

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 | merrylea.goshen.edu

Kerry Goodrich Retires After 44 Years

AFTER AN AMAZING 44 YEARS, we would like to extend a heartfelt congratulations to Kerry Goodrich on his retirement! Kerry has not only served as our Property Manager for so many years, but he has also been an important “face” of Merry Lea since he and his wife, Robin, lived just down the road from the Learning Center. He has truly shaped Merry Lea into who we are today.

Kerry was one of the first people to greet folks on our trails and the first person to show up when wildlife (snakes, bats, and even raccoons) sneak their way into our buildings. He was also the main point of contact for those who live in our local communities and regularly answered calls from concerned neighbors in the middle of the night when issues arose.



Standing on the new vernal pond dock that he built! It took 13 of us to move it.

He was also one of the first people to greet undergraduate and graduate students living at Merry Lea and played an important role in helping them settle into our living-learning community. He was truly the jack of all trades...from jumping in and helping teach field trips to fixing broken tractors, cars, machinery, tools and other equipment.

When Kerry first arrived at Merry Lea on August 1, 1980, he was the entire physical plant and one of two employees - the other being the interim Executive Director, Fran Troyer for the first year and a half. Over the years, Kerry's favorite projects have been building the bridge over Thuma ditch with Tom Stinson, which spans between the Kesling and Wysong prairies, and working with Luke Gascho, former executive director, to build the Michael Yoder Dome in 1998.

Kerry also enjoyed hearing the laughter of all of the students on the trails during



Flying through the air on skis!
Kerry taught cross country skiing on our trails back in the 1980's with volunteers and teachers. He talks about this often!

field trip season, the smell of the muck and ferns in the low bog at Luckey's Landing, and teaching cross country skiing. He also loved sitting with his son and wife at Cub Lake to watch a den of red fox kits many years back.

The Merry Lea property has become a part of who Kerry is and vice versa. His legacy will continue to resonate through the projects he's completed. We will greatly miss his presence, as he was often the first one here and last one to leave, but we take comfort in knowing he'll return often - he's already volunteered several times since his retirement!

Thank you, Kerry, for your unwavering dedication and passion for Merry Lea over the years. We hope you enjoy your well-earned retirement and we can't wait to see you around the property... or whenever Robin kicks you out of the house for a few hours! 🍷



Kerry holding one of the farm goats!



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE
DR. JASON MARTIN

Nature's Lasting Bonds

My first foray into the field of environmental education occurred in 1994 when I worked as an intern for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Although my parents were not very outdoorsy, they were very supportive as I explored this potential career path. I didn't realize at the time just how much this experience and their support would shape my world view. That summer, I came to realize that nature is not just a place of intrinsic beauty, perhaps more importantly it is a place for forging and deepening connections with others.

The most memorable moment of that internship for me was the day that I took my parents on a hike at my nature center. To my surprise, my mom, who had never shown much interest in nature, became fully engaged, marveling at the natural world around us. I taught her about snags—those dead trees that provide critical habitat for wildlife—and taught her how to identify different types of tree species. When we came across a sycamore, I pointed it out and she quickly learned how to recognize its distinctive bark. These small, shared lessons became lasting cherished memories. Years later she would still always point out snags and sycamores when we were together.

I've thought a lot about that hike since my mom passed away in September. What seemed at the time like a casual outing turned into one of the most profound shared experiences I had with her. It's a memory I now hold close, a reminder of the simple, lasting connections we can make with each other in nature.

Echoes of that day happen all the time here at Merry Lea. Whether hiking, learning about the plants and animals that call this place home, or simply enjoying the beauty of the landscape, this place offers endless opportunities for families to build life-long memories. The connections made here not only shape how we understand the world but also have the power to deepen relationships with those we love.

Merry Lea's trails and educational programs are the perfect setting for families to explore, learn, and grow closer. Imagine coming here with your family, not just for a day of adventure, but to create traditions—traditions that will be remembered and passed down for generations. Whether you're marveling at a towering tree or observing a bird in flight, these experiences hold the power to form lasting connections.

As I reflect on my time with my mom, I encourage you to take the time to connect with your own loved ones at Merry Lea. The memories that you form here will stay with you long after the adventure ends.



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.

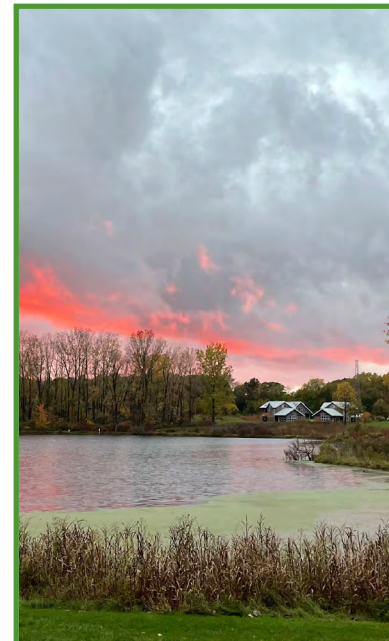
The Merry Leaflet, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. Kayla Beasley is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at merrylea.goshen.edu for more updates.

TEAM MEMBERS

- Kayla Beasley**
Associate Director of Communications & Marketing
- Freya Berntson**
Natural Resources Manager
- Carol Good-Elliott**
Environmental Educator
- 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-Bergey**
Property Supervisor

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**



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.

Thank you for your support

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Volunteers at Merry Lea



WE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A heartfelt thank you to all of our amazing volunteers who support Merry Lea in so many ways. From August 2024 through February 2025, we've been fortunate to have had around 122 dedicated individuals actively volunteering with us. Together, they have donated 898.75 hours. These volunteers are truly the backbone of our organization, helping with everything from teaching programs and setting up large public events to managing registration tables, greeting visitors at the front desk, cooking, baking, sewing, sorting and harvesting seeds, research, garden maintenance and so much more!

Merry Lea is the well-oiled machine that we are thanks to the efforts and enthusiasm of our volunteers. We couldn't do it without them! If you're interested in learning more about how you can become a part of our volunteer team or if you want to explore upcoming volunteer opportunities, please visit: merrylea.goshen.edu/get-involved/.



Seasonal Snapshots

MAEE IN HAWAI'I - INTERCULTURAL COURSE

On February 1st, our Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) students and Dr. Carla Gull, Director of MAEE, embarked on a three-week trip to Hawai'i for their Intercultural Environmental Education course! This experience is providing Sara and Zane with an incredible opportunity to build their confidence and enhance their teaching skills. They have been busy creating lesson plans and activities tailored for local students while gaining insights into the island's unique environmental challenges and its diverse ecosystems.

Being fully immersed in Hawaiian culture, they are able to discover everything from native plants and animals to the island's history, land and traditions. They have even been fortunate enough to witness the eruption of a volcano at Volcanoes National Park—truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience! The group has also ventured to Mauna Kea and explored a waterfall in Hilo.

Their time in Hawai'i has been a transformative blend of hands-on learning, cultural exploration, and environmental discovery. They will be returning to Indiana on February 21, and we can't wait to hear more about their time in Hawai'i.



Sara and Zane looking at the active volcano at Volcanoes National Park.



MISCHLER AWARDED FULBRIGHT SCHOLARSHIP

We are excited to announce that John Mischler, Associate Professor of Biology & Sustainability, was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship in July 2024! The Fulbright Scholar program is the United States government's flagship program of international educational and cultural exchange. This program is offered in more than 160 countries to give students and scholars the opportunity to study, teach, conduct research, and exchange ideas. The Fulbright Scholar Program plays a vital role in fostering international relationships.

From February through August 2025, John will be continuing his research on phosphorus levels in ecosystems in Indonesia. "It is a great honor to be awarded a Fulbright fellowship," said Mischler. "I see it as a time to refocus on larger questions within farm-based university curriculums and lay the groundwork for continued collaboration." This award not only allows Mischler to continue Goshen College's collaboration with universities in Indonesia, but also allows him to expand his current research internationally in a new context. We can't wait to see the strides that John will make through this incredible opportunity!

The Mischler family is currently staying in Jakarta, the largest city in Indonesia for a Fulbright conference and will be flying to Kupang on the island of Timor, where they will be spending the bulk of their time for John's research, on February 24th. Recently, they took a trip to an overlook and a waterfall just outside of Jakarta, pictured on the right.



SUSTAINABILITY SEMESTER FARM TO TABLE MEAL

At the end of each Sustainability Semester, our students in the program prepare a dish based on things they have grown and raised in the greenhouses, barn or teaching garden throughout their time at Merry Lea that all come together for a farm fresh meal. This year, the menu included collard greens, mashed potatoes, pulled chicken with homemade currant barbeque sauce, green beans, rabbit momos, vegetarian momos and deviled eggs. The farm crew also provided homemade pumpkin pie, farm fizzies, and apple cider. At the beginning of the meal, the students shared things they learned, their favorite activities, how they spent their free time with each other and more.

Immersed in Nature's Classroom

IN RAIN, SNOW OR SHINE, MONDAY through Thursday, around one p.m., our nature preschoolers and educators load up their supply and toilet wagons or cargo sleds and take a short hike beside Kesling Wetland to the outdoor classroom near the Farmstead.

Each day, they gear up to take on whatever weather mother nature is throwing their way, with the exception of thunderstorms and bitterly cold temperatures with wind chills lower than 0 degrees Fahrenheit, with matching waterproof and windproof pants and jackets, as well as a backpack packed with their nature journal, a water bottle, magnifying glass, exploration tools, and their "jobs" for the day.

Our Nature Preschool is a collaboration with the Cole Center Family YMCA and Central Noble Community Schools. In the mornings, students begin their day indoors at Central Noble Primary before heading to Merry Lea after lunch for their outdoor learning experience.

"[Being immersed in an outdoor learning environment] provides indelible learning opportunities that can't be replicated inside four walls," says Kaitlyn Sproles, Director of Environmental Education Outreach. "Our program design allows children to grow socially, physically, emotionally and cognitively."

A typical day for these preschoolers can range from being fully immersed in the outdoor classroom to an all-day excursion somewhere to a remote part of Merry Lea's property or occasionally somewhere off property such as Bender's Apple Orchard.

Throughout their time in the classroom, students have free time to play and explore within the classroom. They might choose to participate in large or small group activities or learn how to use various tools such as a saw or hammer. There are also various areas for the students to explore such as a sandbox with kitchen supplies, a mud kitchen and tinker area for them to create whatever comes to their minds!

Some days, students have sit spot time. During this time they sit in their designated area, which is a student selected location somewhere within the boundaries of the classroom. During this time, they are able to sit, reflect and observe the things around them, draw in their journal, and have independent time for self-exploration to develop self awareness and appreciate their space.

By the end of the day, students are typically covered in mud, snow, leaf litter and smiles. The outdoor classroom offers them an experience unlike any other, nurturing their growth in every way possible!

To see more about a day in the life of our nature preschoolers, including a great "brownie" recipe, check out the student-filmed video from our 2023-2024 cohort on YouTube ([@MerryLeaELC](https://www.youtube.com/@MerryLeaELC)). A big thank you to Carla and Matt Gull for helping put together this video for a tiny film project. 🌱



Nothing but smiles after playing in the mud!

Internal Staff Transition



Josie Strader-Bergey

Property Supervisor

We are so excited to announce that Josie Strader-Bergey has been promoted to Property Manager! She may look familiar to most of you as she originally joined the Merry Lea team in April of 2023 as our Land and Facilities Management Assistant. Josie graduated from Goshen College in 2022 with a degree in Environmental Science.

In her new role, she helps operate and maintain various tools, machinery, vehicles, and equipment. Josie also constructs and maintains our trails & trail structures, assists with program support when needed, and provides after-hours of support for students in residence.

In Josie's free time, you can find her sewing, knitting, gardening, and doing various art projects. She is also a native to Goshen, Ind.

If you see her out and about around the property, be sure to say hi.

Prescribed Burning Transforms Wilmer Meadow

BY Freya Berntson & Kayla Beasley


FREYA BERNTSON, OUR NATURAL resources manager, led a successful prescribed burn at Wilmer Meadow on December 3, 2024, a site historically too wet for this type of management practice. The burn, supported by 21 volunteers, students, and staff, marks a major step in habitat management at Merry Lea.

Wilmer Meadow, once used as cropland until the 1960s, gradually became an “old field” after agricultural use ceased. While the meadow naturally transitioned, no formal restoration efforts occurred until the 1990’s. Without disturbance, the area would eventually become a woodland, which, while ecologically valuable, would reduce habitat for grassland species on our property. Northeast Indiana has few remaining grassland habitats, making places like Wilmer Meadow crucial areas for native birds and invertebrates.

Before the burn, the meadow had been periodically brush-hogged to manage tree and shrub growth, a practice commonly used when burning isn’t possible. While effective, this method lacks the ecological benefits of fire, which is a natural disturbance in many northeast Indiana habitats, including oak woodlands, marshes and fens.



Merry Lea volunteers, students and staff members geared up to perform a successful burn.

Fire helps maintain open grasslands by preventing trees and shrubs from becoming established, ensuring sunlight reaches the ground to promote the growth of native grasses and forbs. Prescribed burns also help reduce the prevalence of invasive plant species, like reed canary grass, that can outcompete native plants. While fire doesn’t kill reed canary grass outright, it makes it easier to apply targeted herbicide. Additionally, burning stimulates fire-adapted native plants, exposes the soil and seed bank to sunlight, and releases important nutrients. To preserve biodiversity, only one-third of Wilmer Meadow was burned, leaving behind areas of standing vegetation used by overwintering invertebrates. We are incredibly proud of Freya’s leadership of our habitat management efforts and excited to watch the transformation of this area in the coming months. If you’re interested in getting involved in future prescribed burns or other land management efforts, reach out to Freya at freyakb@goshen.edu. 



Fire sweeping through part of Wilmer Meadow.

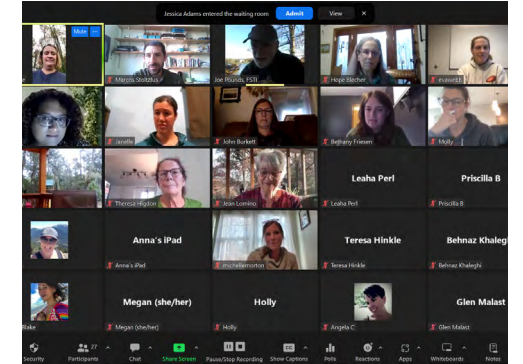
ECHO NETWORK FOR EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS!

The Early Childhood Hoosiers Outdoors (ECHO) Network is a community for education practitioners wanting to get students into outdoor learning environments. They meet virtually on the second Monday of odd months (1-January, 3-March, 5-May, 7-July, etc.) at 4 pm via Zoom.

Each session features expert speakers on various topics with a main focus on developmentally-appropriate educational opportunities, whether in the woods, on the prairie, or even in the schoolyard, making it a great space for educators to share resources, best practices, and opportunities for professional development. ECHO Network is inspired by the rise in Nature Preschools, Forest Kindergartens and Forest Schools and welcomes all who work with young children in any setting.

You can explore past ECHO Network meetings on our [YouTube Channel](#) @MerryLeaELC. Topics covered have included risky play, cold weather play, sit spots, Forest School 101, cold weather clothing management, and more!

Interested in joining the ECHO Network or learning more? Visit our website at merrylea.goshen.edu/events to sign up for our Google group and stay connected with like-minded educators!



BOOKSTORE LOCATED IN LEARNING CENTER BUILDING

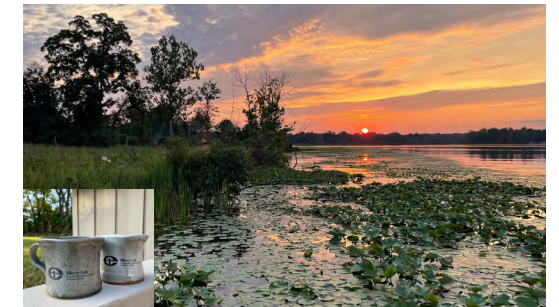
Did you know that we have a bookstore located at the entrance of the Learning Center building? You can find various nature related guidebooks, children’s books, professional development resources (including books written by Dr. Carla Gull, our Master of Arts in Environmental Education Director), Merry Lea branded items such as mugs and stickers, finger puppets, bookmarks, magnifying glasses, and more. You can also receive a hiking stick medallion or purchase one here as well! Whether you’re shopping for a gift, picking up a resource, or just browsing, the bookstore is definitely worth a visit. Come check it out!



MERRY LEA PHOTO CONTEST!

Do you love to take photos when you visit Merry Lea? Do you want a limited edition Merry Lea mug? You’re in luck! From now through March 21, 2025 you can submit your favorite snapshots that you have taken somewhere on our property or during an event by emailing them to merrylea@goshen.edu. Please let us know the location you took the photo, when it was taken and your name. Include “photo contest” in the subject line. The winner will receive a mug and their photo will be posted to social media and used as our cover photo on Facebook for the season during the first week of April.

We love seeing Merry Lea through the lens of other people and can’t wait to see what you capture! Thanks to Foy Spicer, our PreK-12 Programs Coordinator and Environmental Educator for the photo from Luckey’s Landing.



Looking for ways to make a difference?

Merry Lea relies on the generosity of people like you to provide quality environmental education programs for all ages. Please consider becoming a Friend of Merry Lea by making a gift to us today.

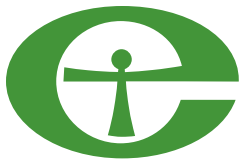
Thanks so much for your support. You may give online at merrylea.goshen.edu/donate or call our office at (260) 799-5869.

Can you “be-leaf” it?

Did you know that our trails are open for cross-country skiing? Bring your own skis and explore the snowy trails! Please keep in mind that our bathrooms are closed after hours and on weekends. Happy skiing!

Facebook: Facebook.com/MerryLeaEnvironmentalLearningCenter

Instagram: Instagram.com/merrylea_goshen/



Merry Lea
*Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College*

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Events

Learn more at: merrylea.goshen.edu

March Mudness!

WHERE: Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701
WHEN: Saturday, **March 15** | 1 – 3 p.m.

Come take a hike with the family to explore, and investigate different soils at the Merry Lea Farmstead. We will then use those soils to create a mud mixture to create a natural painting! Afterwards, we will be deciding which soil creates the best mud - bracket style!

*Cost is \$7 per adult & \$5 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 & location!*

Native Plant Series #1: Shrub Cutting & Live Stakes

WHERE: Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701
WHEN: Saturday, **March 15** | 9:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Learn about native alternatives that work well in any location and how you can propagate your own shrubs from cuttings. Take your native gardening to the next level by learning how to propagate your own native shrubs.

*Cost is \$15 per adult
Registration required on our website.*

Spring Break Day Camp

WHERE: Merry Lea Farmstead, 2152 S 425 W, Albion, IN 46701
WHEN: **April 7 - 11** | 9 a.m. - 4 p.m., daily - extended care available for additional fee

Become a flight fanatic as you explore the fascinating wings of insects, birds, and mammals through fun, hands-on activities. Embark on exciting hikes to discover these winged creatures in their natural habitats, play games with fellow explorers and be immersed in the outdoors!

Cost is \$80 per child. Registration is required on our website.