



Iosco County News-Herald and Oscoda Press

SECTION B
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ACC works to perfect drone program for future students

by Jenny Haglund

OSCODA – Staff at Alpena Community College (ACC) are pushing ahead in their efforts to expand lessons on unmanned aerial systems (UAS), commonly known as drones.

To prepare themselves for what lies ahead, three ACC employees recently passed the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-approved drone pilot certification test at Kalitta Air in Oscoda.

Those who attained this goal are utility technology instructor Roy Smith, media technician and UAS assistant Gary Hollingsworth and Michigan Occupational Safety and Health Administration grant director Dana Labar.

ACC President Don MacMaster stated that passing the test is a significant accomplishment, which was seconded by Dawn Stone, ACC director of the Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program.

According to Stone, the FAA issued new rules, known as Part 107, last year for commercial UAS

operations. These rules dictate what a drone pilot needs to know and adhere to in order to fly commercially.

In other words, one must be certified in order to use drones for commercial purposes, such as in the real estate, linework, photography, agriculture and other businesses which utilize the camera and recording functions of drones.

She shared that, in addition to the ACC staff, a student has also earned the FAA UAS pilot certification from the Kalitta Air test site, as have three others. This is significant, since only a handful of people each year are able to do so, but seven have already achieved the goal this year.

Stone explained that the exams must be delivered at an official FAA test site and Kalitta Air fits the bill. She said this is unique to the community, since the next closest test sites are in Midland and Traverse City.

Stone said the person who developed the curriculum to prepare the graduates for their recent exam success was Brian Dawson, UAS

instructor and licensed UAS pilot.

Hollingsworth referred to Dawson as an encyclopedia of aeronautics, saying he was an excellent resource in preparing him for the certification process.

Hollingsworth said it was a very rigorous test, which called for a lot of studying, and that it stretched his boundaries in terms of growing his knowledge in the field.

While ACC does not currently offer a degree program specific to UAS, the college is working on fine tuning the curriculum for such, and does implement the use of drones in several programs, including the utility technology classes.

Additionally, an associate's degree in marine technology, with the use of underwater robotics drones, is available.

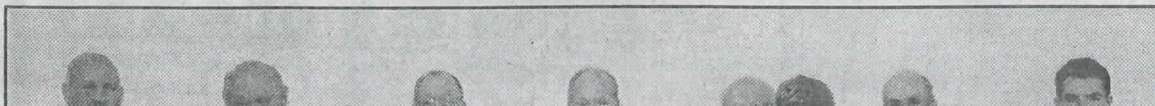
According to Dawson, the UAS program is evolving and an initial group of students received their first block of instruction in this field last week. The instruction will be brought to utility technology classes.

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Courtesy photo

MOVING FORWARD – Three Alpena Community College (ACC) staff members have passed the Federal Aviation Administration drone pilot certification test. Their skills will be used to help students obtain the same license, as well as fine tune what is needed to offer an unmanned aerial systems degree to enrollees who attend both the Alpena and Oscoda campuses of ACC. As part of this, the college has acquired a mobile command and control unit, seen here, from which to conduct training.



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Tammy Bowers to Thomas and Diana Paoness, Lot 85, Sand Lake Realty Company's Subdivision, Grant Twp.

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ogy students in the near future, which will include going out into the field for hands-on lessons.

Dawson noted that it will be a huge thing to have on one's resumé if a utility technology graduate also has a drone pilot certification under his or her belt.

He said ACC students could very well be on the cutting edge as some of the first individuals to have this particular license, which will only become more valuable in such fields as utility technology, the companies of which will begin having drones in their vehicles as part of their regular equipment.

Smith agreed, saying that he can also envision drones on the trucks. As a lineworker himself, he can't even think of how many times a UAS would have been useful in his career to assess damage and know what tools may be needed to correct a problem.

Swampy areas or locations with downed trees can be tricky to navigate from the ground, but drones provide a clear view of problem areas, he said.

He added that Consumers Energy is excited to hire ACC utility technology graduates who, with a UAS pilot license, will be able to contribute to the company right away.

Stone shared that one four-week class is currently being offered at the Alpena campus of ACC, which is not for credit, in order to prepare students for the pilot certification.

She said the first class was a pilot course to make sure the materials, time and other elements were appropriate. Once the details are hashed out, future courses will be brought directly to the students at the Huron Shores campus in Oscoda and then to the public.

She said ACC is committed to having the drone lessons as a fixture at the Oscoda branch, as well as the main campus.

Dawson added that some Huron Shores enrollees have already attended short sessions with the other students, as just one chapter of the process to begin a full-on program available to all.

Because of a previous TAACCCT grant, offered by the United States Department of Labor-Employment & Training Administration, Dawson and others have been able to provide two-day seminars and other lessons in the use of UAS to both students and community members.

As part of the evolving ACC curriculum, MacMaster stated that the college has acquired a custom-made mobile command and control unit to add to the growing program.

The van, equipped with all the latest technology, and from which students can fly drones, inspect utility lines and receive other training, was obtained primarily through a state grant via the Community College Skilled Trades Equipment Program.

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