



city of
bristol

News Release

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Bristol is flying high with new certifications

The City of Bristol Tennessee now has fully trained and certified ground pilots, or remote pilot certifications. An unmanned aircraft system (UAS), sometimes called a drone, is an aircraft without a human pilot onboard; instead, the UAS is controlled from an operator on the ground. These operators are sometimes referred to as ground pilots. Before August of 2016 the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) required commercial drone operators to have a traditional pilot's license, something that takes months and costs thousands of dollars to obtain. In the fall of 2016 the FAA introduced the drone regulations and the testing material for the pilot's license.

The City's Community Relations Department had purchased a drone earlier and sought out someone to assist in training staff to fly the apparatus. Mr. Richard Blevins, a licensed commercial pilot, was hired. Mr. Blevins heads up the Aviation Technology program at Northeast State community college, in Blountville, Tn. Two individuals from the Office of Community Relations tested along with members of the Bristol, Tennessee Fire and Police Departments. Brennan Dye and Brittany Helton, Office of Community Relations, Captain Harry Miller, Battalion Chief Dwayne Honaker, Asst. Chief Jack Spurgeon and Captain Darrell Meares of the Fire Department and Detective Eric Sargent, Officer Nathan Greene, and Major Matt Austin of the Police Department all received their certifications and may now fly the UAS.

City staff members had to answer 60 questions correctly, and receive a score of 70, in order to pass the two hour test.

The FAA has numerous restrictions as to time of day the UAS may be operated, height and speed restrictions, and other operational limits. The license must be renewed every two years. The City also addressed certain restrictions prior to UAS' being flown.

The City Fire Department has utilized the drone on arson investigations and will possibly use it for search and rescue in the future. The Police Department has previously used this equipment asset to supplement crime scenes from a perspective otherwise not available. New technology is becoming available every day that will assist all departments in better serving the community.