



News Photo by Steve Schulwitz

Alpena Community College media instruction development technician Gary Hollingsworth tinkers with some of the technology in the college's new mobile cockpit. The van will be used for training and testing of unmanned aircraft systems. It was acquired thanks to a grant from the State of Michigan.

ACC receives van for drones

By **JORDAN SPENCE**
News Staff Writer

ALPENA — Not all work needs to be done in a classroom.

This is the concept behind the new Unmanned Aerial System Mobile Command Unit at Alpena Community College.

The large van was delivered to the college Friday and is equipped with computers, iPads, and other technological systems to help with the use of drones.

"It's to support drone testing and training," college President Dr. Don MacMaster said. "It's a great day at the college. Our footprint will be forward with the evolution in drone usage."

Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training Grant Di-

rector Dawn Stone said she's excited for students to use it.

"It will help us take students into the field and apply their knowledge," she said.

The van is part of a larger drone program the college started for the spring semester. The college will have a non-credit class to prepare students to take the drone pilot test.

A drone is an unmanned aerial vehicle often used to take photos or video.

In order for people to use drones for business purposes, they must be a licensed drone pilot. Stone said officials hope students in a variety of career fields can use the new program and mobile unit to their advantage.

"Because of the capabilities of the van, the students won't have to worry about drone battery life," she said. "We can also

have a lot more students out training."

She said utility students go out in the van and use it to inspect utility lines. Global information systems students can take the data recorded by the drone and build topographical maps, in the van, Stone said.

"We'll have 16 utility students trying out the van soon," she said.

ACC media technician Gary Hollingsworth described how the vehicle is set up.

"We have ways for electronics to be plugged into a wall to build power from," he said. "There are banks for batteries to charge. There's a backup generator, a bank of computers for executing missions and

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drone operation.”

He said a mission is when there are set travel points, set by a computer for a drone to travel to. The drone then must take a picture at each point to build a map.

He said the van also is equipped with video editing software to compile and edit data.

All the equipment and

van cost \$150,000 and was funded by the Community College Skilled Trades Equipment Program, Stone said. It was a custom build created by LDV out of Wisconsin, she said.

To help provide more research and development on drones, ACC partnered with the Northern Michigan Unmanned Aerial Systems Consortium.

Consortium CEO Jim Makowske said this new mobile unit will give them a competitive advantage.

“We do a lot of testing of drones,” he said. “What we’re trying to do is reach out to companies to test drones or sensors and develop software.”

He said it will be another way to attract more people to Alpena.

“It’s a competitive environment,” he said. “We’ve got good airspace here to try these kinds of things. This is an exciting addition.”

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