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Gene Chambliss demonstrates the basics of operating a small drone aircraft.

Remote controlled aircraft now much more than toys

By BECKY GILLETTE

Gene Chambliss first became interested in remote controlled aircraft about 35 years ago when his parents bought him a gas-powered, remote controlled Cessna 172.

"After that I was pretty much hooked on remote control aircraft of one type or another," Chambliss said. "When I was a kid, my friends and I would go to the local hobby store in Hattiesburg and look at all the remote control aircraft hanging from the ceiling that were for sale. Basically, we were kids drooling at all the nice toys that were available. Now they are way more than toys."

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Chambliss got interested in drone aircraft five years ago. He followed the market as he saw the commercial side of it being developed. He is also an avid photographer. So he combined the two interests to develop a business called Bliss Aeronautics (www.blissaeronautics.com), which specializes in taking aerial photographs for business applications like real estate sales.

"Drones that can take photos are just getting better and better," Chambliss said. "In order to make it a business, I had to get the Part 107 FAA drone pilot's license. That legally allows me to do it commercially and make a living at it. This is a side business. It is not my main business. I'm a ship's captain."

Chambliss provides promotional photos and videos for real estate agents to sell their listings. He said it makes it more attractive to have an aerial video or photographs rather than just ground-based photos. It is more interesting for customers shopping from home, and can result in higher sales for real estate agents.

One of his customers is Big Bay Lake near Lumberton, which is the largest privately-owned lake in Mississippi, and a certified Bill Dance Signature Lake, a ranking based on providing excellent habitat for fishing. The aerial shots put the lake properties in the best light.

Aircraft drones are also now able to do agricultural work. Chambliss said they are becoming much more popular for monitoring plant health.

"You can see a large section of crop area and analyze it through online software to see what plants need more fertilization or watering," Chambliss said. "That is much more economical to do from the air than with a ground-based survey. When you have a large section of agricultural land, it takes some time to cover that property."

He also is very interested in orthomosaic photography or drone mapping where a drone flies over a property and takes hundreds of photographs later uploaded to a server. The computer combines the digital images to make one large photo of that property, whether it is five or thousands of acres.

"That can be changed into a 3D digital model to see how all the features work together," Chambliss said. "It is useful for things like planning a subdivision. It is very interesting and exciting to look at."

Google Earth is available which has images from the air of places all over the world. But Chambliss said the drones provide photographs on demand. You could use the drone photograph to show updates on the progress of construction, whereas Google Earth would only show older images of the site.

"Also, the resolution is much higher than you would find with Google Earth," Chambliss said. "With drone photography, you can read letters on a manhole cover. We offer different packages based on what resolution the customer wants. The higher the resolution, the more flights are needed at a lower altitude."

Any drone photography contemplated for commercial uses can only be provided by a licensed drone pilot.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has a lot of regulations for certified drone pilots. Drones can't exceed a speed of more than 100 miles per hour, are limited to an elevation of 400 feet, and must yield to any manned aircraft. Pilots aren't allowed to fly drones over people or fly at night unless they get special waivers from the FAA. Drones must be registered by the FAA, and there must be an identification number on the drone aircraft.



GENE CHAMBLISS

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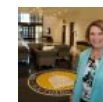
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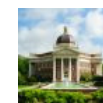
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“There are lots of rules in place to keep people safe,” Chambliss said.

There has been some bad publicity around drones including cases where they have spooked animals and the drone that crashed near the White House. Chambliss cringes wherever he reads a report where a drone has caused a problem.


“Usually it is a hobbyist, not a commercial pilot, who has some kind of accident with drones,” he said. “Those who are reckless make it harder for those of us who are stewards of aerial safety and proper drone use. For those hobbyists flying drones, enjoy yourself, but do so responsibly. When flying at a site, keep people at a safe distance. Put up signs saying you are running a commercial drone. After it lands, people like to come ask questions. I enjoy talking to people because it is important to have positive, word-of-mouth information spread about the benefits of drone usage.”


Before any flight, they always go through a long checklist of all their systems to make sure they will perform correctly in the area.

“Safety in the air starts on the ground is our motto,” Chambliss said. “Drones have just begun to be introduced. People have no idea how much drones are going to affect their lives. We are only in the beginning stages. This industry is going to bloom dramatically in the coming years. Some of the things drones are being used for include delivering medical supplies to remote areas of Canada and Africa, and searching for survivors after natural disasters. We provided video to the television station after the tornado in Hattiesburg in January.”

Chambliss wants people to understand drones are a business and people are trying to do it the right way.

“There is no reason to be afraid of new technology,” he said. “It has some wonderful uses.”

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2 COMMENTS



Eugene Chambliss
April 1, 2017 at 7:14 pm

Thanks to Becky Gillette for her interest in our company and this growing industry!

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