

# 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

## “There's Healing Here”

BY Greg Perigo

### I HAVE A FRIEND WHO DESPITE

of his high-profile sporting profession, cannot go far without being approached for an autograph or a selfie. I marvel at his patience.

Unfailingly polite, the well of his patience is not inexhaustible. Indeed, there are days when the intrusions become too much. It is then that my phone rings.

“Is there any room at your cottage?” he’ll ask.

“Of course,” I’ll reply. “But if you’re coming to the cottage, remember that maximum occupancy is only two-and-a-half people.”

“No problem. We’ll bring the trailer. See you in a few.”

What happens next is as much ritual as it is routine. He and his wife will find their way to “Windover,” my family’s little cottage on Bear Lake (so named by my daughter because of how strong the “...wind over” the water blows in front of the place). They’ll settle in, grab a pair of battered lawn chairs from the garage, lay back, and watch life unfold across the lake at Merry Lea.

In warmer months, they’ll kayak or canoe

along the shore, eager to see if the resident beavers have made progress in felling a tree or two. Later, I’ll be summoned for a hike to the prairie to catch sight of an Indigo Bunting or, recently, toward High Lake to trace a sighting of a Bald Eagle.

As the weather cools, we’ll hike the west end of the property, eager to explore trails and spot a few deer. Not to put too fine a point on it, but it’s the birding at Merry Lea that has been their latest treat (it’s the Pileated Woodpecker that reels them in).

As the lake freezes, we are reminded that, yes, we actually do like to ice-fish, even though we are rank amateurs at best.

Mostly, though, when my buddy calls and says, “I’m on my way,” I know it means he’s had enough; he needs to unplug. Phones are put away; the Merry Lea woods are a-calling.

These are what we call our “Sacred Saturdays.” Moments are spent wandering about Merry Lea in quiet reflection, unraveling life’s greatest challenges, and teasing meaning out of it all.

“This,” he says, pointing to Merry Lea “is a very healing place,” a point to which I readily agree.

He should know: Despite the shiny veneer of his life, there are flaws. For most all his days, my pal has pitched a fraught battle with substance abuse and alcoholism. The fall from grace was hardly unexpected. In time, though, sobriety was achieved. Among the therapies he embraced were



Greg Perigo showcasing the infamous hiking stick festooned with badges while hiking at Merry Lea. Photo provided by Greg Perigo.

long, rambling walks in the woods with his friends. I was privileged to be among them.

Hiking sticks became a companion and, of course, we’d find our own. Today we have many, each festooned with badges marking where we’ve been: Zion, Grand Canyon, Joshua Tree, Red Rock, Black Hills, Brown County, Shades, Turkey Run, The Dunes, Spring Mill, Prophetstown and a host of others.

Soon we’ll wander Merry Lea again, taking note of the return of the Dark-Eyed Juncos and delight at the call of the Sandhill Cranes off in the distance.

And I will hear him whisper, to no one in particular, “there is healing in this place.”



Hiking on the west end of Merry Lea’s property. Photo taken by Greg Perigo.

## 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.*

- Malinda Berry & John Stoltzfus
- Laura & Jason Moshier
- In honor of Dan Crooke*
- Kathleen Nofziger Yeaky & Michael Yeaky
- Samuel & Janet Schwartz
- John & Joann Smith
- Kaitlyn & Michael Sproles
- Evelyn & Roger zumFelde
- Jakob zumFelde



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE  
DR. JASON MARTIN

## By the numbers: Another year of impact at Merry Lea

IN THE HEART OF NORTHEAST INDIANA, Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College stands as a beacon of environmental education and conservation. We embrace a mission dedicated to preserving nature’s wonders and provide opportunities for people to learn about and connect with these wonders in deep and profound ways. As 2023 draws to a close, I am proud to share some of the more notable ways that our 18 staff and faculty members have served our community this past year.

### Environmental Education Endeavors

Our 4 environmental educators provided immersive nature-based field trips for over 4,000 PreK-12 students. In doing so, they connected these children with the environment in deeply transformative ways. Additionally, 19 students enrolled in our Nature Preschool program spent 275 hours exploring our outdoor classroom while pursuing early childhood learning milestones related to socio-emotional, cognitive, and physical development. Beyond these formal pedagogical experiences, 2,000 participants of all ages attended 82 workshops, classes, and special events. In total, our environmental education programs touched the lives of over 6,000 people through a combined 25,000 hours of learning time!

### Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Excellence

Our Sustainability and Environmental Education Department continues to mold the next generation of sustainability professionals, equipping them with the knowledge and skills required to champion environmental conservation and preservation efforts into the future. In the past year, 7 Merry Lea staff and faculty taught 37 courses to 140 Goshen College students, including those enrolled in our distinctive 11-month Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) program. The MAEE program graduated 5 students this past year, 100% of which are now gainfully employed in environmental education-related positions!

### Sustainability and Conservation Milestones

In addition to serving as a hub of high-quality environmental and sustainability-related education, Merry Lea is also an exemplar of sustainability practices and a haven for our region’s biodiversity. This year we added 63 solar panels to our previously existing 72, further lowering our non-renewable energy consumption by over 30,000 kWh and our energy bill by over \$1,000 per year! We also celebrated the first recorded instance of an endangered Blanding’s turtle nesting on our property when a turtle that student researchers have been monitoring named Celia laid 16 eggs. This happy occasion highlights the positive impact of our conservation efforts and our dedication to preserving vulnerable species.

### A Natural Oasis

Countless people continue to commune with nature and nourish their souls in our 1,189 acres of preserved prairie, forest, and wetland habitat. Our 8 miles of hiking trails are explored by the public from dawn to dusk, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Nestled within our natural landscape, Merry Lea Teaching Farm provides opportunities for students and the public to learn about where their

see *By the numbers*, 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.

### 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

**Melinda Long**

Office Manager

**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

**Jeremiah Sharp**

Residence Life Coordinator & Environmental Educator

**Foy Spicer**

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

**Andy Rieth**, Chair

**Ben Bontrager**

**Greg Perigo**

**Douglas Vendrely**

**Carl Weaver**

Ex Officio: **Ann Vendrely**

Ex Officio: **Marcos Stoltzfus**

Ex Officio: **Jason Martin**



By the numbers, continued from page 2

food comes from and how to grow that food in environmentally responsible ways. This past year our 3 farm staff members cultivated over 100 individual crop types!

This has really been a remarkable year for Merry Lea. True to our mission, we provided environmental education for people of all ages, a natural sanctuary for northern Indiana's plants and animals, and opportunities for people to connect with nature mind, body, and spirit. As a non-profit organization, our ability to continue pursuing this mission is dependent on the generosity of our community.

As we enter the season of giving, I invite you to become one of the 150 people that invest in our mission every year. Please visit [goshen.edu/merrylea/donate](https://goshen.edu/merrylea/donate) today and become a sustaining Merry Lea donor. Click on "Give Today!", select the "Monthly" option, and enter your reoccurring monthly gift amount. For as little as \$5 each month, you will make it possible for children and families to experience deeply transformative learning at Merry Lea. Thank you for the part that you play in making Merry Lea such a special place! 🌱



Participants from our Easy Artisan Cheese Making Class - utilizing fresh herbs from the Merry Lea Teaching garden!

## Buried in the Bog: Exploring the Glacial Retreat Center

### NESTLED IN OUR 1,189 ACRES

is a hidden gem that offers a wealth of geological wonders, educational opportunities and research possibilities. Merry Lea's Glacial Retreat Center is an area that is not open to the public but instead serves as a field trip and special event hot spot, as well as an area for undergraduate research. There are many unique features here, such as glacial formations, a bog, rock pit, extra housing for graduate students

enrolled in our Master of Arts in Environmental Education program, research projects and more.

The glacial formations on this part of the property were created by the deposition of sand and gravel from meltwater streams within, on, or beneath glaciers thousands of years ago. This area appears as a long, winding, "S" shaped ridge that offers a window into the processes that shaped the Earth during the last ice age.

If you descend down this "S" shaped ridge, there is a bog, which is a type of wetland characterized by acidic, nutrient-poor conditions and unique plant life. Bogs often contain peat, a type of organic soil that accumulates over time. This type of ecosystem is vital for biodiversity and plays a significant role in carbon storage.

The rock pit at the Glacial Retreat

Center provides a fascinating glimpse into the geological history of our area. In the pit, you can expect to find various types of rocks and fossils, exposed rock layers and mineral deposits. This area is mainly used for education programs, enabling students to quite literally dig up the Earth's history.

One unique fact about the rock pit is that most of the rocks found in this area are Canadian rocks that were pushed here by a glacier!

On this area of the property also lies the Goodrich house and the Dome apartment. The upper floor of the geometric dome is used for various research projects, education purposes and storage while the bottom apartment is used for housing graduate and undergraduate students.

A student-favorite field trip, "Rock Cycle", also takes place at the Glacial Retreat Center. While hiking along the glacial formation and exploring the rock pit, this program highlights how the landscape at Merry Lea has changed over time, what forces changed the landscape, and how the rocks and soil influence the plants and animals that live there.

During this field trip, students learn about what parts of Indiana were glaciated in the ice age by viewing a map. They also learn about sedimentary, igneous and



Students exploring a glacial formation during their "Rock Cycle" field trip.

see *Buried in the Bog*, page 5

# Merry Lea Team Updates

## Foy Spicer



**New Environmental Educator**

*B.S. Public Horticulture, Iowa State University, 2003*

Foy grew up in Iowa, graduating from Iowa State in 2003 with a degree in Horticulture. She interned at Chicago Botanical Garden, Longwood Gardens and ISU Extension, then served in the Peace Corps along the edge of primary rainforests in Panama as a Sustainable Agriculture Systems volunteer.

When she returned to the States, she moved to Indiana to be a horticulturist at the Garbis Arboretum. She has also worked with sustainable farms in Wabash County.

For two years before coming to Merry Lea, she was a guide for the Montessori School at WPC and developed their summer Farm School program for 3-12 year olds.

Foy joined Merry Lea as an Environmental Educator in August 2023 and mainly helps with the Nature Preschool program, public programming, and K-12 field trips.

Foy lives in North Manchester with her partner and their two kids. As a foodie she loves cooking and fermenting with wild and locally grown meat and produce.

We are so excited to see the impact Foy will have on Merry Lea and the thousands of students who visit here each year.

## Melinda Long



**New Office Manager**

*B.A. General Studies, Indiana University Indianapolis, 2017*

*A.S. Fish & Wildlife Management, Haywood Community College, 2012*

Melinda joined Merry Lea in the summer of 2023 as our Office Manager – a support role for Merry Lea’s operations and activities. She also manages the Learning Center’s bookstore and Merry Lea’s library collections which are part of Goshen College’s Harold & Wilma Good Library, among varied other tasks.

Melinda’s background ranges from working in the field of fisheries and guiding tour groups at a historic site, to working at desk jobs, livestock care and management on a ranch.

When she’s not at work, she enjoys reading, camping, kayaking, sauntering in the woods, practicing her many fiber crafts (such as spinning, knitting, or cross stitch), making music with her family and volunteering at historic recreation events.

We are fortunate that Melinda has joined our crew. Stop by and say hi the next time you are at the Learning Center.



## Farm-to-Table Recipe: Persimmon Pudding



### INGREDIENTS:

- 2 C. Persimmon Pulp (about 4 medium fruits)
- 4 Tbsp Melted Unsalted Butter
- 2 Large Eggs
- 1 C. Granulated Sugar
- 1 C. Light Brown Sugar (packed)
- 1 tsp Vanilla
- 2 C. All-Purpose Flour
- 1 Tbsp Baking Powder
- 1/2 tsp Salt
- 1 tsp Cinnamon
- 1 C. Chopped Walnuts or Pecans (optional)



### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Preheat oven to 350F & grease a 9x13 glass baking dish
2. Remove any seeds & lightly puree the persimmon pulp to break apart seed casings
3. In a large bowl, whisk persimmon pulp, butter, eggs, sugars, and vanilla together
4. In a separate bowl, sift & mix flour, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt
5. Sift the flour mixture into wet ingredients and stir by hand until combined. Fold in chopped nuts (optional)
6. Pour batter into greased pan & bake for 45-55 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean - if edges start to brown too quickly, loosely cover with foil, and continue baking
7. Let cool & serve with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream

From the kitchen of: Lily Ernst, "Little Sweet Baker"



*Buried in the Bog, continued from page 3*

metamorphic rocks while using microscopes to examine them and later on, will test the hardness of rocks at our rock breaking station.

Rock Cycle also allows students to compare various types of soil while descending down the glacial formation to experience clay soil at the top, sand at the “beach,” (where a beach once was, pre-1900), about halfway down the glacial formation and eventually to the bog at the bottom of the formation to learn about peat.

To demonstrate how the glacial formation was made, a small-scale model is utilized as we pour water and sand down a slope, which eventually builds up at the bottom to create the formation.

Stream tables are also used to demonstrate how water is an eroding factor and moves sediment at different rates. Additionally, mesh

screens are used to separate different particle sizes of rock.


Students also evaluate forces that may have changed the landscape, such as drainage or humans. This allows them to better understand how Bear Lake and High Lake were once one large lake, but were eventually separated into two different lakes due to drainage as the thick mucky soil in this area was highly sought out to grow potatoes, mint and onions.

“The landscape of the Glacial Retreat Center offers us a chance to highlight glacial activity in an area where many of these students have grown up in and allows us to provide a rich learning environment,” says Marcos Stoltzfus, Director of Environmental Education & Assistant Executive Director.

Cattle grazing and prairie burning research is also done on this part of the property to assess the effects

of grazing livestock and burning on native prairie plants.

For example, last summer (2022), in partnership with multiple Kenyan students during an eight-week program, students spent four weeks at Merry Lea and four weeks in Kenya to experience various types of native prairie plants. The main goal of this program sought to understand the role that fire and grazing play in sequestering carbon in grassland soils.

While the Glacial Retreat Center is not typically open to the public, we do occasionally open it up for special events such as “Buried in the Bog” and “Tales & Trails” where families can experience the geological wonders of the area together. If you are interested in visiting this part of the property, keep an eye out on our [website](#) or [social media outlets](#) for events taking place here! 



Participating in a “bog jump,” where they can feel the ground shake beneath them due to the compressed peat beneath their feet. Even the trees sway due to their shallow roots!

## Can you “be-leaf” it?

We maintain a Storywalk® trail in partnership with the Noble County Public Library that gets changed out seasonally! This trail starts at the South trailhead, located by the Learning Center. Currently, the book *Pond* by Jim LaMarche is featured on the trail.

If you visit our Storywalk® trail, take photos along the way and share them with us using the hashtag, #MerryStoryWalk.

For more fun facts about Merry Lea and the environment, follow us on social media!

Facebook: [Facebook.com/MerryLeaEnvironmentalLearningCenter](https://www.facebook.com/MerryLeaEnvironmentalLearningCenter)

Instagram: [Instagram.com/merrylea\\_goshen/](https://www.instagram.com/merrylea_goshen/)





# A Glimpse Into Nature Preschool



## MEETING DON, THE NORTHERN WATER SNAKE

Although we are sad to announce that Don, our Northern Water Snake, passed in early November 2023, our nature preschool students were lucky enough to be the last group to meet him. They all enjoyed getting to touch Don and learn about water snakes, including their habitats, what they eat and how long they typically live (Don was 12 years old, while water snakes typically only live 3-5 years in the wild!).

## FROM THE ORCHARD TO MAKING APPLE CIDER

During a morning excursion to Bender's Orchard in Albion, students learned all about apples, picked various varieties of apples and of course, taste tested along the way. Once they wrapped up their morning at the orchard, students and parents came to Merry Lea, where they made their own apple cider blend from the apples they had picked at the Farmstead. They wrapped their day up by tasting the cider they made, playing lawn games and exploring the Merry Lea Teaching Farm.



## EXPLORING KESLING WETLAND

Students learned about dipping for macroinvertebrates and of course, made some mud pies and got some water in their waders and boots. Everyone, including our educators, were so excited to finally step foot into the water as they have to pass the wetland daily to get to and from their outdoor classroom.



# Making a New Path

BY Jonathon Schramm

**SUSTAINABILITY IS A BROAD AND** interwoven field, and looking closely at any issue quickly leads one to explore others related to it. This is part of what makes it such a fun thing to talk about around a kitchen table or a campfire – the conversation can go in so many different directions! Students and faculty involved in the Sustainability Semester (SS) at Merry Lea this fall have been experiencing that diversity firsthand in these last few months.

As you may recall, this fall program is the first of a new version of immersive studies that blends some of the best elements of the old Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI) and Sustainability Leadership Semester (SLS) undergraduate programs. As staff have changed at Merry Lea over the years, and as the interests of our students in this field have diversified, it became necessary to make some structural changes to the residential undergraduate program.

This fall, undergraduate students have been challenged by some pieces from the old SLS program. For example, the Elkhart/St. Joe watershed canoe trip in September, as well as some from the old ASI program, such as contributing to the daily care of animals at the Merry Lea Teaching Farm and to their eventual harvest. They have contemplated their own ethical and spiritual commitments around



Our sustainability semester students and professor Luke Beck Kreider (left) on a field trip at Pine Knob Park with John Brittenham, from Blue Heron Ministries (right) who showed them the restoration work on the fen.



Conrad, Isabella, Liam, Mia and Ethan (from left to right) during their week-long canoe trip. Photo taken at Wellfield Botanical Gardens.

sustainability and worked to articulate them more clearly to themselves and others.

They have also learned from and been inspired by a range of professionals working in the field (farmers, community organizers, municipal government officials, academics, and others), to looked closely at how systemic change happens and what makes it a durable change.

On Wednesday afternoons, during “Wacky Wednesday,” they have spent time as a group baking bread, canning preserves, pressing cider, making beeswax wraps, spinning yarn, and having fun on the landscapes of Merry Lea together!

In other words, they are partaking in all of the ways that an immersive program in this living laboratory can enhance their learning, in both planned and serendipitous fashion. Although the details of their program are new, it is clearly built on a foundation that has been nurturing student growth and learning at Merry Lea for many years now.

As you might expect for a redesigned semester program, there has also been lots of learning for the staff and faculty involved. Although most of this team had at least some experience with Merry Lea’s immersive programs, none of us had provided these courses in this combination, and the process of bringing our shared ideas together will be ongoing. Some of those same

learning hallmarks mentioned earlier, such as immersion in the rhythms of farm creatures and learning to traverse multiple portages on a canoe trip, are giving us an opportunity to “cross-train” and help each other with our work in new ways.

We trust that as we continue to build on this experience, through team debriefing and planning for next year, we will see this new Sustainability Semester be as valuable for future generations of Goshen College students as ASI and SLS were in their day.

In the meanwhile, the entire learning community of students and faculty are enjoying the finale of this inaugural sustainability semester and looking forward to sharing a farm-to-table meal together that incorporates learning and care from across the whole semester.

And, of course, we’ll take a couple of final hikes together to appreciate some of the ways that the landscape has changed dramatically with the seasons, since that first hike together around Kesling Wetland in late August!

If you are interested in learning more about the sustainability semester, or various places that our five students have visited and experienced, follow us on our social media outlets or visit [goshen.edu/academics/sustainability-semester](https://goshen.edu/academics/sustainability-semester). 



# 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](https://goshen.edu/merrylea)

### Winter Wreath Making

**WHERE:** Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701

**WHEN:** Saturday, **December 2** | 1 – 4 p.m.

Kick off the hoilday season by joining us for a festive craft! Participants will design and make their own wreath to take home using a 12" wire frame, a wire spool and a variety of evergreen cuttings. The finished wreath will be around 20".

**Cost is \$35 per adult**  
**Registration required on our website.**

### Tales & Trails

**WHERE:** Learning Center, 2388 S 500 W, Albion, IN 46701

**WHEN:** Tuesday, **December 19** | 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!**

### Family Night Hike: Owl Prowl

**WHERE:** Learning Center, 2388 S 500 W, Albion, IN 46701

**WHEN:** Saturday, **December 2** | 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

We will be spending time both indoors and outdoors as we learn about the three most common owl species here. We will practice using our senses to search for owls and explore outdoors, since we don't know if the owls will let us find them.

**Cost is \$7 per adult, \$5 per child.**  
**Registration required on our website.**

### 6th Annual Michiana Regional Seed Swap

**WHERE:** Goshen College Church-Chapel

**WHEN:** Saturday, **January 20** | 9:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

Join fellow gardeners, growers and plant enthusiasts to exchange and gather seeds, compare & discuss varieties, attend educational sessions and more. Participants are not required to bring seeds to the event. Food for purchase will be available!

**Cost is free. Registration not required.**  
**Visit [goshen.edu/merrylea/seedswap](https://goshen.edu/merrylea/seedswap) for more details.**