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Walpole winery wins 2012 Farm of Distinction

By **DOMENIC POLI** / Reformer Staff

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WALPOLE, N.H. -- When Virginia Carter wins an award, she isn't the type to crack open a bottle of bubbly.

No, a nice vintage red wine will suit her just fine. Besides, opening some champagne might be messy. And she wouldn't want that.

When she was informed in December that her Walpole Mountain View Winery had won the 2012 Farm of Distinction Award, she said the honor would mean so much to every vineyard and farm in the Granite State that works hard to make their business pleasing to the eye.

"It's just so gratifying and it feels so good and amazing," the winery's owner and vintner said in a telephone interview. "We try to keep everything looking nice and very presentable.

"We want to represent the state of New Hampshire in a positive light," she continued. "We take it very seriously."

The Farm of Distinction Award is given to a farm that maintains its beauty and stays aesthetically pleasing.

To be nominated, a farm must be commercial, have proper signage and the view of the farm as seen from a public



Walpole Mountain View Winery won the 2012 Farm of Distinction Award. (Submitted photo)

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way or an invited approach must be attractive. Carter described proper signage to be a quality sign out front in addition to several around the area to lead customers in the right direction.

She said it always helps if the establishment's buildings and fences are in good shape and painted appropriately, if the hedgerows are trimmed and if the orchards are mowed and the equipment is stored neatly.

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Once a farm is nominated, a staff member of the N.H. Department of Agriculture, Markets & Food comes to take photographs of it. The photos are then sent to the selection committee. Carter said the man that came to her farm in October was very polite and even rinsed out a few buckets while he was waiting for a dark cloud to pass by.

This is actually the third Farm of Distinction Award in two years for the town. Walpole Valley Farms and Alyson's Orchard each won in 2011. Chris Caserta, co-owner of Walpole Valley Farms, said he is very proud of his town and that Carter has truly earned the award.

"It means being recognized by your peers. Virginia is probably really happy because she works very hard," he said. "It just goes to show that when you do things right, people take notice."

He said winning in 2011 was really special for him and his wife because they have been farming for about only 12 years.

Both Walpole Valley Farms and Alyson's Orchard, like Walpole Mountain View Winery, were nominated by Rep. Tara Sad, D-Walpole. She said she has watched Carter's business built from the ground up and loves what Carter has done with the property.

"She has transformed the land into a wonderful, wonderful benefit and treasure to the town of Walpole," she said in a telephone interview. "It couldn't have happened to a better farmer."

Sad, who has been a part of the rows of volunteers that help pick the grapes each spring, has also been a member of the House Environmental and Agriculture Committee in Concord. She is now the ranking member and works to encourage wineries, which she said is a new niche for the state.

Carter said her business grows 32 varieties of French-American hybrid and cold-climate grapes. Four, she said, are seedless table grapes for farmers' markets and to make raisins, while the other 28 varieties are wine-making grapes.

Most people wouldn't think a winery could survive in the frigid weather of New England. But just like Charles and Kate Dodge of Putney Mountain Winery, Carter uses grape varieties that remain hardy in temperatures as low as 40 degrees below zero.

Carter said she started planting in 2004, developed her first vintage two years later and went commercial with a 2008 vintage in 2009. She will soon release her 2011 vintage. The rest is New Hampshire wine history.

"I love doing this," she said. "There's no better work than out in the vineyard."

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