

Vineyard with a view!

Walpole woman hopes to create a Northern New England wine culture

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Editors note:

The Barnett Hill Vineyard will be on the Walpole Historical Society Home Tour next Saturday, June 23, 2007. This article appeared in the Sunday Magazine of the Eagle Times June 17, 2007. The author thanks Virginia Carter for her time and enthusiasm in telling her about the vineyard. SLB

A Vineyard with a View!

by Sue Bingaman, Contributing Writer

Vineyards are in New Hampshire

Think you have to go to California or France to see a vineyard and a winery? And a spectacular view? Not so!

Right in Walpole, on a scenic southerly slope high on Barnett Hill, the newly developed Barnett Hill Vineyard commands a view of the Connecticut River Valley and half of Vermont. And, this year, produced its first vintage.

Only planted four years ago, the vineyard was conceived, researched, planned and executed by one ambitious woman: Virginia Carter. She has done her homework. She reads about wineries, attends workshops and seminars, visits wineries some in Napa and Sonoma, CA, consults with the UNH Cooperative Extension Service, and mentors under Peter Oldah owner of the award-winning winery "Jewell Town" in South Hampton, NH near the coast.

Carter has also experimented with growing different grape varieties because "Every vineyard is unique. The soil, the exposure, the drainage all differ even from one acre to the next and affect how the vines develop," she says. The northern climate is also a big factor. Consequently she has planted 27 varieties hoping to find vines that will flourish in her high hilltop micro climate and make outstanding wine. She has purchased vines from Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri and Western New York and finds that only the hardiest varieties survive and thrive on Barnett Hill.

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Already she has identified real favorites because of their vigor and growing habit including 'Sabrevois', 'Frontenac', and 'St. Pepin', eliminated some varieties and discovered much about herself. "Having the vineyard has changed me!" she says. "I love working outside in the vineyard on the hillside looking out at the spectacular view. I never really enjoyed being outside." Her enthusiasm is infectious. "I prune each vine cutting off the previous years growth, insert 8" starts in the soil and in weeks buds sprout and become green and I know that in time 'Sabrevois' will produce beautiful purple clusters of grapes! I get goosebumps!"

Carter remains intimately involved with the vineyard although she has a few part time employees. "I can't tell you how many times I touch the same vine". On any given day you will most likely find Virginia Carter in the vineyard tending her grape vines, pruning, planting, removing leaves to allow sun to reach the fruit, repairing trellisses, or starting hundreds of twig-like vines to replicate successful varieties in her 'nursery'.

Carter has approximately one acre planted with 650 grape vines but in the next few weeks she plans to plant another 850 vines so there will be enough grapes for making more wine in the future. She treats each vine individually, spacing them 8 feet apart and 9 feet between the trellised rows. Through careful pruning and trellising each vine produced between 8 and 14 pounds of grapes this past year. Carter hopes to reap 15 pounds per vine when the plants are mature in five years -- next year!

Growing Vines on a Hilltop

Carter enjoys her adventure and loves her location. "Not only is it beautiful up here but there is a continuous breeze in the vineyard because of the southern exposure and being high on Barnett Hill. This keeps the plants and the grapes dry and fungus down which helps to increase the crop," Carter noted.

This breeze also enables Carter to use few chemicals. She said, "I am probably the only one in the state using organic farming practices. I feel good about the resulting product and feel better about not having to subject my workers to chemicals". Although Carter developed the vineyard on her own, she now employs her son and 4 high school boys part time since spring to mow, weed, plant, prune and to repair trellises in the vineyard.

Harvesting the crop will begin in mid September for the whites and the first week of October for the reds. Then the fun begins!

The three Gs of wine making...The Ground the Grape and the Guy/Gal

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Carter not only grows grapes but also makes wine. Virginia has always been interested in experimenting in Chemistry from the time she received a chemistry set as a gift when she was 7 years old. Chemistry plays a large part in winemaking. She is still experimenting.

In the cheerful walk out basement of her home, Virginia has created a winery. Glistening vats, pressing equipment, a corking machine and colorful posters of luscious clumps of grapes on the walls complete the picture. Bottles of aging wine line the walls, the "girls," the white wine in one room and the "boys", the reds in another. She envisions building a separate winery next to her house also with a spectacular view.

Carter is making several different styles of wine. When asked about different kinds of wine she can make she said that "for example, although I cannot grow Reisling but I can do a Reisling style wine by blending". Carter's eyes brighten and her voice becomes animated as she tells about her experiment of 12 different batches of juice from last year. "With the Frontenac, for example, I divided it into three batches, one control to which I added nothing, one I put on oak chips all winter and another I added extra tannin. Two of the three were not very good. The batch left with the oak chips was wonderful."

Last year she produced 100 gallons of wine and hopes to produce more this year.

Carter's goal is to create a really good northern New England wine. "I want people to experience northern grapes from New Hampshire soil. I want people to drink Barnett Hill wine, share it with their friends and to be really pleased."

So the resulting wine will reveal the effect of the "Ground, the Grape and the Gal". With the enthusiasm, the work, the care and the commitment Virginia Carter demonstrates Barnett Hill Vineyard wine promises to be a winner!

Virginia is applying to be bonded so she can sell Barnett Hill Vineyard wine at the beginning of next year.

For more information see the New Hampshire Winery Association's web site www.nhwineryassociation.com

And for New Hampshire winetasting, wine education, wine classes and wine dinners see www.localwineevents.com/other-New-Hampshire-Wine/

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Comments

Re: Vineyard with a view!

Wonderful news! I can't wait for a wine tasting room and hope Virginia is planning on one. It will remind me of our many trips to the Napa Valley and Sonoma. Mel Schupack

Posted by melschupack on June 17, 2007 at 10:15 AM

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