



COVER STORY



Isabel Prescott

Wins 2016 Open Space Award

By Jenna Caputo

Photos by Louis Torres Photography

"A farmer is not only the owner of the land, but the land and farming permeate every aspect of life." This statement certainly is true for Isabel Prescott, owner of Riverview Orchards in Rexford. Her lifelong passion not only turned into a career, but a lifestyle – a lifestyle that has recently earned her recognition from her beloved hometown.

Farming in the Mohawk Valley can be traced back through Isabel's family at least to the 1800s. Throughout the years, her family produced a variety of crops and animals. Her parents originally had a poultry farm in Charlton, but her father's true love was apples. He wanted to make the switch to fruit farming, so in the early 1940s,

they looked for an affordable place with good soil and land they could farm. Their search brought them to Clifton Park.

Isabel says it was a perfect way to grow up. "I truly did not appreciate what a wonderful life I was living. We were not at all well-to-do, but I was part of a loving family surrounded by farm life. My grandparents soon moved into part of our farmhouse, as did the hired man. All of us ate our meals together, worked together, went to grange and church together and experienced a quality of life like no other."

While it was indeed a wonderful life, Isabel's father didn't want his girls to be dependent only on farming or their spouses, so he encouraged them to pursue a good education. Isabel received her BA in English Literature

from Hartwick College in Oneonta before working for over 20 years in Information Systems, Computer Operations and Finance at General Electric and United Artists Cable Systems. But her heart was in farming, and in 1983, she bought the farm from her aging father. "I couldn't stand the thought of a development on our land and at that time, I knew the only realistic option would be to continue my parents' life work."

The farm has changed over the years. Initially selling most of their crop wholesale to supermarkets, they have since expanded their services and opened the farm to the public. Today, they depend on the community to regularly visit the farm, and in addition to picking apples, enjoy the other benefits like hayrides; birthday parties; weddings; meeting the animals; pumpkins; and enjoying the homemade pies, cider donuts, jams and other goods from the store.

Riverview Orchards also hosts many field trips, educating children on various aspects of the farm and our food in its original form. "We love to share the experience of living and growing food on the land with our friends and neighbors," says Isabel. "Today there are fewer farms than ever before and if we want our young people to know and understand where their food comes from, we need them to visit the farm."

Hearing Isabel talk with ease about the work on her farm makes it sound easy, but it's really quite the opposite, especially with the climate change and unpredictable weather we've been having lately. The changes have severely impacted the quantity of apples that all the farmers in the area have been able to produce. "Some people believe that 'apples just grow on trees,' but in reality, there's a lot of work and risk involved," Isabel explains. "We have to prune, spray, move, fertilize, thin and get the apples picked and stored. We have to experience desirable weather, including no late frosts or hailstorms to grow good fruit. To maintain and restore the trees takes a lot of investment and labor. Farming is not all that easy!"

Isabel is passionate about not only educating the public on the origins of our food, but also in preserving open space. In the early 2000s, the Town of Clifton Park began to develop potential options for protecting the land left in the area. Isabel decided to participate with a Purchase of Development Right, which allows the farmer to receive the difference between the value of the farm for agricultural purposes and the value for development of the land. In return, the deed to the farm stays in her name, but has a limitation for usage, prohibiting the land from ever being developed in the future.

Isabel is also on the town's Open Space Committee. This spring she was recognized for her effort in helping the town to carry out their land preservation goals with the 2016

Town of Clifton Park Open Space Award. This was a huge honor for a cause so close to her heart and Isabel was happy to share it with her family and now displays it in the store.

Passionate about local and family history as well, Isabel is a very active member of the Friends of Historic Grooms Tavern; the Saratoga County's Agriculture Promotion Group; Sundae on the Farm; Town of Clifton Park's Open Space, Trails, and Riverfront Committee; Farm Fest Committee; Winter Fest Committee; the Rotary's Apple Blossom Festival and the 41-Acre Park on Riverfront Committee.

Family continues to be an important aspect of Isabel's life. She shares the responsibility of the farm with her son and his family, who also live on the farm. Her nephew works there as well and her sisters live with their families next door. She loves to attend her grandchildren's events and partakes in many of the ongoing activities in the community.

As a lifelong resident, Isabel has seen Clifton Park change dramatically over the years. A student of the original one-room schoolhouses, Isabel was one of the first to attend Shenendehowa School. But the changes obviously haven't stopped there. "As I was growing up, our community center was the grange hall in Grooms Corners. We went there for Halloween and Christmas parties, cover dish suppers and to enjoy other social events. Graduation classes at the newly formed Shenendehowa were under 100 students. We frequented Klingbeil's Store in Grooms Corners and Olsen's in Vischer Ferry for groceries. We saw the onset of television; the building of the Northway, the mall, housing developments, a centralized school system; and an increase in traffic. Nothing could have prepared us for the onset of the computer age and the abilities that have come with it. Although there will always be negatives in growth and development, almost all that I've seen in Clifton Park has been good. We need to keep this continued trend as we strive to maintain the quality of life that we have achieved during the last 50 years. I am completely convinced that when we see the good in our community, we help to maintain it for the future."

So what does she want to see for Clifton Park in the future? Most importantly, maintaining a good balance between development and open space so that future generations can continue to enjoy the many benefits of the area. "Development is OK as long as it is planned," she says. "So far, the Town is in total agreement with that philosophy. I am so proud of my town! To be able to sustain and bequeath to our descendants that which we consider to be the best part of our lives is a privilege." ■

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