

The Merry Leaflet

Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center of Goshen College | P.O. Box 263, Wolf Lake, IN 46796 | 260.799.5869 | goshen.edu/merrylea

Merry Lea bids goodbye to Luke Gascho

After almost 22 years as executive director, Dr. Luke Gascho will retire June 30. When he arrived at Merry Lea in 1997, his office was in what is now a windowless archive room. As Luke ties up loose ends in the archives during his last weeks, he jokes that he is returning to where he started.

Not quite. At that time, there were just four permanent employees, only two of whom are still on staff. Rieth Village did not exist, and the buildings that were here looked different. Pre-K to 12 programs were thriving, but Goshen College did not yet have a major in environmental studies. Wetland restorations were underway, but even the Kesling Wetland was only six years old.

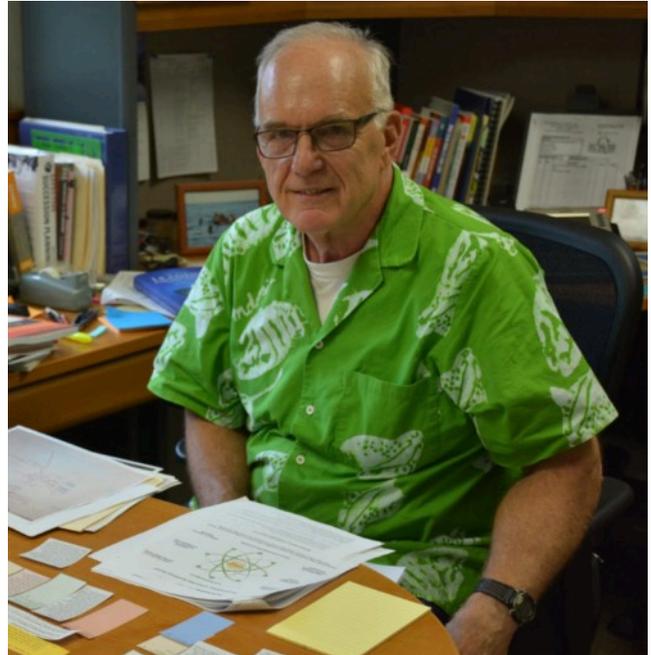
Luke would be the first to say that the progress made at Merry Lea over the last two decades has been a team effort. This is true. Nevertheless, his leadership enabled others' gifts to shine and spanned multiple spheres of influence. The Friends of Merry Lea Dinner on April 6 attempted to capture Luke's contributions over the past two decades. Academic Dean Dr. Ann Vendrely spoke on behalf of Goshen College and four panelists offered additional perspectives.

Academic Administrator

"Beyond Merry Lea, Luke's fingerprints are on multiple college strategic plans and the formation of campus 'Institutes,' Ann said.

She described the ways that environmental sustainability is alive and well on Goshen College's main campus, from prairie restoration to composting to solar power. In fact, becoming a more visible leader in environmental science and stewardship is one of five strategic directions that the President's Cabinet has developed this year.

"Over twenty years, Luke was able to guide significant growth here at Merry Lea. He developed the talented staff, visionary programming, and diverse lands. As he enjoys his retirement, I'm committed to continuing that legacy with the next generation of leaders here at Merry Lea," Ann concluded.

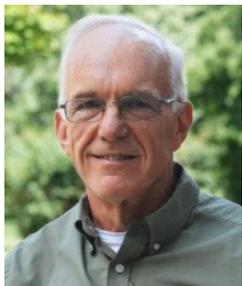


Above, Dr. Luke Gascho at work on one of the many conceptual models he created for Merry Lea.

Four panelists shared their appreciation for Luke following the Friends of Merry Lea Dinner April 6. Left to right, they are: Kaitlyn Sproles, former master's student; John Yordy, Merry Lea board member; Joy LeCount, former board member; Janeen Bertsche Johnson, board member.

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Placed



The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.

Psalm 16:6

My heart is filled with gratitude that my life journey brought me to Merry Lea 22 years ago. The pleasantness of the 1,189 acres that make up Merry Lea's land has enriched my entire being.

DIRECTOR'S DESK DR. LUKE A. GASCHO

I recall reading through the mission statement as I filled out my application for employment. I was drawn by the significance of all three parts of what Merry Lea provided—sanctuary, environmental education and re-creating opportunities. But what resonated most deeply with my inner being was the third component: “providing a setting for re-creating opportunities that benefit the human body and spirit...” I sensed how this part augmented the first two parts of the mission in distinctive ways. As a result, I knew I wanted to work here!

My spirit has been touched and changed by this land. It is a gentle land that has shown me resilience, restoration and regeneration. The ecosystems have summoned me to pay attention to the meaning of health and wholeness, to interconnections and to ecological time. The immeasurable beauty I find within the landscapes of Merry Lea has enriched my heart and soul.

Being placed in this setting has opened doors to wonderful relationships with many people who are committed to the mission of Merry Lea. I will forever be grateful for the amazing team members who have labored with me. They were—and are—the well-spring of creative imagination for the many new programs that they have designed and delivered. I am also thankful for the many people who have participated in programs, provided financial support and cheered us on through acts of kindness. We are all motivated by the call to care lovingly for God's creation.

I am grateful that 55 years ago, Lee and Mary Jane Rieth had the foresight to purchase the first 80 acres of land—and launch the mission. The pursuit of their vision continues in robust ways. The impact of the mission ripples out beyond the borders of this special place. We have trained people of all ages to care for the Earth wherever they are placed. Merry Lea is an inspiring springboard for those who spend time here. We are together creating a goodly heritage.

I have learned so much throughout these years of being rooted in this place. I've learned about creation care, sustainable buildings, creative pedagogies, watershed discipleship, inclusion, the importance of we, learning from the past, envisioning the future, and ecological leadership. These ideas will continue to inform me as I enter retirement. Re-creation has happened within me!

This pleasant place—Merry Lea—has truly been a “happy meadow” for me. My heart will always be warmed by the memories of this journey. 

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 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. Jennifer Halteman Schrock is its editor and the author of articles without bylines. See the news tab at goshen.edu/merrylea for more news.

TEAM MEMBERS

Chad Agler
Building Manager and Grounds Assistant

Luke Gascho Executive Director

Kerry Goodrich Property Supervisor

Carol Good-Elliott
Environmental Educator

Tom Hartzell
Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs

Krista Freel Environmental Educator

Bill Minter Director of Land Management

John Mischler Director of Agroecology

Ruth Mischler Asst. Professor, SEED

Dave Ostergren
Director of the Graduate Program

Joel Pontius Director of Sustainability
Leadership Semester

Ellie Schertz Farm Manager

Jonathon Schramm
Assoc. Professor, SEED

Jennifer Halteman Schrock
Communications Manager/MCCN

Katie Tipton
Public Program Coordinator, Educator

Marcos Stoltzfus Director of
Environmental Education Outreach

Maria Tice
Admin. Assistant / Volunteer Coordinator

BOARD MEMBERS

Marcia McNagny, Chair • Heather Harwood, Asst. Chair • Melissa Kinsey, Treasurer • Colleen Banta • Janeen Bertsche Johnson • Kenneth Newbold, Jr. • Fancheon Resler • John Yordy

Ex Officio: Luke Gascho, Ann Vendrely

Dr. John Yordy, formerly a provost at Goshen College, is currently on the Merry Lea Board. He added comments emphasizing the quality of Luke's character and the ways in which Luke maximized good work that had already been done.

Faith Leader

Janeen Bertsche Johnson is a current board member and serves as campus pastor at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. She described Luke's service in helping to plan the seminary's conference on land and stewardship multiple years. His knowledge of green building also influenced other major buildings in the Mennonite Church USA.

"Think of how a stone dropped into a lake causes ever-growing ripples. I don't think it is exaggerating to say that Luke's commitments to creation care and the way he has connected those to our faith, have been the primary disturbance in the lake of Mennonite thought about the environment," Janeen said.

Teacher

In addition to his administrative responsibilities, Luke taught leadership courses in the master's program and the Sustainability Leadership Semester. In both venues, he pushed students to identify their core values and the personal strengths they brought to environmental work.

Kaitlyn Sproles, a 2017 graduate of the Master's in Environmental Education program, described how she'd learned about emotional intelligence in the leadership course she took with Luke. Kaitlyn, who is now an interpretive naturalist at Chain O'Lakes State Park, led a training on the topic for her workplace.

The final public gathering in honor of Luke will be a retirement reception from 2 to 5 on Saturday, June 15 in the Farmstead Pavilion. See page 8. 

We too are grateful

When I asked the Merry Lea Team what they appreciated most about Luke Gascho's leadership, no one mentioned the construction of Indiana's first platinum-rated LEED facility. No one mentioned his role in initiating the Master of Arts in Environmental Education, the Agroecology Summer Intensive, the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm, the Sustainability Leadership Semester or the Mennonite Creation Care Network. Even stellar strategic planning processes didn't make the list.

Of course, we're very proud of these achievements. We wouldn't be here without them. But most of all, we cherish the chance to work with a gracious and compassionate human being. Here's what colleagues *did* mention. Luke, we thank you for:

- Friendship. An open-door policy and a willingness to stop and talk or listen.
- A calm and easy-going temperament. Being a non-anxious presence, even in challenging circumstances. Patience—with team members and with reality.
- The ability to connect people to a larger vision.
- Being an advocate for the work we do here. Displaying interest, providing affirmation and the necessary resources.
- A lived faith. Fostering an organization that is both open and faith-based at its core.
- Willingness to share practical and technical gifts that not every executive director possesses. Jumping in and helping with what needs to be done, from fencing to solving IT problems to cleaning toilets.
- Nurturing a warm and welcoming team culture.
- Helping us see and use our strengths.
- Wisdom, humility, seeking the good of others.
- Creativity
- Attention to beauty
- Following through on what is promised.
- Making the most of available resources.
- Concern for the public face of Merry Lea. Well-maintained buildings and trails and the equipment to care for them. 

compiled by Jennifer Schrock

Gascho sifts suggestions for retirement



Luke Gascho and his son, Adam Gascho, stand in Luke's newest garden next door to his home in Goshen, Ind.

Skydive...watch all seasons of the TV series, *Parks and Recreation*...attend the musical, *CATS*... make an interpretive trail for the Gascho garden...coordinate the Merry Lea Invasive Species Strike Team. These are a few of the suggestions Merry Lea's master's students offered for Luke Gascho's retirement. For months, they kept a running list on their classroom bulletin board.

Luke did not comment on which if any of these ideas he would pursue, but he *has* declined a few other opportunities.

"My commitment is to make no commitments to any outside organization for a year. I know I have administrative experience and gifts, but I need to let that piece rest for a while," Luke said. His first goal is to learn a new pace of life that does not involve filling up every moment.

Gardening

In retirement, Luke will continue to care for the gardens and orchard he has developed on his property in Goshen, Ind.

Drawing on the work of Michael Phillips, an organic orchardist who studies the interactions between plants and mycorrhizal fungi, Luke has developed an orchard on his property along the lines of Merry Lea's woody perennial polyculture. The Merry Lea Team will miss the tastes of pawpaws, kiwis, berries, apples and squash bars that he's shared at the lunch table over the years.

This spring, Luke began another half-acre orchard on a plot of land that became available next door. He's planted over 230 trees, bushes and vines in the past month. Urban farming energizes him.

Reflecting

Secondly, Luke looks forward to reading in more depth than he has had time to do while employed. His reading list is a mix of applied theology, leadership and creation care. He is particularly interested in the way these areas intersect. For example, the emerging field of ecological leadership—leadership that is informed by ecology—intrigues him.

When Luke taught leadership courses in the master's and undergraduate programs, he pushed students to articulate their own values. Drawing on thinkers such as Peter Senge, Donella Meadows and Martin Seligman, he developed a model to help them think about the ways virtues and character traits enable leadership in sustainability.

"People are better equipped to tackle wicked problems when they understand their values and who they are," Luke says. He plans to work further on this philosophical framework.

Luke expects to reflect on his areas of interest by writing about them. While he doesn't feel pressure to publish, he is open to making his thinking available to others through articles like "Tilling Soil on Stolen Land," which he recently published in the May issue of *The Mennonite*. In the piece, he explored the history underlying his garden. "Who cherished this land before me?" he asked, recalling the Indigenous Peoples of Northern Indiana.

On a lighter note, Luke and his wife, Becky, look forward to regular trips to the Boundary Waters in Northern Minnesota. They also want to be more available to their children and grandchildren. Will they find time to watch *Parks and Recreation*? Maybe. 🌱

"One day Luke described to our leadership class what he had accomplished that weekend. I remember him saying, 'I hauled sunshine around in a wheelbarrow' to describe harvesting squash from his land in Goshen. I appreciate his ability to find joy in those little moments connecting to the land."

Emily Hayne
MAEE class of 2019

Supporting service projects for master's students

A Gift in Honor of Luke Gascho



Luke and Becky Gascho on Andros Island, The Bahamas.

Merry Lea's Farewell and Recognition Committee invites the community to join us in a gift in honor of Luke Gascho's 22 years of service.

Luke has been very involved in the development of the Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) program over the years. He was also instrumental in setting up the international course that master's students take on Andros Island in The Bahamas each February. The experience parallels Goshen College's Study Service Term and includes a service component. Students teach environmental education in local schools and assist with projects such as trail maintenance.

When we consulted our Bahamian hosts, they mentioned a need for picnic tables at the schools where the MAEE students teach. Most of the schools also lack playground equipment. These are things master's students could help paint

and install. Your donation will pay for materials and carpentry.

"Picnic tables hold space for people to enjoy the outdoors. The kids need encouragement to be kids in a communal setting," observed Sarah Goethe, a 2019 MAEE graduate.

A picnic table may also be placed on Goat Island, a snorkeling hot spot known for its outstanding coral reefs.

This gift is especially fitting because Luke and Becky Gascho will continue their involvement on Andros Island. They plan to lead adult groups there from time to time.

To participate in the gift, make checks out to Merry Lea and write "Gift in honor of Luke Gascho" in the memo line. Or visit <https://www.goshen.edu/give/online/> and mention Luke's name under "comments." 

Comments from the Merry Lea Team

"Luke and I approach life from different but complementary perspectives. Together we learned how to keep the conversation going. I'm grateful for the ways we've been able to resolve issues while keeping the best of each of us."

*Dave Ostergren
Director of the Graduate Program*

"I've only heard Luke swear once. The word was well-placed and completely appropriate. It says a lot about Luke as a person that he even swears appropriately!"

*Joel Pontius
Director of the Sustainability Leadership Semester*

"I'm grateful that Luke is a deep thinker. He not only considers matters strategically and carefully; he is skilled at representing and communicating ideas. I 'speak' in models as well, so his diagrams and creations have always resonated for me."

*Marcos Stoltzfus
Director of the Environmental Education Outreach Team*

May in Review



Ali Sanders, an MAEE graduate from Maryland, receives her hood from Dave Ostergren, director of the master's program.

2019 MAEE students share the moments that transformed them

Merry Lea's Master of Arts in Environmental Education program ended May 24 with a celebration meal and words from the graduates. One would expect repetition when eleven students all report highlights from the same year, but the 2019 cohort offered dramatically different accounts of how they grew as environmental educators.

Delanie Bruce described how she'd learned to claim her leadership abilities during the past year.

Josh Crawford brought down the house by writing a rap about Merry Lea for the occasion. The performance demonstrated both his appeal as a middle school science teacher and his potential for winning a Grammy.

Sarah Goethe told of her plans to walk the Trail of Death with a group from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in June. This is the route that the Potawatomi Nation took when they were expelled from Indiana in 1838. The brutal trek claimed 42 lives.

"I'm 32 years old. I've lived in Indiana most of my life, and I didn't know about the Trail of Death until this year," Sarah said.

Andrew Beal, who came to the program directly from college, read a list of firsts he experienced during the year that ranged from camping to research to water color.

"All these firsts are just the start of a list that's going to keep going the rest of my life," he said.

Eagles Nesting at Merry Lea

For the first time in many years, a pair of eagles are raising young at Merry Lea. The eggs were probably laid in February, and the young birds should fledge in mid-June.

Eagles spend one to three months constructing nests that average four to five feet in diameter and two to four feet deep. They choose tall trees in forested areas near water.

The male and female build the nest together as part of the pair bonding process. The courtship displays that follow involve dramatic aerial exchanges that demonstrate the birds' agility.

Bald eagles lay one to three eggs and incubate them for about 35 days. The young take an additional 10 to 14 weeks to fledge and up to five years to reach sexual maturity.

Eagles mate for life and often return to the same nest, so they may be back next year. The Merry Lea nest is at an undisclosed location on a remote part of the property. Please respect the birds' privacy.



Without long, sticky tongues to help them, these children had trouble catching food in the air the way frogs do. But that didn't spoil the fun.

Frog contests close out PROWL

Merry Lea's PROWL wrapped up its season May 2 with a lively series of frog contests. PROWL is an after-school program for children from Central Noble Elementary in nearby Wolf Lake, Ind. Parents were invited to witness the creativity and delight.

Teams of children competed in frog jumping and frog eating contests. They were the 'frogs' in a jumping race and in attempts to catch food with their mouths.

The most challenging event of the day was a frog call contest. Children did their best to imitate recordings of frog calls and Marcos Stoltzfus, director of Environmental Education Outreach, judged the contest with his eyes closed.

Later, children led their parents on a hike and showed them the frog field guides they'd created.

"My daughter loves PROWL," Kelly Rockenbaugh remarked as she watched the games. She described the tears that resulted when a snow day cancelled a PROWL event.

Merry Lea's Tom Harzell leads PROWL. As a result he is known throughout Noble County as "Tom Tree."

NatureFest goes global

International volunteers from three continents visited Merry Lea during NatureFest, May 17 to 18. The group was part of Menonite Central Committee's yearlong International Volunteer Exchange Program (IVEP).

On Saturday, the visitors attended a woodland hike that contrasted forests of different ages. In between encountering Solomon's seal and pawpaws in bloom, they described what the natural world was like in their home countries. Melissa Namakhosi Ndlovu, Zimbabwe, urged Hoosiers to visit her country's beautiful Victoria Falls. Nouchee Lor of Laos said that it was not safe to hike in her home country, but she enjoys hiking here.

The group would like to come back. Eric Kurtz, the administrator of the IVEP program, said he may make NatureFest an annual event for the volunteers.



Camping was a new experience for many of the international volunteers who visited Merry Lea's NatureFest May 17 to 18. Deus Okong'o (center in red and black) volunteers at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm.



Duane Kauffmann shows a collection of Merry Lea's land snails.

Volunteer spotlight:

Kauffmann uncovers land snails

Duane Kauffmann, Goshen, Ind., is a retired professor with a unique passion: snail taxonomy. Following a May 20 slide show over lunch, Duane presented the Merry Lea Team with a pictorial notebook and display cases documenting the 31 species of snails he has found on Merry Lea property so far.

Duane began his field research on Merry Lea's land snails a year and a half ago when he asked Executive Director Luke Gascho for a species list of the nature preserve's snails. Since there was none, he volunteered to create it.

Duane's quarry is tiny. The species that fascinate him are measured in millimeters and are best found by taking gallon-sized bags of leaf litter home and running them through screens. Most of the snails in his collection are smaller than a pencil eraser; a few are so tiny they look like insect frass. Duane refers to a species a half inch in diameter as "a large snail." They live along shorelines and in prairie thatch; under woodpiles and in the gravel pit. Unlike their flashier marine cousins, the typical land snail is a modest shade of brown. Vivid common names like *obese thorn* or *carved glyph* make up for the bland coloring.

Duane has not found any rare snails on Merry Lea's property, but his survey confirms good populations of the common species. Snails are an important part of woodland ecosystems. Since they ingest calcium in order to build their shells, they are an excellent source of this mineral for larger animals. Crabs, salamanders, birds, larger snails and some insects depend on these tiny mollusks that humans easily overlook. 🌱



Merry Lea
*Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College*

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Events

Learn more at:
goshen.edu/merrylea

Nature Play Day

WHEN: Thursday, June 13, 1 PM to 5 PM

WHERE: Learning Center Building
2388 S 500 W, Albion

DESCRIPTION: Merry Lea is participating in the Indiana Children and Nature Network’s Nature Play Days. This is a family-friendly event with a variety of guided and self-guided activities. Dip for tadpoles, create a nature craft, go on a hike, work on a scavenger hunt and more. Come explore the natural world in your own backyard!

COST: No charge; registration not required.

Retirement Reception for Dr. Luke Gascho

WHEN: Saturday, June 15
2 to 5 PM; short program at 3 PM

WHERE: Farmstead Pavilion
2152 S 425 W, Albion

DESCRIPTION: Join the Merry Lea Team for homemade ice cream, lawn games, canoeing, stories.

YOU MAY WISH TO BRING:

- A card or note for Luke. A container will be available where you can leave memories.
- A donation (See page 5.) Make checks out to Merry Lea and write “gift in honor of Luke Gascho” in the memo line. Or visit <https://www.goshen.edu/give/online/>.

COST: No charge.

Food Preservation Workshop

WHEN: Saturday, July 13
9 AM to 12 PM

WHERE: Farmstead Barn
2152 S 425 W, Albion

DESCRIPTION: Learn how to safely preserve food by canning. We will discuss the science of canning, processing times and important techniques to ensure safe food preservation. Build your canning confidence as we walk you through the steps involved with water bath and pressure canning. Participants will leave the workshop with samples of food they have helped preserve. Adults only. No prior canning experience needed.

COST: \$15 per person. Register by June 10th. Space is limited.