

# The Merry Leaflet

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

## “Fall Cabin - Oil on Linen”

### THANK YOU SO MUCH TO JOHN

R. Blosser M.F.A., who is generously donating his oil painting of the cabin at Luckey’s Landing created during his 2004-2005 sabbatical. John graduated from Goshen College in 1970 with a bachelor’s degree in art and art education, though he originally started college with a strong focus on science.

During his freshman year at Goshen College, he ended up taking Introduction to Fine Arts with Mary Oyer, where he discovered not only the power of music, but also architecture and art. He also discovered that he had the ability to draw and possessed a natural intelligence for creating visual things, which led him to change majors and discover his true passion for art.

John later taught art in both middle and high schools for six years throughout Indiana, Africa and Canada. He also earned his Master of Arts in painting and drawing from Bowling Green State University in 1979 and later a Master in Fine Arts from Arizona State University in 1986.

From 1978-1999, John taught art at Hesston



“Fall Cabin” (Luckey’s Landing Pavillion) by John R. Blosser

College in Kansas and later joined the Goshen College Art Department to teach and serve as the department chair until 2011.

This painting - titled “Fall Cabin” was strongly influenced by a two week course that John took in September 2004 at Anderson Ranch, Colorado with Susanna Coffey, M.F.A. Yale and full-time faculty at the Chicago Art Institute. “She offered a wonderful course entitled “From Drawing to Painting: Working from Direct Observation.” Simply put, one

stands in a specific location and paints or draws what one sees. Seeing closely takes a considerable amount of concentration,” said John.

We are so grateful to have this piece hanging in the Learning Center Library. We welcome you to join us on Monday, March 16 for a short painting reception at 12:30 p.m. at the Learning Center following our Merry Lea Milers program. 🕊



## 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 [merrylea.goshen.edu/donate](http://merrylea.goshen.edu/donate) or call our office at (260) 799-5869.

## Can you “be-leaf” it?

We now have a free monthly hiking program for adults - Merry Lea Milers! Join us around the property on the third Monday of each month.

For more fun facts about Merry Lea or to learn more about our programs, follow our social media outlets for more fun facts!

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

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



VIEWS FROM THE CORNER OFFICE:  
ANN VENDRELY

# Waiting and Planning

*Oh, my soul must find rest in God only, because my hope comes from him. Psalm 62:5 (Common English Bible)*

It's a quiet afternoon on the Merry Lea campus, with snow filtering down through the trees. There is something restful about the blanket of white outside the window today. It feels as though nature is quiet and dormant, waiting for something to happen. The pace is slower at the moment, but things are still happening at Merry Lea.

Through Psalms and other passages of the Bible, we are reminded that waiting is important, especially when we are rooted in God. Our souls need to find rest, which allows us to build our hope. It can be difficult to find rest some days, there are so many pressures on our time and distractions calling out to us. For me, nature is an important part of finding rest and time to focus on God. Spending just a little time appreciating the natural world that God made can help refocus my energy.

While there is less programming scheduled at Merry Lea during the winter months, things are not dormant here. The nature preschool students are enjoying the snow when the weather permits. The staff are fully engaged in planning for the next season, preparing our buildings and land to host a variety of field trips, community programs and college students. At the farm, we are planning what seeds to start in the greenhouse and which animals will educate our learners of all ages. The trails are open for both skiers and hikers. Compared to other times of the year, this is our period of waiting and planning.

For those who haven't met me yet, I'm serving as acting executive director while we conduct a national search for the next leader here. I've provided supervision for the Executive Director of Merry Lea during my nearly eight years as the vice president for academic affairs at Goshen College (GC), so I've attended many board meetings and visited regularly. My family has appreciated the trail system, especially our beagle Daisy, who enjoys finding new smells and exploring.

As an undergraduate student at GC, I vividly remember spending a sunny Saturday at Merry Lea so our physics class could apply what we were learning and contribute to this new offering of Goshen College. Used telephone poles were required as the class designed and built a bridge over a ditch (wider than a telephone pole is long) in the mid 1980's. It served to move equipment over the ditch for many years, but no longer exists. For me, it was an important introduction to the land and possibilities at Merry Lea.

Much has changed since then, as the land is being restored and the programs are evolving to meet the needs of people of all ages. We are moving into a new phase as we seek the next leader for Merry Lea, through a search for the next Executive Director. Details about the position are posted on the [GC human resources webpage](#) and the Merry Lea page. I hope that you will share this with people you know who might fit the mission of Merry Lea. The search committee includes the chair and vice chair of the Merry Lea Board of Trustees, a staff member, a faculty member, and myself. I'm happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Merry Lea is a tremendous asset for Goshen College with compelling programs and landscapes. By the time you read this, programming will be ramping up as field trips resume and more community programs are offered. Please look at the website for details on how to get involved and plan to visit soon. Perhaps Merry Lea can be a place for you to find rest and build hope.

## 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 newsletter tab at [merrylea.goshen.edu](#) for more updates.

## TEAM MEMBERS

### Gonzalo Barahona Hernández

Operations Assistant

### Kayla Beasley

Associate Director of Communications & Marketing

### Freya Berntson

Natural Resources Manager

### Carol Good-Elliott

Environmental Educator

### Stephany Hancock

Environmental Educator & Residence Life Coordinator

### Luke Kreider

Assistant Professor, Religion & Sustainability

### Melinda Long

Office Manager

### John Mischler

Associate Professor, Biology & Sustainability

### Ruth Mischler

Instructor, Biology & Sustainability

### Christi Nickey

Farm Manager

### Jonathon Schramm

Professor & Chair, Biology & Sustainability; Director, Institute for Ecological Regeneration

### Jeremiah Sharp

Environmental Educator & Public Programs Coordinator

### Foy Spicer

Interim Managing Director

### Kaitlyn Sproles

Director of Environmental Education Outreach

### Alan Stadler

Buildings Manager

### Josie Strader-Bergey

Property Manager

## BOARD MEMBERS

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Nature PreK students walking back to the Farmstead from their outdoor classroom in their snow gear.



*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 trail*

## Thank you for your support!

Amanda & W C Thomson  
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 Anonymous



# From Student to Staff: Seasons of Change

BY Jeremiah Sharp

WINTERTIDE HAS ALWAYS CARRIED A quiet weight in my life. As the air sharpens and the landscape shifts beneath a blanket of white, a gentle stillness settles over everything. The world slows, and in that softened rhythm, I find the clarity to look inward.

This year, my thoughts returned again and again to the people and moments that shaped me, the mentors who offered wisdom, friends who offered laughter, colleagues who offered guidance. Each of them, in their own way, helped lead me to Merry Lea.

My first glimpse of Merry Lea came in 2018, during my senior year of high school. I arrived on a field trip with my geology class, wandering the esker and studying the gravel pit with the earnest certainty of a seventeen-year-old who believed he knew his future. At that time, I imagined myself a geologist and thought I understood the path ahead. I had no sense that this land would one day become a central part of my life.

By my senior year of college, my path had shifted, as paths often do. I found myself as a biology and environmental studies major, unsure of the next step but curious enough to follow the possibilities that opened before me. It was an advisor, wise and steady, who urged me to look toward the Master of Arts in Environmental Education program at Merry Lea. And so, on a cold January morning in 2022, I drove through falling snow to visit once again.

I toured the campus, shared lunch with graduate students, and felt something stir in me as I listened to their stories, their genuine excitement and their deep connection to this place. The landscape spoke too, in its winter quiet, and before long, I applied.

The program that followed was filled with experiences that changed me in ways both subtle and profound. One of the most unforgettable was our trip to the Bahamas. It was a collection of firsts: my first time leaving the country, first time flying, first time traveling with teachers and peers.

Though nerves caught in my chest at the start, they loosened the moment I stepped onto the warm sand. Teaching Bahamian students about mangroves, weather and their coastal world, I felt something click into place, a sense that the skills I had been practicing were settling into who I was becoming. Teaching no longer felt like an aspiration; it felt like purpose.

It was during that trip, floating in the ocean beside my cohort member Stephany Hancock, now my colleague, that we learned of an opening at Merry Lea. We laughed at the possibility of applying together, not knowing that life, in its gentle symmetry, would place both of us in that role at different times.

When the offer finally came, I felt a mixture of surprise and gratitude. I finished the graduate program first, taking Kaitlyn Sproles' wise advice to

rest for a week between chapters, an interlude I needed more than I knew.

I began my new role during Conservation Leadership School week, a whirlwind introduction to the job, yet one of the programs I've grown to love most. That first year was full of challenges, triumphs and lessons I tried to embrace with openness. Eventually, I stepped into my current position, a role I have now held for nearly two years. Only recently, in the stillness of another wintertide, have I begun to fully understand how much I've changed.

The skills I carried into this work have deepened, shaped by the Master's program, by mentors both past and present, and by a quiet but persistent desire for excellence. In many ways, I still feel like a student here, and perhaps that is the true gift. Growth, I've learned, is not a chapter we finish but a rhythm we return to.

The mission of Merry Lea has become my anchor, the thread that ties my experiences together and inspires the work I do each day. This place has shaped me, challenged me and offered space for transformation. Now, as a staff member, I have the privilege of giving back to the community that helped form me.

And so, I return to gratitude, deep and enduring gratitude, for the way this land and its people continue to impact me, and for the chance to leave my own quiet imprint in return. 



Jeremiah with Fresh Creek Primary School students in Andros, Bahamas.

# Merry Lea Team Updates

## Ryan Sensenig



**Departure** Interim Executive Director

*Ph.D. University of California, Davis - Ecology, 2007*

*B.S. Eastern Mennonite University - Biology, International Agriculture, 1992*

*Biology Teaching Certification, Eastern Mennonite University, 1992*

*Earth Science Teacher Certification, James Madison University, 1998*

In December 2025, Dr. Ryan Sensenig stepped down from his role as Interim Executive Director.

Ryan shared his deep gratitude for the opportunity to work with the Merry Lea

community and to support our mission. However, the role required more time than he was able to commit.

With a heavier teaching load at the University of Notre Dame during the spring semester, he recognized that he would not be able to give the position the attention it deserves.

Ryan will continue to serve as a strategic advisor to Goshen College as the college advances strategic planning in biology, environmental sciences and sustainability education.

We are grateful for Ryan's leadership and dedication, and we wish him nothing but the best in his continued work and service.

## AmeriCorps Members 2025 - 2026

We are excited to welcome these AmeriCorps Members to our crew! We will also have two more members joining us this summer - stay tuned to learn more about them. AmeriCorps is rooted in service, enriching lives, strengthening communities, civic engagement, and community-building. The program also offers individuals of all ages and backgrounds a chance to grow both personally and professionally while making a difference in their local communities. If you or someone you know is passionate about environmental education and is looking for a meaningful opportunity to serve, learn, and grow, we'd love to hear from you!



### Natalie Startitz

Natalie first discovered Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center while searching online for environmental education positions. She was drawn to serving as an AmeriCorps member because it offered the opportunity to gain hands-on experience as an educator while serving the community and learning alongside other passionate educators.

Natalie earned her degree in Sustainable Development from Taylor University in 2025. She is especially excited to teach students about the place they call home, the history of the land, what lives here now, what once lived here and where their food comes from. She also loves how the students that visit Merry Lea get to be outside and not be confined by walls and a desk.

Natalie will be with us through August 2026, and we can't wait to see the impact she will have on all who visit Merry Lea!



### Elyssa Lewis

Elyssa first heard about Merry Lea by looking into our Masters of Arts in Environmental Education program and educational programs for adults. She loves working outside in nature, teaching kids about new creatures and where their food comes from.

Elyssa earned her degree from Purdue University in Sustainable Food and Farming Systems in 2023. She first became interested in becoming an AmeriCorps member because she saw it as an opportunity to serve her community and connect with others who are also interested in sustainable agriculture. In her free time, Elyssa enjoys fiber arts and gardening.

She will be with us through August 2026. We are so excited to have her as part of our crew!



### Brennan Beachy

As a native of Goshen, Indiana, Brennan first learned about Merry Lea through friends in the Goshen College community. He is excited to step into this position, viewing it as an important step toward a career in the environmental field.

Brennan will graduate from Manchester University in 2026 with a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies and Biology. He is passionate about environmental education, driven by a deep care for nature and a belief that sharing its wonders can inspire others to discover their own connection to the natural world.

He looks forward to getting to know everyone involved with Merry Lea and to helping create meaningful, positive environmental education experiences for others. Brennan will be with us through August 2026, and we are grateful to have him on our team!

# Mending Mist Nets for Bird Banding Research

BY Carol Good-Elliott

## WHAT DOES MERRY LEA'S BIRD

banding crew do in the winter when they aren't putting bands on birds? Well, that depends on the person and the day, of course, but one thing some do is mend the mist nets used throughout the summer to capture birds for banding.

Mist nets used to gently capture birds for the summer research work are quite sturdy but do get damaged during the 10 weeks they are mounted each summer. Each net is 2.6 meters tall by 12 meters long (8.5' x 39') and is made of a 30-millimeter (1.2") mesh of fine black nylon thread.

The very thin, black nylon threads making up the mesh can get damaged in a variety of ways: snagged by grasses or thorns, weakened by UV light exposure, broken when a large animal runs into and through the net, and -rarely- cut by a bander when a bird is much more tangled than usual.

It is important to mend damage to the nets because birds can become badly tangled if they happen to get caught in the net next to a tear. Due to the nature of the nets, it can be challenging to see damaged spots (especially small tears) in the net while they are mounted - these



Julie, Katie, Barbara, Lois and Elma repairing a mist net.

nets are, after all, designed to be hard to see so that they can better capture birds in flight.

Small tears can be mended while the nets are mounted in the field during the banding season. Larger openings, however, are best mended with the net spread out flat on a light-colored background.

The past few years, from November through March, a dedicated group of

volunteers has met with Carol to check and mend each of the mist nets.

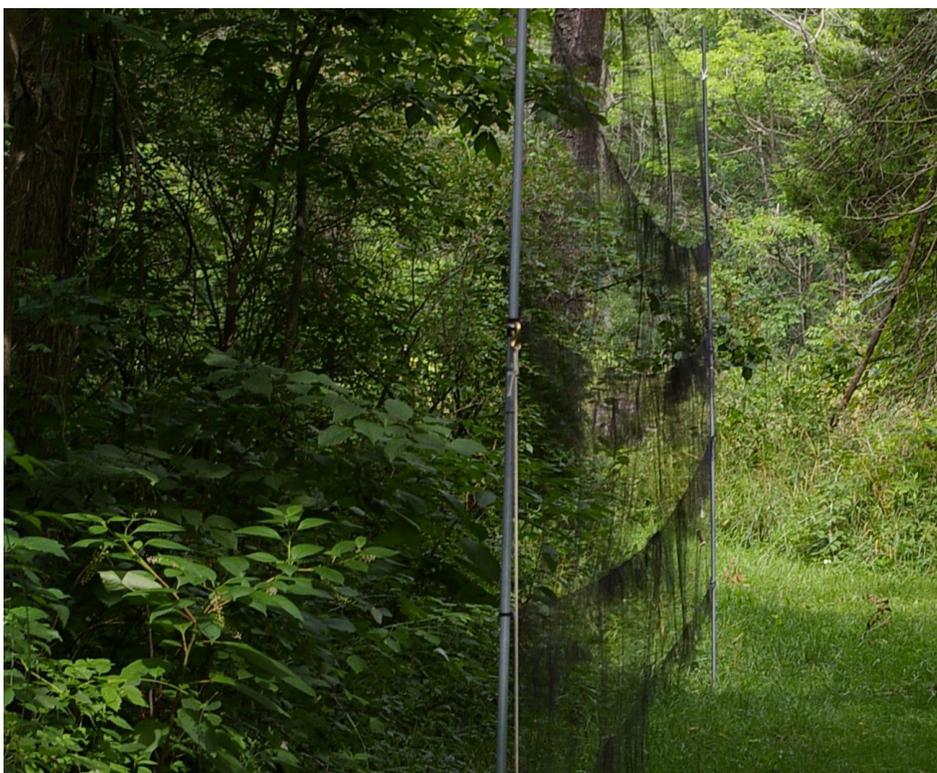
This process includes spreading a net over a line of tables set up to make a 6' by 32' rectangle. The group carefully looks over the whole net, marking each tear with small flagging strips. This allows Carol to assess the condition of the net and decide if it is repairable and still usable or if it needs to be discarded and replaced.

Most of Merry Lea's nets are still repairable, but some have been discarded and replaced because they were so damaged by UV light after many years of use that the threads weren't strong enough to be repaired. To repair a net, the damaged area of mesh needs to be rebuilt using nylon thread that matches the net material.

The team at Merry Lea has developed a process of taping down the net around a damaged area using painter's tape. This provides enough tension to be able to tie the replacement thread to the undamaged edges and tie knots at each intersection where the replacement threads meet.

While this work might sound challenging and tedious, the time typically flies by due to great conversations among the menders who are working on a given day.

If you are interested in learning more about repairing and replacing mist nets, please reach out to Carol Good-Elliott at [carolge@goshen.edu](mailto:carolge@goshen.edu) 



Mist net set up for bird banding research.

# Forest Bathing 101: Vernal Pond

OVER THE PAST YEAR, Stephany Hancock, our Environmental Educator and Residence Life Coordinator, fully immersed herself in a professional development opportunity - Forest Bathing. Inspired by the Japanese practice of Shinrin-yoku, this time has become a ritual of slowing down and tuning in, one sense at a time. Each week, she intentionally spends an hour at the vernal pond dock (located between trail markers G and F).

She begins her time at the vernal pond with a focus on breathing first to settle herself; deep inhales, holds and exhales. Rainy days are her favorite because the scents of the forest are at their heaviest. During the spring, she enjoys laying on the dock to see little creatures such as snails surfacing for air, clams moving along the bottom and various macroinvertebrates. By watching these slow creatures, she has learned that observation takes time.

“What began as a simple commitment to sit still has grown into a meaningful connection with this small patch of woods. I photograph the pond each week to document its changes and I journal to reflect on my own. After just an hour, I leave feeling calmer, more grounded, and ready to tackle my work. I am constantly reminded that sometimes the most productive thing we can do is pause,” says Stephany.

Check out some photos taken over this past year! We love seeing how the vernal pond changes from season to season.



02/10/2025



03/03/2025



04/28/2025



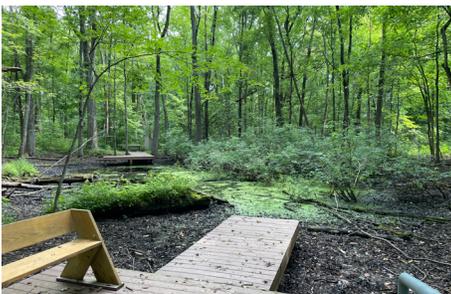
05/19/2025



06/09/2025



07/21/2025



08/18/2025



09/15/2025



10/22/2025



11/10/2025



12/25/2025 (with Stephany & Hulk)



01/13/2026



**Merry Lea**  
Environmental Learning Center  
of Goshen College

1700 S. Main St.  
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## Events

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

### Spring Break Day Camp

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

**WHEN:** April 6 - 10 | 9 a.m. – 4 p.m., daily.

\*Extended care options available for additional fee.

K-5th learners, come join us at Merry Lea to become animal analysts! Explore a variety of wildlife including insects, amphibians, birds and much more through fun investigations! Hike through different wildlife habitats, swing a net to catch interesting insects, and build your own bird nest!

**Cost is \$80 per student.**

**Registration required on our website.**

### Native & Garden Plant Swap

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

**WHEN:** Saturday, May 16 | 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Join Merry Lea for our first ever Vegetable and Native Plant Swap. Pot up your extra plants and join other growers and plant enthusiasts to trade them. Don't have a plant to swap? We've got you covered! Everyone who attends will be able to participate. This is a great event to meet other plant enthusiasts in the community, learn about new plants, and of course take home a new plant!

**Cost is free. Registration not required.**

**See website for more details.**

### Merry Lea Milers: Bites & Biodiversity

**WHERE:** Various Sites around Merry Lea

**WHEN:** Third Monday each month | 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

During our time together, we will hear from a guest speaker about various nature-related topics while eating some lunch. Afterwards, we will spend the rest of our time hiking and exploring around the property. Please wear weather appropriate clothing, closed-toe shoes, bring a sack lunch and a water bottle.

**Cost is free. Registration not required.**

**See website for more details & location!**

### Conservation Leadership School

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

**WHEN:** June 1 - 5

Camp overnight and explore a world full of natural resources and conservation. Hike across historic wetlands, help run a community nature event, get a taste of careers in the natural resources field, and canoe. Enjoy an educational and rejuvenating week at our beautiful 1,189 acre nature sanctuary with peers and professionals inspired by the natural world.

**Cost is \$85 per student. Applications are due May 8.**