of our environment.

For the next five days, the CLS students expanded their understanding of sustainability by exploring how we strive to preserve our natural resources and ecosystems here on Merry Lea’s 1,189 acres.

They learned how to scientifically survey turtles, birds, and macroinvertebrate insect populations, test water quality, manage terrestrial habitats, and construct green buildings. They also spent time interacting with Merry Lea staff members and other professionals

that work in the field of sustainability, and shared some of their new found knowledge and perspectives with 67 children and 31 adults during our Nature Play Day program. While so many activities crammed into one week may seem exhausting, this year’s CLS students were always eager to learn more.

At the end of the week, we again probed the students’ understanding of sustainability during their nightly journal reflections. Their responses were much more nuanced, including “making sure a balanced ecosystem is maintained in as many ways as possible,” “keeping native wildlife and plant life in the area flourishing,” and “restoration of natural habitats through removal of invasive species.”

It was affirming to hear how the students’ understanding of sustainability grew through participating in the various activities throughout the week.

“I was a counselor back in the first year of this program in 2017 and it’s so fun to see how CLS has evolved over

the years,” said Kaitlyn Sproles, our Environmental Education Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator. “It’s just a fun week for students with shared interests to live, work and play together. Relationships are formed that can last a lifetime and students have met future college roommates, have gone on to attend Goshen College and other local universities, have come back as counselors, and so much more!”

From eating bowls of whipped cream for breakfast (along with more nutritional foods!) and swimming all the way across High Lake after canoeing from Bear Lake to High Lake, to finding a leech that they named “Larry” and playing in the dirt during Nature Play Day, these students had a great rejuvenating week filled with unique and life changing experiences.

We wish them all the best on their next adventures. Fingers crossed that we welcome some of them back as counselors for future CLS cohorts and as volunteers! 🌱



2023 Conservation Leadership School students and counselor after helping run a successful public program - Nature Play Day.



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE
DR. JASON MARTIN

The Next Stepping Stone For Creation Care

Since our founding as the “Merry Lea Nature and Religious Foundation” in 1967, Merry Lea has always emphasized connecting people with nature on a spiritual basis. Coming to know a place, and to ultimately care for that place, is not just a matter of the mind; it involves the heart and soul as well.

We believe that providing opportunities that nurture spiritual connections with the natural world results in people embracing their responsibility to preserve and wisely use the environment. This concept is reflected in the Christian ecotheology of creation care, through which we acknowledge and embrace our charge to care for God’s creation. This type of eco-spirituality is widespread among most faith traditions.

The faith-based underpinnings of our work were strengthened when Merry Lea became part of Goshen College in 1980. We embrace the college’s mission of integrating academic excellence and real-world experience with active love for God and neighbor as grounding for our own mission of providing a natural sanctuary for northern Indiana’s biodiversity, environmental education for people of all ages, and a setting for re-creating opportunities that benefit the human body and spirit.

In looking for ways to broaden the work of creation care beyond our small corner of northeast Indiana, Luke Gascho (Merry Lea Executive Director, 1997-2019), Jennifer Halteman Schrock (MCCN Leader, 2016-present), and others planted the seeds of the Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN) at Merry Lea in 2005. Partnering with Mennonite Church USA (MC USA), Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada), and Everence, MCCN’s aim is to encourage Mennonite congregations throughout North America to claim their biblical and theological foundation regarding the care of God’s creation, and in doing so discover the ties that link all created beings to each other and to God.

Over the years those seeds have grown into a beautiful ecotheological ministry. MCCN offers curriculum with which congregations can explore econnections between their faith and their place in nature, provides resources and grant funding to help churches reduce their carbon footprints, advocates for environmental justice, and more.

I am very excited to share that MCCN is about to enter an exciting new chapter. It has become obvious that MCCN has outgrown the original pot in which it was planted. As a result of its success and growth over the years, the MCCN ministry will be better served by transplanting it into an organization that has a broader geographic scope than Merry Lea.

On August 1, 2023, MCCN will become part of Mennonite Church USA. Jennifer Schrock will step down from her current role as MCCN Leader on September 30, 2023, and MC USA is creating a new climate justice coordinator staff position to oversee the work of MCCN moving forward. Merry Lea is providing funding to support this transition and will continue to engage with future MCCN projects in an advisory capacity, while Everence will continue to provide financial support for this program into the future.

see *Stepping Stones*, page 3

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. Kayla Beasley is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at goshen.edu/merrylea for more updates.

TEAM MEMBERS

Kayla Beasley

Associate Director of Communications & Marketing

Kaeli Evans

Farm Manager

Carol Good-Elliott

Environmental Educator

Kerry Goodrich

Property Supervisor

Carla Gull

Coordinator, Master of Arts in Environmental Education program / Associate Professor, SEED

Luke Kreider

Assistant Professor, SEED

Jason Martin

Executive Director

Bill Minter

Director of Land Management

John Mischler

Assistant Professor, SEED / Director of Merry Lea Teaching Farm

Ruth Mischler

Assistant Professor, SEED / Assistant Director of Merry Lea Teaching Farm

Jonathon Schramm

Associate Professor, SEED / Director of Institute for Ecological Regeneration

Jennifer Schrock

Director of MCCN

Jeremiah Sharp

Residence Life Coordinator & Environmental Educator

Alan Stadler

Building Manager & Grounds Assistant

Kaitlyn Sproles

Environmental Education Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator

Marcos Stoltzfus

Director of Environmental Education Outreach / Assistant Executive Director

Josie Strader

Land & Facilities Management Assistant

BOARD MEMBERS

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I want to thank all of those that have made this transition possible, especially Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz (MC USA), Glen Guyton (MC USA), Marlene Kroeker (Everence), Madalyn Metzger (Everence), and members of the MCCN Advisory Council and Merry Lea Board of Trustees. And it is not possible for me to thank Jennifer Halteman Schrock enough for all of her efforts in shepherding the MCCN ministry over the years. It is thanks to her that MCCN is positioned to take this leap into a bright future.

Moving forward, creation care will remain central to all that we do at Merry Lea. It is our reason for being and the “why” for what we do. I invite you to continue walking with us on this path of cherishing God’s creation and sharing the wonders of this awesome gift with others. 



Jennifer Halteman Schrock, Director, Mennonite Creation Care Network (MCCN)

Volunteer Spotlight



Karen Bradley hosting our natural egg dyeing program during Nature Fest 2023.

Karen Bradley has been a Merry Lea volunteer since spring 2021 - ever since her daughter, Kaitlyn Sproles, began working here! She has helped us tremendously and always jumps in whenever we need her, no matter what.

Best known for her amazing baking and cooking skills for Enchanted Forest, Conservation Leadership School and our volunteer appreciation lunch/dinner, Karen is also known for being one of our first aid experts (she is a retired RN of 30 years) and helping us with various sewing projects. Before her grandson Bradley was born, she also assisted with our Nature Preschool program during fall of 2021.

During the past two Nature Fest events, Karen helped run the natural egg dyeing activity, from prepping the materials to helping kids dye eggs. She also does a lot of behind the scenes work for us throughout the school year, such as assisting with inventorying supplies, folding rain ponchos and t-shirts, and helping with Nature Preschool prep.

We don’t know what we would do without Karen supporting us in the many ways that she does. Thank you Karen! 

Thank you for your support

Thank you to the following people for donating to Merry Lea during this quarter. Your support has contributed to delivering safe environmental programming, maintaining facilities and the upkeep of hiking trails.

Beth Bartel & Christopher Miller
Kayla & Nathan Beasley
Malinda Berry & John Stoltzfus
Roy & Connie Bender

Emma Bontrager
Jonathan Bortrager & Elizabeth Leinbach
Karen Bradley
Francis Bundy
Julia & Gary Delp
Lisa & Joe Ebersole
Shirley Friesen
Sarah Gorski
Joanne Henline
in memory of Carole M. Johnson
Ruby Hochstedler
Jennifer & Shaleen Jain

Armon & L. Bernice Kauffman
Alexa Kennel
Greta Klassen
Stephanie Mason
Kristen Mast
Tom & Erika Meyer
Scott & Katherine Minielly
Charles & Esther Nafziger
Anna Osborne
Gretta Rempel
Alice & Willard Roth
David & Beth Rupp
Mary Beth Schlabach

Stephanie Shepline & Chris Lyle
Tim & Jane Short
Bill & Sally Smith
Kaitlyn & Michael Sproles
Alan Stadler
Doug & Jane Vendrely
Tonya Yoder
Wayne & Roveen Yoder
Evelyn & Roger zumFelde
Anonymous



Merry Lea Team Updates

Josie Strader



New Land & Facilities Management Assistant

B.A. Environmental Science, Goshen College, 2022

Josie graduated from Goshen College in 2022 with a degree in Environmental Science and joined the Merry Lea team in April of 2023 as our Land and Facilities Management Assistant.

She plays a pivotal role in assisting our Land Manager, Property Supervisor, and Building Manager to ensure the maintenance and

upkeep of our indoor and outdoor facilities, trails, and natural areas throughout the landscape of Merry Lea.

Josie has been a vital part in helping us prepare for our public events and field trip programs. Her contributions have already left an indelible mark on Merry Lea, enriching our organization and enhancing our ability to fulfill our mission. We are incredibly fortunate to have Josie as a member of our team

In Josie's free time, you can find her working on DIY projects, sewing, knitting, gardening, and doing various art projects.

Jeremiah Sharp



New Coordinator for Residential Collegiate Programs and Environmental Educator

M.A. Environmental Education, Goshen College, 2023

B.S. Biology, B.S. Environmental Studies, Manchester University, 2022

Jeremiah graduated from Manchester University in 2022 and began his journey here at Merry Lea as a graduate student in our Master of Arts in Environmental Education program shortly after. After completing

this degree, he joined the Merry Lea team in June 2023 in the role of Residence Life Coordinator and Environmental Educator. In this capacity, he supports our undergraduate and graduate students in residence and helps to deliver K-12 field trips and public programs.

We are very excited to have Jeremiah on our staff and can't wait to see the impact that he has on Merry Lea.

During Jeremiah's free time you can find him birding, hiking, spending time with friends, reading a good book, or hanging out with Cora, our Eastern Milk Snake.

Carla Gull



New Coordinator of the Master of Arts in Environmental Education Program and Associate Professor in SEED

Ed.D. Instructional Leadership, Argosy University, 2009

M.A. Curriculum and Instruction, National Louis University, 2002

B.S. Elementary Education, Brigham Young University, 1998

Dr. Gull joined the Merry Lea team in June 2023 as an Associate Professor in the Sustainability and Environmental Education Department and the coordinator of the Masters of Arts in Environmental Education Program.

She has over 20 years of experience in the education field at the preschool, elementary, and collegiate levels. Carla enjoys helping educators incorporate nature in their everyday early childhood settings.

She hosts a podcast called "Loose Parts Nature Play", facilitates the international "Loose Parts Play" group, and regularly facilitates workshops, gives presentations, and conducts academic research on loose parts, STEM, outdoor classrooms, nature education, and more.

Carla is a coauthor of the book "Loose Parts Learning in K-3 Classrooms". She is also the state coordinator for Indiana Children and Nature Network (ICAN). To see a list of Carla's other publications, visit [our website!](#)

Team Updates Continued

Rian Bylsma



Vacant Environmental Educator

M.S. Evolutionary and Wildlife Genomics, Purdue University, 2020
B.S. Biochemistry, Calvin University, 2015

As an environmental educator, Rian fostered curiosity, discovery and wonder in all of Merry Lea's PreK-12 and public programs. Before coming to Merry Lea in fall 2021, Rian gathered experience in public science programming, curriculum development and community learning to complement their degrees in biochemistry and wildlife

genomics. Throughout their time at Merry Lea Rian also assisted with our Nature Preschool program and cared for our Northern Watersnake, Don.

Although Rian has returned to their hometown in Michigan to be closer to family, we are confident that they will embark on a thrilling new chapter in their professional journey.

Their impact on our organization and the individuals they have touched during their time here will be cherished forever. We wish them the very best, knowing that they will continue to make a positive difference wherever their path may lead.

Dinah Gilbert



Vacant Farm Hand

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

Dinah assisted with various maintenance and management activities at the Merry Lea Teaching Farm including planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, mowing, pruning, pest management, livestock care, and more. They also assisted with farm-based public and environmental education programs, such

as grapevine wreath making and Exploring Merry Lea Teaching Farm field trips.

After completing their position at Merry Lea, Dinah has moved to New York State and is further exploring a career path in sustainable food production. As Dinah discovers new horizons, we express our sincere appreciation for their dedication, hard work, and the positive impact they have had on Merry Lea. We will miss Dinah regularly sharing their random environmental facts and the amazing floral centerpieces that they created for our various lunches and dinners.

Maria Tice



Vacant Office Manager & Volunteer Coordinator

B.A. Environmental Studies, Goshen College, 2002

Maria returned to the Merry Lea staff in 2012 as our Office Manager and Volunteer Coordinator after serving as a Merry Lea intern from Fall 2005 to Spring 2006 following graduation from Goshen College. For the past 11 years, Maria has managed our bookstore, maintained office functions, provided clerical support, maintained

relationships with the public, supported delivery and implementation of our programs, assisted with event planning, helped proofread the Merry Leaflet, jumped in whenever someone needed help, and SO much more.

One of Maria's most admirable qualities is her willingness to lend a helping hand wherever it was needed. Her versatility and unwavering support made her an invaluable asset to our team. She truly embodied the spirit of Merry Lea and played a vital role in shaping who we are today.

She will be greatly missed and we wish her nothing but the best on her next adventure.

What's Going On at The Farm?

OUR GARDENS ARE IN FULL BLOOM!

From the orchard to our teaching garden and greenhouses, there are fruits, vegetables, herbs, and other fun plants growing like crazy.

Thanks to our amazing summer farm crew and farm volunteers for helping us with planting, maintenance, harvesting, watering, fertilizing, weeding, and so much more. We couldn't function without them.

We have a large amount of produce currently growing including tomatoes, apples, grapes, pears, melons, peaches, asparagus, gooseberries, strawberries, onions, mixed salad greens, spinach, pumpkins, summer and winter squash, radishes, blackberries, mushrooms, radishes, eggplant, beans (snap & dry), carrots, cauliflower, broccoli, celery, cilantro, basil, dill, parsley, mint, peppers, garlic, cucumbers, zucchini, various cover crops, and flowers!



Merry Lea Teaching Farm garden: lettuce, onions, kohlrabi, various other greens and more!

If you're eager to explore a comprehensive collection of the delightful produce we cultivate at Rieth Village, we invite you to visit goshen.edu/merrylea/food-grown-at-ml/. Alternatively, you can simply park your vehicle in the Rieth Village parking lot and embark on a short walk through our bountiful gardens and orchard firsthand.

Currently on the farm, we also have 275 chicks, four sheep and several button quail that also keep our farm staff and crew busy!

The farm has been busy preparing for fall school field trips that will begin in September as well as for our Junior and Teen Indiana Master Naturalist Summer Day Camp in July.

"My favorite part about the Merry Lea Teaching Farm is working alongside my colleagues and with students who

are researching, learning, and working here," says Ruth Mischler (Assistant Professor in SEED and Assistant Farm Director). "I love the sense of discovery each season brings and that I am always learning something new."

Our Sustainability Semester students will be moving into Rieth Village for the fall semester at the end of August. These students will receive a share of food that is grown on the farm to incorporate into their meals and snacks. Our MAEE graduate students get a share of food from the farm as well!

Regardless of the season, Merry Lea Teaching Farm is always brimming with captivating endeavors. To stay updated on the latest farm happenings, we encourage you to explore our social media channels. It's a fantastic way to stay connected and immerse yourself in our ever-thriving community. 🌱



Some of the newest Merry Lea members in their coop - chicks!



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Merry Lea relies on the generosity of people like you to provide quality environmental education programs that are accessible for all ages.

Please consider becoming a Friend of Merry Lea. Thanks so much for your consideration.

You may give online at goshen.edu/merrylea/donate or call our office at (260) 799-5869.

Can you "be-leaf" it?

Merry Lea has an active worm compost bin in the Learning Center's program storage room! The worms love to snack on carrots, fruit peels and tea bags.

For more fun facts about Merry Lea, follow our social media outlets for more fun facts!

Facebook: Facebook.com/MerryLeaEnvironmentalLearningCenter

Instagram: Instagram.com/merrylea_goshen/

Keeping Up With Changes & Life at Merry Lea



NEW WEBSITE

We are excited to announce that Merry Lea's new website, along with our new program registration system, DoubleKnot, has officially launched! Special thanks to Elena Fischer, our previous Associate Director of Communications & Marketing, for her part in getting this large project underway. We invite you to check out the new updates and features at goshen.edu/merrylea/.

NEW DOCK AT VERNAL POND

Thanks to a generous Friend of Merry Lea, we were able to replace an aging dock on our woodland vernal pond located between trail markers F and G. Through their generosity, this donor has ensured that countless individuals, young and old alike, can continue to enjoy the serenity and educational opportunities that our vernal pond has to offer. While their identity remains shrouded in mystery, the imprint they have left on Merry Lea's landscape and the hearts of our community is everlasting. We extend our deep appreciation to this benefactor. Check the new dock out when you take your next hike! If you're lucky, you may even see a frog or two before the pond dries up for the rest of the year.



STRATEGIC PLANNING ON HOLD

Due to ongoing staffing transitions and Merry Lea board development work, we have decided to pause the final phase of designing our next strategic plan. Instead of launching the plan in July 2023 as originally intended, we will instead be moving across a 'one-year strategic bridge' that will span the gap until our next plan is finalized. "This Strategic Bridge will serve to elevate goals and objectives that we have identified as being particularly crucial for ensuring organizational stability and resilience over the next year. This approach will set us up for greater success as we move into our next plan," says Jason Martin, our Executive Director. The Merry Lea team has been hard at work developing our strategic bridge and it will be posted on our website soon!



MASTER OF ARTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION GRADUATION

Our 2022-2023 Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) students completed their program in May! We are all so proud of everything that this cohort accomplished over the past year and they will all be greatly missed. Jamie McBride, Jeremiah Sharp, Michael (Mike) Miller, Stephanie Hancock and Eva Webb all brought great assets to the Merry Lea team and we can't wait to see the positive impact that they will make on the environmental education world.



SUMMER STUDENT RESEARCHERS

This summer we have two Hickory Scholar students that have joined us here at Merry Lea: Henry Meyer and Aiden Schloneger. Henry's research is focusing on the comparison of pastured chicken growth rates and feed consumption while Aiden is researching rotational grazing effects on reducing parasite loads in sheep. We also have eight summer research students working on the Grassland Grazing Project, a long-term research project involving two restored prairie sites in North America (one at Merry Lea and one in Goshen) and another savanna site in Kenya. This summer, students have been collecting data on plant diversity, aboveground biomass, and belowground root growth patterns. To learn more about research done here at Merry Lea, check out our [website!](#)





Merry Lea

Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

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Goshen, IN 46526

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Events

Learn more at: goshen.edu/merrylea

Nature Explorers (Part 3)

WHERE: Glacial Retreat Center, 1799 S 650 W, Kimmell, IN 46760

WHEN: Thursday, **August 10** | 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Elementary-aged students can join us to get outside and engage in the habitats and landscapes across Merry Lea! For part 3 of 3, students will explore our gravel pit, hike along a glacier made hill, jump on our bog, and rock out with rocks on this hands-on hike!

Cost is \$5.50 per child

Registration required on our website.

Tales & Trails

WHERE: Various Sites around Merry Lea

WHEN: **Last Tuesday each month** | 10 – 11:30 a.m.

Hear a tale and hike a trail with your preschooler to discover the natural wonders around you together! This is a 1.5-hour monthly program designed for children ages 3-5 and their caregiver(s), led by a Merry Lea educator. Please dress to be outside for each program.

Cost is free. Registration not required.

See website for more details!

Merry Lea Adventure Challenge: Aquatic Agents

WHERE: Luckey's Landing, 2300 S Stone St., Albion, IN 46701

WHEN: Saturday, **July 29** | 1 – 3:30 p.m.

Join us for the newest Merry Lea Adventure Challenge! Sign up as a team of code-breakers to complete puzzles and collect clues by canoe and on land to uncover a message from your 'secret agent.'

Cost is \$7 per adult, \$5 per child.

Registration is team based and required by July 26 on our website. Each team can be up to 6 people.

Enchanted Forest

WHERE: Merry Lea Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701

WHEN: **October 20 & 21** | 7 – 8:30 p.m.

Come for a night hike by lantern light and meet native Indiana animals. These friendly creatures will talk about their diets, habits and favorite places. Enjoy music and snacks, and end the evening sipping hot cocoa around a campfire.

Cost is \$5 per person. Ages 2 & under are free.

Registration is not required. See website for more details!