

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

Nature preschool explores all weathers

BY Jennifer Schrock

Four days a week at noon, a small caravan leaves from the Farmstead Barn. There are two wagons, three teachers and a gaggle of 13 preschoolers wearing matching backpacks and rubber boots. The children take turns pulling the wagons which carry supplies for the day.

“Do you know what an excursion is? We get to go somewhere we don’t normally go!” a child told me proudly as we walked, suggesting that I am lucky to have shown up on a Wednesday. The Wednesday ritual allows for trips into the prairie, to the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm or other interesting places within walking distance. I was glad for the tip. It was in the 40s and rainy, so I might have thought myself unlucky if I hadn’t had four-year-old help.

“You found an interesting bumpy-looking thing. Do you want to take that along to the classroom?” Environmental Educator Carol Good-Elliott asks one of the boys who has picked up a milkweed pod. The pod comes along to the classroom, where it could be an interesting focus for sit spot time.

Their destination is a clearing in the woods near where the Kesling Wetland and Kesling Prairie intersect. There, they hang their backpacks under an open shelter and find their “sit spots.” Like many other age groups at Merry Lea—from kindergarten to graduate level—the preschoolers spend time watching and listening with a journal in hand. The vibrato of a singing bowl marks the beginning and end of the quiet time.



Sun or Rain, children attending Merry Lea’s nature preschool spend two hours a day outdoors. *Above*: Zain displays a swallow nest he made on a warm, September day. *Below*: Mayla hides under a prairie dock leaf during a rainy-day exploration of how animals find shelter.

“How was today different from yesterday?” Carol asked the circle of children, now perched on tree rounds.

“Things look more brown.”

“I heard a crow squawk.”

“It’s easier to see the water because there are fewer leaves.”

“I wonder how birds stay dry on a day like today. And what about caterpillars?”

Carol muses as she introduces the day’s excursion. As they head out to the prairie, she gives each child a plastic animal and challenges them to find their animals a place to hide from the weather.

“I got a snake!...I got a lizard!...I got a frog!”

see [Nature preschool](#), page 3



**FROM THE INTERIM DIRECTOR'S DESK
DR. DAVE OSTERGREN**

Taking in the big pic

I am Merry Lea's interim executive director, but I also still direct the Master of Arts in Environmental Education program (MAEE). Fortunately, one of my duties for the MAEE is to meet teachers and principals on Andros Island in the Bahamas. In November, I spent a wonderful week meeting teachers who 'love us.' I also squeezed in time to float around in warm marine water, take a deep breath, and reflect on Merry Lea. I stepped back for the big picture. It is a grand picture!

Within 36 hours of my return on November 9, the weather changed dramatically—but I kept my view of the big picture. The big 'weather' picture is that over time, we have colder weather and then warmer weather. If you know me, you know I joke that "it seems like the weather happens in an annual pattern."

Weather patterns also provide a great opportunity to think about what we do at Merry Lea. We invite people out to connect with life: the grand, mysterious, miraculous life on our 1,189 acres. Merry Lea contains infinitely complex relationships developed over an unimaginable span of time. And everyone reading this, working here, or visiting as a guest is part of what we do: we connect to nature.

The team works together to invite people—from preschoolers to graduate students—to our farm, wetlands, forests, bookstore, nature preschool, prairies, bogs, gravel pits and trails. We are out in the woods and on the water on sunny, warm days and on days that require a jacket. We invite people on hot days with mosquitoes swarming, butterflies dancing and dragonflies hunting. We are also out on cold, rainy days that try to dampen our programs.

About 2,600 students have gone through our programming this fall. Our annual Enchanted Forest for family groups was one of those programs. On a pleasant Friday evening, a record-breaking 289 people met friendly, informative animals during a night hike. Saturday's Enchanted Forest featured a torrential downpour. But spirits don't dampen easily around here, and a couple of dozen people still wanted to be enchanted. They enjoyed great music and hot cocoa while the animals found shelter in the buildings so they could welcome the small but dedicated group.

Like the weather, over time our team will change. The constant is that the people who are part of this team are united in the big picture: our desire to connect people to nature. As personalities change, there is a slow but inevitable shift in perspectives, programs and resources. This is a time to embrace difference and revel in new ideas while holding fast to the lessons learned and the legacy of past companions. Our most recent hire is a farm manager; our next hire is an executive director. In the midst of these changes, we will continue to be a strong, positive team doing our best to provide excellent services and protect our extraordinary resources. This is who we are. Our big picture does not waver.

If you are reading this, you are part of Merry Lea. Whether you are a friend, visitor, student or team member, you are part of a group that has come together to protect habitats, join in environmental education and maintain a place to reconnect and recreate. It's the big picture that makes Merry Lea what it is. Thank you. 

ABOUT MERRY LEA

Merry Lea was created with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and through the generosity of Lee A. and Mary Jane Rieth. It is operated by Goshen College. The center provides a comprehensive program of environmental education and recreation.

The Merry Leaflet, published in spring, summer, fall and winter, provides news about programs and developments at Merry Lea. 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*

Kaeli Evans, *Farm Manager*

Elena Fischer, *Environmental Educator*

Kerry Goodrich, *Property Supervisor*

Carol Good-Elliott,
Environmental Educator

Krista Freel, *Environmental Educator*

Tom Hartzell, *Coordinator of Undergraduate Programs*

Bill Minter, *Director of Land Management*

John Mischler, *Director of Agroecology*

Ruth Mischler, *Asst. Professor, SEED*

Dave Ostergren, *Interim Executive Director & Director of the MAEE*

Joel Pontius, *Director of Sustainability Leadership Semester*

Jonathon Schramm,
Assoc. Professor, SEED

Jennifer Schrock,
Communication/MCCN

Eric Shaffer, *SEED Recruiter*

Katie Tipton, *Public Programs*

Marcos Stoltzfus, *Director of Environmental Education Outreach*

Maria Tice,
Admin. Assistant / Volunteers

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Soon the snakes, lizards and frogs are hiding under leaves and behind tree bark. Since everyone has boots, there are also puddles to splash in.

As I watched the pint-sized explorers, I thought back to a workshop I'd attended entitled, "Lessons from the Forest: How Great Preschools Place Nature at the Heart of the Curriculum."

"Something changed in 2012," Christy Merrick of Natural Start Alliance told us as she shared a graph shaped like a hockey stick. That year and following, the number of nature preschools in locations around the world jumped dramatically. Perhaps in response to the statistics about screen time and phone addiction, parents are seeking outdoor experiences for their children. In the U.S., 80% of nature preschools have a waiting list.

Inclusion of all children was very important to the workshop instructor. She stressed that all children can benefit from learning outdoors, including those with developmental needs and those in diapers. She was concerned that special education children, racial minorities and bilingual children often lack equal access to these services.

Workshop participants came from a wide array of contexts. A professor from Australia described how nature preschools in her country are based in national parks. They teach families to enjoy nature and care for the parks together. A nature preschool administrator from Alabama described how her school partnered with Head Start in order to give children access to multiple kinds of support. Another attendee administered a school at a zoo that served as a bridge between low-income and affluent families.

I left Merry Lea's nature preschool damp but grateful. I was glad I didn't have to do today's laundry, but I still wished every child in the country could have outdoor education like this. 

Merry Lea's Team: Transitions



Kaeli Evans, Goshen, Ind., joined the Merry Lea Team as the new farm manager on November 13. Kaeli is a graduate of the 2012 Agroecology Summer Intensive and a 2014 graduate of Goshen College. Since then, she's worked with AmeriCorps VISTA in Athens, Ga., and taken courses in food studies at Chatham University in Pittsburgh. Her work in Georgia involved food security.



Elena Fischer arrived in August to teach and help support school programs at Merry Lea. She also assists with the Master of Arts in Environmental Education, coordinating opportunities for the students and developing recruitment strategies. Elena first explored the field of environmental education in Honolulu, where she served on the External Affairs Team as a Kupu AmeriCorps Intern for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A native of Elkhart, Indiana, Elena is excited to re-invest in a place she calls home.



Lungelo Nnodana is a yearlong volunteer with Mennonite Central Committee's International Volunteer Exchange Program. He hails from the country of Eswatini in Southern Africa which was known as Swaziland before 2018. Lungelo works at the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm and is doing his best to adapt to cold weather.



Ellie Schertz left her position as farm manager in September 2019. She and her husband, Josh, moved to Tucson, Ariz., where they are presently enjoying the Sonoran Desert. In her time here, Ellie mentored farm volunteers and students, managed the Merry Lea Sustainable Farm's CSA and did an admirable job of maintaining the farm gardens and greenhouse.



Eric Shaffer joined the team in September 2019. He recruits high school students and graduates for the Master of Arts in Environmental Education. Eric grew up in Lakeville, Indiana, and spent seven summers working at Camp Tamarack, the local Boy Scout camp. These experiences gave him a lasting love of nature. During his time at Purdue University, he studied forestry and was part of Purdue's Student Chapter of Environmental Education. 

Merry Lea alumni: Where are they now?

Over 140 people have passed through Merry Lea's semester and yearlong residential programs in the past 13 years. *Seven cohorts have completed the Sustainability Leadership Semester (SLS) or the Sustainability Semester in Residence (SSR), as it was called in 2012. Eleven cohorts have completed the Master of Arts in Environmental Education (MAEE) and 13 cohorts have completed the Agroecology Summer Intensive (ASI).*

Here's what we learned when we asked our graduates to report back on what they are doing. Some of them also told us how their time at Merry Lea influenced them.

2006-2010

Camry Hess, ASI 2008

lives in Houston, Texas, but works remotely as a data analyst for the Indiana State Department of Health. "I analyze trauma and overdose data

and help the epidemiologists in my division write code for this purpose.

"The ASI helped me shape my lifestyle goals. I support local farmers by purchasing local produce and goods. My job uses my biochemistry major more than the environmental science major, but they have both shaped how I live."

Emma Reesor, ASI 2010 and SSR 2012

Alamosa, Colo., is the executive director of the Rio Grande Headwaters Restoration Project. This nonprofit partners with local landowners, farmers and ranchers, state and federal agencies and diverse stakeholders to improve riparian habitat, aquatic condition, agricultural water use, recreation access, community safety and watershed resiliency. Emma is also the vice-chair of the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable. She and her husband, John, spend free time exploring Colorado by foot, bike, ski or boat.

"At Merry Lea, I learned the importance of understanding diverse perspectives in order to solve environmental problems and make positive change. I draw on this experience in my work and personal life daily."

**—Emma Reesor,
ASI 2010 & SSR 2012**

Jennifer Amstutz, MAEE 2010

Geneva, Ind., teaches kindergarten at Lancaster Central Elementary School in Wells County. She is also in charge of her school's science club and a seasonal interpretive naturalist for the Salamonie Reservoir.

"I'm always incorporating nature into my classroom. People know my room as the 'tree' room with all the owls. They also come to me with nature facts or nature questions."



MAEE FEATURE

Josh Crawford

Josh Crawford graduated from the MAEE in 2019. He now teaches 7th grade science and chemistry in Redford, Mich.—a suburb of Detroit. His favorite teaching assignment is an elective class on conservation where the students become environmental detectives. Tasked with figuring out why the fish are dying in a fictional bay, they ask questions like, "What do fish need to survive?" and "What might be getting into the water?"

Josh says his biggest takeaway from Merry Lea was the importance of simply slowing down and spending time in the natural world. At Merry Lea, the chance for a nature fix was outside every window, and he often walked to class to enjoy it. Now, he meets students who find nature alien or threatening; who cannot enjoy a canoe trip because damselflies frighten them.

One way he'd like to address this problem is by replacing some of the school lawn with pocket prairies. Adding nature on site would increase access to outdoor study for everyone. Josh's colleagues and principal like the idea, but it will take time to implement. 🌱

Maddie Grimm, MAEE 2010

Porter, Ind., works for United Way of Porter County as their AmeriCorps director and director of grants.

Hannah Miller, MAEE 2010

Morrisville, Vt., is an assistant professor of education at Northern Vermont University in Johnson, Vermont.

“Because I do not teach a course called Environmental Education, I sneak it into all of my courses in some way. I also take my students on field trips that are related to sustainability and the environment.”

Lael Welle, MAEE 2010

Rice, Minn., teaches life science, wildlife biology and environmental science courses at Cathedral High School in St. Cloud, Minnesota.

2011-2015

Josh Yoder, ASI 2012

Tucson, Ariz., is currently enjoying the Sonoran Desert following a recent move from Goshen, Ind., with Ellie Schertz, former farm manager at Merry Lea.

Matthew McQueen, MAEE 2012

South Bend, Ind., teaches courses on earth/space science, astronomy, meteorology and environmental systems at John Adams High School in South Bend. He has also worked as a STEAM resource coordinator for Elkhart Community Schools and as the education outreach coordinator for the Lopez Island (Wash.) Solid Waste District.

Laurina Graber-Ditzler, MAEE 2012

Goshen, Ind., is an instructor at Merit Learning Center, an alternative high school related to Goshen Community Schools.

Tom Hartzell, MAEE 2012

Albion, Ind., coordinates residential undergraduate programs at Merry Lea. This involves managing community



SLS FEATURE

Jenna Lee

“Don’t get discouraged! **Jenna Lee (SLS 2014)** tells job seekers. After a few false starts, she is now working in her dream job as a conservationist for the Elkhart County Soil and Water Conservation District. The role blends both of her primary interests: environmental science and education.

“I am constantly learning in this job,” Jenna says. One day, she might be preparing education kits for school teachers; another day, she might advise a homeowner interested in a rain garden. Yet another day would find her in a classroom introducing children to worms.

Much of Jenna’s work involves connecting people with programs. Do teachers know that they can sign up for a stormwater education field trip for their classes and receive free bussing? Do farmers know there are programs that can help them pay for conservation? Jenna helps them find the right resources.

The SLS is special to Jenna for a reason unique to her. This fall, she married a man whose farm she recalls canoeing past on the SLS canoe trip. He proposed at Silver Beach on Lake Michigan, where the canoe trip ends. 

see *Alumni*, page 6



ASI FEATURE

Andre and Lillie Eisenbeis

Andre (SLS 2014) and **Lillie (SLS 2013)** are proud to be part of the movement of millennials returning to the land as they begin building their small, diverse farm on Lillie's grandmother's land.

Prairie Roots Farm is located three miles south of Freeman, South Dakota. The Eisenbeises have completed their second year of supplying 25 families in the region with fresh produce through CSA subscriptions. They also sell at the Freeman Farmer's Market and several other venues.

The farm produces about 40 different kinds of vegetables, fruits and herbs. The CSA newsletter included with the last share of the season lists cabbage, onions, peppers, squash, potatoes, greens, garlic, parsley and turnips. Recipes for Spicy Ground Beef and Butternut Squash, Garlic-rubbed Cabbage Steaks and Turnip Au Gratin guide consumers. Lillie also markets homemade soaps.

The Eisenbeises are members of the Freeman-based grassroots organization, Rural Revival, which works toward improvement in three areas:

- Land transfer from one generation to the next
- Local Foods
- Education

Their commitment to the development of a local food system reflects their desire for rural communities to be healthy, economically vibrant and ecologically minded.

Caring for the land as farmers is not just a job for this couple. It is also part of their faith. Lillie serves on the council of the Mennonite Creation Care Network, keeping her fellow council members in touch with a rural perspective. 

life with students, planning field trip experiences and leading other administrative aspects of the programs such as May Term, the ASI and the SLS. He also leads the PROWL after-school program that serves Central Noble children.

"I was heavily influenced by the teaching practicum. The information and strategies gained in those experiences continue to shape the ways I interact with both the human and nonhuman systems around me."

Hannah Geiser Godshalk, SSR 2012

Washington, D.C., is pursuing a master's in public health from George Washington University with a focus in global environmental health. In her free time, she volunteers with Cooking Matters and the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History.

"The semester I took at Merry Lea changed my career path and led me to pursue environmentally focused jobs."

Hannah Johnson, SSR 2012

Goshen, Ind., is a professional pet sitter with her own business. On the side, she volunteers at the Humane Society.

"I am currently educating my fiancé and in-laws about what sustainability means and how we can do better. Reducing the use of water, plastics and animal products are a few examples. I pay more attention to eco-politics than ever before too. I'm rooting for the earth!"

Miranda Davies, MAEE 2013

Montgomery, Mich., homeschools her son. She also travels and educates people wherever she goes.

Mingla Charoenmuang, MAEE & ASI 2015

West Lafayette, Ind., is finishing a Ph.D. in Agricultural Sciences Education and Communication at Purdue. Her dissertation examines high school students' systems thinking in the context of sustainable food systems. She promotes informed decisions for healthier diets that also encourage support of local farmers who use sustainable practices.

"I learned about local food production and met a lot of organic farmers and farmers who were interested in sustainable practices. That surely helped my work as an advocate for local sustainable food systems. John Sherck, whom I met during the ASI, helped me with an online curriculum I developed. I also incorporate experiential learning activities and outdoor education into my curricula."

Corinne Grossmeier-Doblar, MAEE 2015

Mukwonago, Wis., teaches AP environmental science and general biology at Badger High School. As the local "nature nerd," she uses her field guides just as frequently today as she did while taking Lisa Zinn's natural history course. Merry Lea also gave her an "eco-travel bug." Solar panels are in process at her home.

"Big Foot Beach State Park is directly behind [my school], and I frequently bring my students there to do environmental studies. This week

we collected leaf litter from three unique ecosystems within the park. We built berlese funnels to collect the insects so that we can compare the biodiversity in the three locations. My students thrive in a collaborative learning environment that flips the traditional classroom structure."

Judy Miller, MAEE 2015

Goshen, Ind., works as an energy education specialist for Goshen Community Schools. Her job includes tracking utility expenses and looking for ways to reduce utility costs and carbon footprints. Judy oversees several green initiatives, such as recycling and tree-planting. She also leads a Green Team comprised of teachers and staff and offers environmental education instruction to classrooms. Judy achieved a career goal this year when Goshen Community Schools was awarded the 2019 Green Ribbon Schools Award.

"I live on a lake and recently started an official lake association thanks to

the introduction I had to watershed knowledge, water quality testing, and macroinvertebrates at Merry Lea."

Jacob Shapley, MAEE 2015

West Lafayette, Ind., is the assistant property manager of Prophetstown State Park, which opened in 2004 and is Indiana's newest state park system. Jacob says that the most rewarding part of his work is creating a public space "that will be here long after I have passed on."

David Pauls, SLS 2015

Eugene, Ore., is in his second year of a master's degree in landscape architecture at the University of Oregon—a profession he discovered during his time at Merry Lea.

"Many of the concepts we learned about in the SLS are areas we are trying to design for in our projects," he says.

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SSR FEATURE

Lydia Yoder

Since 2018, **Lydia Yoder, SSR 2012**, has been working for Bike Pittsburgh, a nonprofit that advocates for safer streets for bicyclists and pedestrians. She plans events that express the organization's vision of what the world could look like if more people biked.

Bike Pittsburgh has an annual event called Open Streets where streets are closed for a day and people can come out and bike, walk or skateboard. The rest of her year is filled with advocacy, volunteer coordination and teaching kids how to bike safely.

Since she left Merry Lea, Lydia has focused on using the outdoors to build community and connect neighbors to each other.

"During my time in the SSR, we talked a lot about the concept of home. That really impacted my vision of what I wanted my life to be like," she says. Thinking about geographic homelessness made her want to commit to one place and put down roots in Pittsburgh.

"I think that has made this young adult time in my life easier. I am not constantly thinking about where do I want to go next, but rather, who do I want to be in this place?" Lydia adds. 





Merry Lea

Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

1700 S. Main St.
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Events

Learn more at:
goshen.edu/merrylea

Michiana Regional Seed Swap

WHERE:

Goshen College
Church-Chapel,
1700 S. Main St.,
Goshen, Ind.

WHEN:

Saturday, January 18,
10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.

DESCRIPTION:

Join fellow gardeners, growers, and plant enthusiasts to exchange seeds, compare and discuss varieties, and more. This event is free and open to the public. Participants are not required to bring seeds to the event, but if you save seeds, please bring them along.

Alumni, continued from page 7

2016-2018

Jose Chiquito Galvan, SLS 2017

Goshen, Ind., works for the Center for Civic Innovation at Notre Dame while finishing his college degree. He is a coordinator for the Elkhart site of the Educational Ecosystem Internship Program. Jose’s role involves working with community partners and organizations to find feasible, civically engaged projects that high school and college interns can complete in eight weeks, working full-time.

An example from 2019 includes developing plans for a naturalized play area on an old wood lot at the Elkhart Environmental Center. The interns learned what elements compose a naturalized play area and then created 3-D models and a budget for materials.

Reena Ramos, SLS 2017

Auburn, Ind., is an advancement coordinator for ACRES Land Trust in Huntertown, Ind. The organization protects over 7,000 acres throughout Northeastern Indiana and has 50 nature preserves open to the public for hiking. Reena’s job includes outreach, event planning and managing publications and memberships.

“During the SLS, we took an interdisciplinary approach. Interacting with different disciplines has been very beneficial for me. Some members of ACRES join to protect trees, others to support the trails, some for spiritual reasons or a mix of things. The SLS helped me understand and respect the variety of perspectives and motivations people have.”

Skye McKinnell, SLS 2018

Cassopolis, Mich., is the sustainability assistant at Camp Friedenswald. Leading outdoor education programs and controlling invasives are among her tasks. She makes frequent use of her Merry Lea background because both locations have prairie and oak savanna restorations.

Lydia Dyck and Mandira Panta, SLS 2018

Lydia and Mandira offered a poster presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education in Spokane, Wash., on Oct. 27-30. It was entitled, Seeing Sustainability in Your Own Backyard: Place-based Learning and the Liberal Arts. 