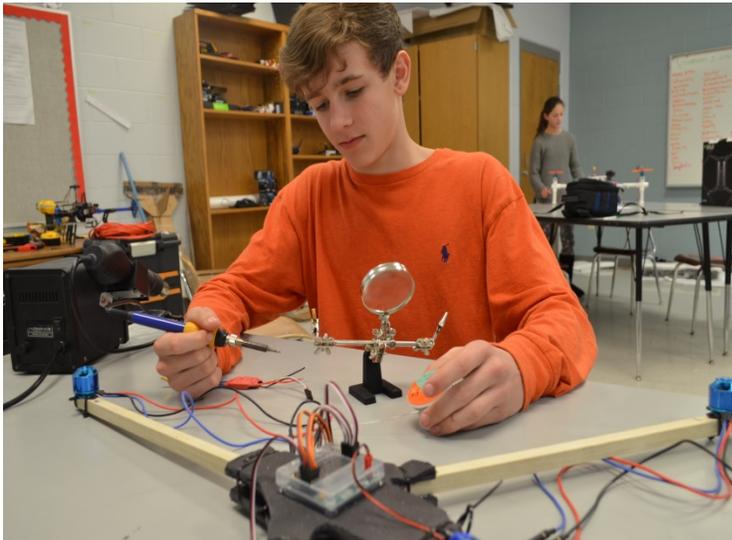


Drone Class Takes Students to Higher Heights

BEEBE – Just as soon as they took to the skies, drones became a thorn in the side for celebrities and a headache for the federal government to manage. A-Listers have called on state and federal lawmakers to ban the unmanned aerial systems – the formal name for drones – from invading



Orman puts finishing touches on his drone.

Orman, a freshman at Beebe High.

Orman said the class has heightened his interest in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers because of all the skills needed to build a drone. He has decided to study mechanical engineering after graduating from high school.

“Engineering is a lot about learning how to build things and learning how they work. That’s what we are doing with the drones – building them and designing them,” he said.

their privacy.¹ Paparazzi use the device to enhance their coverage of superstars, mounting cameras on the drones to get places they cannot.

Drones are a hot topic at Beebe High School, but not for celebrity gossip. Students are building them, programming them, and conjuring ways they can be used to better their communities.

“Drones have a lot of applications that are useful in our society other than just stuff that people do that can get them in trouble,” said Hunter

¹ <http://www.latimes.com/local/political/la-pol-sac-brown-drones-paparazzi-20151006-story.html>

Getting students interested about STEM careers is exactly why this class was created, according to Chad Mercado, who teaches it. He said the idea started on a whim.

“My principal texted me one morning and said ‘What do you know about drones?’ Mercado recalled.



Mercado said he did not know a thing about drones, but Principal Mike Tarkington encouraged him to research ways to bring a drone class to students at Beebe High.

“The initial process was ‘Yeah, they’re cool,’ but we needed to figure out more. We wanted to know if there were educational opportunities that we can teach the kids so they can understand and apply skills to other subjects,” Mercado said.



A drone circles an area of Beebe High School.

The class, called Unmanned Aerial Systems I, started during the 2014-15 school year. The class introduces students to drones, the history behind them, and the safety regulations outlined by the FAA. Students also apply a variety of math and science skills to build drones.

The first year was such a success that school leaders added another level of the class, Unmanned Aerial Systems II, which was implemented in the 2015-16 school year. Mercado is

already building the curriculum for Unmanned Aerial Systems III, set to launch in the fall.

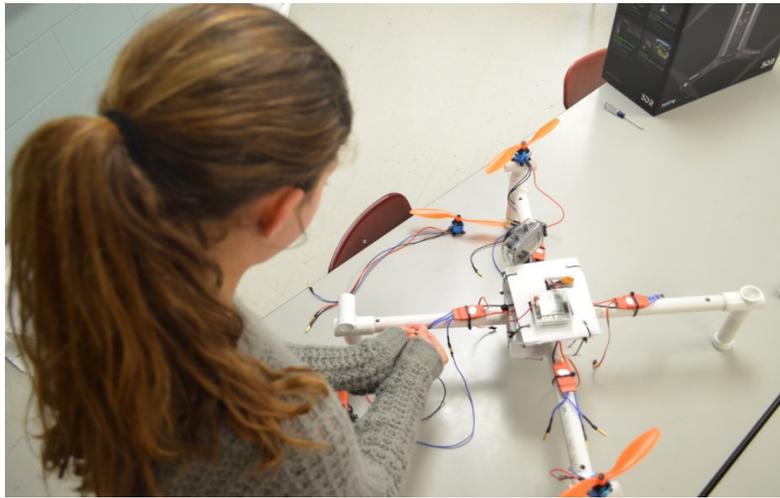
“I think drones will be like computers. Once businesses learned how to utilize computers, they became a social thing. The same thing will be with drones,” said Mercado.

Elizabeth Moody, a freshman, said the class has helped improve upon her math and teamwork skills. It has helped her think about how drones can help her beyond high school as she pursues a career in the military.

“I want to take pictures of the land and the water to make sure everything is okay. Being afraid of heights, I can use the drones instead of going up there myself,” she said.

Beebe High is considered to be one of the first schools in the nation to offer a class on drones. As a result, many other schools across the state and country are looking at ways to implement a similar program.

“I’ve been to a lot of schools, a lot of bigger schools than Beebe High School. Knowing that other schools don’t have a drones class but Beebe – of all places – does is quite impressive,” Moody said.



Elizabeth Moody said she likes the class because it is a challenge.

Mercado said he is proud to know that he is preparing his students for rewarding and cutting-edge careers of the 21st century.

“These students may not ever fly a drone after this class, but they may become a programmer or a mechanical engineer because they have gotten the interest from this class,” Mercado said.

Career and technical education is one of the four divisions of the Arkansas Department of Career Education (ACE). ACE has the mission of providing leadership and contributing resources to serve the diverse and changing career educational needs of Arkansas youth, adults, and persons living with disabilities. To learn more information, visit us at www.ace.arkansas.gov or follow us on Twitter at @ARCareerEd.

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