

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

## Moments & Milestones

WE HAVE EXPERIENCED MUCH change, growth and record numbers over the past few months, and have made significant strides in pursuing our mission. Each moment and milestone is a testament to our continued work towards fulfilling the vision originally set forth by Mary Jane and Lee Reith.

Check out some of our most noteworthy moments and milestones below - we can't wait to see where the rest of the year leads us!



Early morning "lake fog" on Kesling Wetland. By: Kaitlyn Sproles

### MEET OUR 2024 MASTER OF ARTS IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



Meet our 2024-2025 Master of Arts in Environmental Education cohort, Sara (left) & Zane (right). Sara graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with a degree in Earth, Society, and Environmental Sustainability, while Zane earned his degree in Environmental Science & Sustainability from Ohio University. In her free time, Sara enjoys crocheting and listening to podcasts, while Zane loves hiking and singing karaoke with friends. Over the past two months, they've been busy helping with bird banding research, exploring natural history and land management practices, and getting to know Merry Lea. Sara and Zane have also been preparing for our environmental education field trip season and have visited a variety of places including Turkey Run, the Kalamazoo Nature Center, Giving Gardens of Indiana, an ACRES Land Trust site, the Fort Wayne Zoo, Fox Island County Park, and more! We look forward to watching Sara and Zane grow as educators throughout the school year and seeing their enthusiasm for environmental education flourish.

### LUCKEY'S LANDING COMMUNITY PICNIC

Each summer we invite residents who live locally around Merry Lea to a community picnic at Luckey's Landing, located on High Lake. This year, 41 attendees joined us to enjoy s'mores, explore the macroinvertebrates that live in High Lake, and for good conversation. Thank you so much to everyone that joined us and contributed to the memories we continue to create at Luckey's Landing.



### VOLUNTEER POTLUCK & CELEBRATION

A heartfelt thank you to all the volunteers who joined us for our inaugural volunteer potluck dinner! We are incredibly grateful for our dedicated group of supporters and volunteers who consistently help us year after year. Whether it's teaching during field trips, attending tabling events, assisting with office tasks, baking, or contributing in countless other ways, your unwavering support makes a world of difference. Your commitment and enthusiasm are truly appreciated.





VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE  
DR. JASON MARTIN


# Embracing Transitions

The ending of seasons always makes me feel a bit sad, especially the transition from summer to autumn. I don't relish the rich greens of the forest fading to ochre and brown or the skin warming rays of the summer sun giving way to cold dark commutes between home and work. But I take comfort in the fact that this is just part of the grand cycle of nature, without which the return of the bluebirds and the blossoming of the woodland flowers next spring would not feel as joyful.

At Merry Lea we have recently experienced our own ending to a season with several members of our teaming moving on to the next steps in their careers and the next phases of their lives. While I am sad to say goodbye to colleagues that I am also privileged to call my friends, I am very grateful for the seasons of their lives that they have chosen to commit to serving our mission. Regardless of the length of time worked at Merry Lea or the nature of their positions, every single person that has chosen to work here has left an indelible mark and made Merry Lea a better place. It is with deep gratitude that I thank all Merry Lea staff, both present and past, for their contributions to our collective story.

But just as winter gives way to the vibrant rebirth of spring, our recent staff departures and retirements have led to new colleagues joining our team who have brought a renewed sense of excitement and positive energy. I am thrilled to be walking alongside this talented group of people into our future. Together we will write the next chapters of Merry Lea. You can read more about the newest Merry Lea staff members later in this issue of the Leaflet, but there is one person that I would especially like to highlight.

Following the retirement of Bill Minter after 33-years of service to Merry Lea, Freya Berntson has joined us as our new natural resources manager. Not only is good stewardship of our land a direct expression of our mission, it is also the keystone that supports all of our education programs. The future of our land and the life that it harbors is in excellent hands! Freya brings a wealth of land and habitat management expertise and a passion for carrying forward our legacy of conservation and restoration. She has served in similar land steward roles at several other local organizations, including Little River Wetlands Projects, The Black Swamp Conservancy, and Blue Heron Ministries. Freya has a passion for sharing her work with others and looks forward to incorporating volunteers into various land management projects. She has hit the ground running removing non-native cattails and other invasive plant species from our property.

Please consider expressing your support for Freya by making a gift to help purchase desperately needed habitat management equipment. To ensure that we can conduct upcoming prescribed habitat burns as safely and effectively as possible, we need new coveralls, gloves, helmets and other fire safety gear, as well as new water packs and drip torches. In total, we are hoping to raise \$3500 to support this need. To sponsor Freya and her upcoming stewardship activities, please visit [goshen.edu/merrylea/donate](https://goshen.edu/merrylea/donate) and click "GIVE TODAY!". Be sure to enter "For Freya" in the Additional Comments box. Thank you so much for your support! Your generosity will ensure that we have a strong start to the next chapter of Merry Lea. 

## 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 owned and 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](https://goshen.edu/merrylea) for more updates.

## TEAM MEMBERS

- Kayla Beasley**  
Associate Director of Communications & Marketing
- Freya Berntson**  
Natural Resources Manager
- Kaeli Evans**  
Farm Manager
- Carol Good-Elliott**  
Environmental Educator
- Kerry Goodrich**  
Property Supervisor
- Carla Gull**  
Associate Professor, Environmental Education;  
Director, Master of Arts in Environmental Education Program
- Stephany Hancock**  
Environmental Educator & Residence Life Coordinator
- Luke Kreider**  
Assistant Professor, Religion & Sustainability
- Melinda Long**  
Office Manager
- Jason Martin**  
Executive Director
- John Mischler**  
Associate Professor, Biology & Sustainability
- Ruth Mischler**  
Instructor, Biology & Sustainability
- Jonathon Schramm**  
Professor & Chair, Biology & Sustainability;  
Director, Institute for Ecological Regeneration
- Jeremiah Sharp**  
Environmental Educator & Public Programs Coordinator
- Foy Spicer**  
Environmental Educator & PreK-12 Programs Coordinator
- Kaitlyn Sproles**  
Director of Environmental Education Outreach
- Alan Stadler**  
Buildings Manager
- Josie Strader**  
Land & Facilities Management Assistant

## BOARD MEMBERS

- Andy Rieth**, Chair
- Greg Perigo**, Vice Chair
- Doug Vendrely**
- Ben Bontrager**
- Carl Weaver**
- Bekah Houff**
- Ex Officio: **Ann Vendrely**
- Ex Officio: **Jason Martin**



Merry Lea Staff at Bill Minter's Farewell Retirement Party in July. From left to right: Jason, Josie, Stephany, Kaitlyn, Alan, Carol, Bill, Kerry, Kayla, Jonathon, Kaeli, Melinda, Foy, Luke, Ruth and Jeremiah.



## 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.

- Carl Bauer
- Charles Nafziger
- Dawn Kaczor
- Eunice Brenneman

- Evelyn & Roger zumFelde
- Greg Perigo
- Jakob zumFelde
- Janel Rogers
- Jason Martin & Suzanne Beyeler
- Kaitlyn & Michael Sproles
- Karen Bradley
- Kristie Kurzhal
- Lydia Martin
- Randall & Ellen Stoesz
- Ray & Carol Beauregard
- Rebekah Stutzman
- Ryan Springer

- Shelley & Mark Mawhorter (& family)  
*in memory of Gene Lightner*
- Sidney & Sandra Richard
- Veronica Kindel
- Wayne Yoder
- William & Sally Smith
- Anonymous



## 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 by making a gift to us. Thanks so much for your support.

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

## Can you "be-leaf" it?

Did you know that the "E" in our logo stands for environment, ecology, earth and everyone? It is also a circle symbolizing the earth!

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

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

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



# Merry Lea Team Updates

## Stephany Hancock



**New Environmental Educator & Residence Life Coordinator**  
*M.A. Environmental Education, Goshen College, 2023*  
*B.S. Early Childhood Education, Purdue University Fort Wayne, 2020*

Stephany has been a lead preschool teacher in Northeast Indiana for various childcare facilities. In 2018, she started teaching at a Montessori school and fell in love. The Montessori philosophy utilizes nature in a way that resonates with Stephany.

As she gained more experience and a credential for Montessori early childhood, she found herself seeking more education

about the world around her. That led her to the Master of Arts in Environmental Education program at Merry Lea and Goshen College.

After graduating, Stephany worked at an early childhood education facility for a year to help their staff gain knowledge and appreciation of the outdoors. Now she is back at Merry Lea..

Outside of work, Stephany enjoys a variety of hobbies including fiber arts, reading, and spending time outdoors. She enjoys exploring everything Fort Wayne has to offer, with her partner & fur babies.

We love having Stephany here and can't wait to see how she helps us continue to pursue our mission.

## Freya Berntson



**New Natural Resources Manager**  
*M.N.R.S Ecological Restoration Concentration, Colorado State University, 2020*  
*B.A. General Studies, Purdue University Fort Wayne, 2016*

Freya oversees management of the mosaic of natural areas found at Merry Lea. Freya grew up just down the road from Merry Lea in Noble County, IN, and fell in love with the place in her teenage years.

After living and learning in multiple states throughout the country, she found her way back to this area.

She completed a Master of Natural Resource Stewardship with a focus on Ecological Restoration from Colorado State University and has several years of experience in ecological restoration work throughout northern Indiana, northwest Ohio, and southern Michigan. This work has included prescribed fire, invasive plant management, large-scale native plantings, and more.

She enjoys spending time with her partner and their rescue cats, expanding their native garden, growing and giving away native plants, cooking for friends, hiking, and camping.

We are so excited to have Freya as part of our crew and can't wait to see how she will help transform and preserve our land.

## Bill Minter



**Retired Director of Land Management & Assistant Professor in SEED**  
*M.S.F. Forest Ecology, Purdue University, 1980*  
*B.S. Natural Resources Management, Colorado State University, 1989*

Bill first arrived at Merry Lea in 1991 and throughout the course of his career, he played a key role in restoring over 100 acres of wetland and prairie at Merry Lea. When he was not practicing land management, he was teaching courses on related subjects to both Goshen College undergraduates and Merry Lea's environmental education graduate students.

A widely shared favorite memory of Bill is the annual cross property hikes that he regularly

led for our students and staff. During these excursions, he would frequently joke that he was "lost"...we still don't know if he was ever truly lost or just pulling everyone's legs. We always made it back safely though!

Bill's work has been instrumental in preserving the natural beauty and biodiversity of Merry Lea's land. His efforts have ensured that Merry Lea remains a valuable resource for education and research.

"For the past 33 years Bill has tended Merry Lea's natural areas to create and maintain the diverse patchwork of native habitats that exist today," said Jason Martin, executive director of Merry Lea. "Thanks to Bill's work, countless children and adults have had the opportunity to immersively live and learn in these natural spaces and will continue to do so into the future."

# Team Updates Continued

## Marcos Stoltzfus



**Transitioned Director of Environmental Education Outreach & Assistant Executive Director**  
*M.A. Nonprofit Management, Hamline University*  
*B.A. Biology, Environmental Studies, Goshen College*

Marcos joined the Merry Lea team in 2016, bringing with him more than 15 years of experience in environmental education settings. In addition to leading our Environmental Education Outreach group, he helped establish our Nature Preschool Program in 2019.

After 8 years of service at Merry Lea, Marcos and his family have moved to Nebraska.

We are excited to share that Marcos is now the Center Director at Rowe Sanctuary, a National Audubon Society site that is home to nearly a million sandhill cranes each year during their migration north.

"When I began my time at Merry Lea in July of 2016, I could not have known how much I would learn, grow, and become connected to the land and people of Merry Lea. Together we've worked to protect species and ecosystems, nurtured emerging educators, and provided unforgettable experiences to literally tens of thousands of visitors," said Marcos.

While we will miss him greatly, we are beyond excited to watch him grow in this new position and can't wait to see how he will help transform Rowe Sanctuary as he did Merry Lea.

# Other Internal Transitions



## Kaitlyn Sproles

**Director of Environmental Education Outreach**

Kaitlyn first arrived at Merry Lea as a student in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education in 2016. She began working at Merry Lea in 2021 as our Environmental Education Outreach Coordinator and in 2023 added the role of Volunteer Coordinator. In July 2024, Kaitlyn assumed the position of Director of Environmental Education Outreach overseeing our public & preK-12 addition, she continues to help direct our volunteer engagement efforts and instructs the teaching practicum course in our Master of Arts in Environmental Education program.

Kaitlyn lives in Albion with her husband Michael, their son Bradley, and two fur babies. In her spare time she enjoys spending time outside with her son, hiking, gardening and reading.



## Foy Spicer

**Environmental Educator & PreK-12 Programs Coordinator**

Foy joined Merry Lea as an Environmental Educator in August 2023 and transitioned into our PreK-12 Programs Coordinator in July 2024. In this capacity she helps coordinate our volunteers and field trips, and helps deliver our nature preschool and public programs.

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 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.



## Jeremiah Sharp

**Environmental Educator & Public Programs Coordinator**

Jeremiah first arrived at Merry Lea in 2022 as a student in the Master of Arts in Environmental Education program. He began working at Merry Lea in May 2023 as our Environmental Educator & Residence Life Coordinator and in July 2024 he took on the role of Environmental Educator & Public Programs Coordinator.

He currently manages and coordinates public programs here at Merry Lea, delivers curriculum for public programs and field trips, plans events, is a mentor to our MAEE students, and takes care of Merry Lea's ambassador animals (stop in to see all of our snakes soon!).

During his free time you can find Jeremiah birding, hiking, spending time with friends, and reading a good book!



### SUMMER RESEARCH PROJECTS

Each summer we proudly provide a range of research opportunities for students from Goshen College and other local colleges through our Hickory and Linton Scholars program. This program fosters dynamic research collaborations between students and faculty through which students gain skills that are directly transferable to their future careers. This year, we were thrilled to welcome five students from Goshen College into this program. Learn more about the exciting research conducted at Merry Lea this summer below or visit [goshen.edu/academics/hickory-scholars/](https://goshen.edu/academics/hickory-scholars/) for additional information.

Maija Short, a senior majoring in environmental and marine science, and John Mischler, associate professor of sustainability, worked together to install minirhizotrons in prairies. Their research focused on observing root growth in response to fire and grazing treatments, and involved the collection of soil samples and optical scans from these instruments.

Luisa Dutchersmith, a senior in elementary education, under the mentorship of Carla Gull, associate professor of sustainability and environmental education, developed innovative environmental education resources for elementary school teachers. These resources included a curriculum and planning guide designed to engage students creatively on school grounds or at nearby nature centers. Additionally, Luisa has been leading weekly nature play workshops for families, each with a unique theme.

Mia Yoder, a senior environmental and marine science major collaborated with Jason Martin, executive director of Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center, on a multi-year project focused on the Blanding's turtle, a state-endangered species. Their work involved trapping turtles, collecting data on population health, and using radio transmitters to track their movements, which helps expand our understanding of these rare turtles' land use habits and potential vulnerabilities.

Jill Yoder, an environmental and marine science major teamed up with Carol Good-Elliott, environmental educator, and Jonathon Schramm, professor of sustainability and environmental education, on two interrelated projects monitoring bird populations at Merry Lea. Jill assisted with mist-netting songbirds to track their health and nesting success and explored various methods for more efficient bird monitoring across different Merry Lea habitats.

Aaron Yeakey, a senior nursing major, and Maija Short worked alongside John Mischler and Jonathon Schramm on a prairie grazing project. Their research examined the effects of controlled burning and managed grazing on grassland plant communities and soil dynamics, specifically involving soil collection, plant community monitoring, and daily management of grazing cattle on one of Merry Lea's restored prairies.



### GOSHEN COLLEGE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

We had the pleasure of hosting Goshen College's first-year students at Merry Lea during their orientation week. They enjoyed a variety of activities, including flower arranging, canoeing, lawn games, flower pounding and exploring macroinvertebrates. Students also had a chance to hike, play card games, engage in water activities and meet our farm animals. We hope they have a wonderful school year and look forward to their next visit!

### SUMMER PROGRAMMING

One of our favorite summertime activities is providing environmental education for people of all ages and this summer was especially rewarding in this regard! We were thrilled to host a record number of participants at both Nature Fest and Nature Play Day. Additionally, our Conservation Leadership School and Junior/Teen Indiana Master Naturalist Summer Day Camp were great successes. In total, we welcomed nearly 600 people to Merry Lea from May through August, making it a vibrant and engaging season for everyone involved.



### 2024 SUSTAINABILITY STUDENTS

There's nothing like a hacky-sack break to start the first day of classes! This year, six students will be living at Rieth Village for the Sustainability Semester, which runs from the last week of August through early December. They'll kick off their semester with an eight day canoe trip, paddling through the watershed from Ligonier, IN to Lake Michigan. Along the way they'll stop to learn from local experts about regional sustainability efforts. Following this trip, their schedule will include weekly field trips and class sessions covering topics such as regenerative agriculture, agroecology, freshwater restoration, and spirituality. They will also take part in learning community meetings and enjoy "Terrific Thursdays" and "Fun Fridays," where they'll have hands-on experiences creating items like soap, yarn, candles, and more.



### TEACHING FARM UPDATES

Our teaching gardens and orchard have been flourishing lately! This summer we have been lucky to have three great farm hands (Becky, Gonzi, and Aiden) helping us around the farm with harvesting, weeding, planting, cleaning tools, seed preparation, animal care and more. We currently have lots of meat chicks, rabbits, wool sheep, chickens, and a rooster living in the barn. The garden, greenhouses, and orchard have been producing lots of green beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, carrots, figs, pumpkins, watermelons, lettuces, peaches, squashes, cantaloupes, and lots of flowers! Some of the produce and flowers that are growing were also planted by our Conservation Leadership School students in June. Over 50 pounds of food that we produced on the farm was donated to local food banks. In the orchard, we are getting ready to harvest our apples (we will use some of these for fresh cider!) and pears as well. Overall, the farm is gearing up for school field trip season when students get a taste of homegrown food and learn about various farm animals.

### CELEBRATING BILL MINTER'S 33 YEARS AT MERRY LEA

Bill has been a cornerstone of Merry Lea since 1991 so it's hard to believe he has retired after 33 years of service. Throughout his time here, Bill has witnessed the transformation of our land, the expansion of our environmental education programs, and the growth of Merry Lea itself. He has played a key role in everything from prescribed habitat burns and the restoration of over 100 acres of wetlands and prairies, to teaching in various educational programs and working with undergraduate students. Reflecting on his journey, Bill shared, "I have felt honored and grateful to carry out the mission of Merry Lea, especially as I had the opportunity to work closely with the founders." While we can never fully express our gratitude for all of Bill's contributions, we want to extend our heartfelt thanks for the significant achievements that he has helped us achieve.

Pictured from left to right: Dave Miller, Dr. Alton Lindsey, Bill Minter, Mary Jane Rieth, and Elizabeth Lindsey.

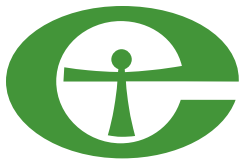


## Merry Lea Wishlist - Summer 2024

Do you have these things laying around your house? Consider donating them to Merry Lea! We are constantly looking for various materials and items to help us pursue our mission. Feel free to drop any of these items off to the Learning Center at any time. We appreciate your support!

- Black Oil Sunflower Seeds (not mixed)
- Suet
- Pantyhose/stockings (clean & used accepted!)
- 5-Gallon Buckets
- Gift Cards to various pet stores (helps with our ambassador animals!)
- Serrated Grape Hook Knives (for collecting seeds)
- 24" - 36" Handle Loppers
- Pruning Saws (for cutting invasives)





**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](http://goshen.edu/merrylea)

### Cheese Making: Cow or Cashew

**WHERE:** Rieth Village, 4415 W 200 S, Albion, IN 46701  
**WHEN:** Saturday, **September 28** | 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. **OR** 1 - 4 p.m.

Make and learn about different types of cheese and dairy free cheese! Transform local, raw cow milk and homemade cashew milk into cheese that you can take home! Then you will finally be able to answer the question...Who did it better, the cow or the cashew?

**Cost is \$30 per adult.**  
**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 & location!**

### Wild About Wetlands

**WHERE:** Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701  
**WHEN:** Saturday, **September 28** | 1:30 – 3:30 p.m.

Get mucky and immersive with this family program to explore what a wetland is and why we should care about them! Put on waders to dip for aquatic macroinvertebrates and use your investigative skills to identify these critters and more!

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

### Enchanted Forest

**WHERE:** Merry Lea Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701  
**WHEN:** **October 18 & 19** | 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!**