

HCC to offer 1st drone pilot certification course this spring

By **MICHAEL CONNORS**
For the Gazette

HOLYOKE — For a long time, the only way for a consumer to have their own eye in the sky was by spending thousands of hours training to become a pilot or buying an airplane ticket.

Now, with the growing drone industry, taking flight has become a more cost-effective endeavor.

From April 28 to June 2, Holyoke Community College will offer to the general public a drone pilot certification course called “Flying Drones for Profit, Public Safety, and Commercial Applications,” dedicated to preparing participants for the Federal Aviation Administration’s drone operator license exam. The class will cost \$349 and will be every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Part of a growing list of colleges offering courses on drone operation, the class at HCC will be taught by Larry Harman, co-director of the GeoGraphics Laboratory at Bridgewater State University in Bridgewater. There, Harman teaches a similar course while also doing private consulting.

“This course is to give folks who want to get into this as a career a really great background in drones,” said Ken White, dean of community services at HCC. “The use of drones will be expanding over the next few years ... in fields like engineering, insurance and public service.”

Harman said that he became interested in drone operation when he was recruited by the CIA from Bridgewater State University in 1963, his senior year. There he worked in tactical intelligence where he was involved in satellite image analysis.

Not only will the course be able to help those looking to make drone operation a career, but it will also teach students about the personal applications of drones, Harman said.

“It’s quite exciting for me because the only people who had this survey technology used to be the military, but now you can go out and buy it yourself from



AP FILE/MATT ROURKE

A drone captures videos and still images of an apartment building in Philadelphia.

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Best Buy,” Harman said. “There’s a recreational aspect to it, but also a huge emerging market in professional fields.”

Harman said that the course will be a great primer for those wishing to become certified with the FAA. The nuances of both learning how to operate a drone and the laws and regulations around piloting will be explained in detail during the class, he said.

“I intend on teaching the students how to take the FAA exam and pass,” Harman said. “There’s going to be a lot of hands-on work that we’re going to do with drones in this class, I am going to teach the students a set of progressive flying skills that will help them master drone piloting.”

White explained that HCC jumped on the opportunity to have a course dedicated to the budding drone industry.

“We are very focused on developing career opportu-

nities for individuals and when something like drones is on the cusp of being part of industry, we see it as our own place to help folks advance on that,” White said.

Participants in the course do not need to have their own drone to be eligible to take the class. The lecture portion of the class will meet in the HCC Kitredge Center for Business and Workforce Development at 303 Homestead Avenue, and students will gain experience flying drones on the nearby college baseball or soccer fields.

“I see this as a fun course, but you also have to understand that these drones are a tool that you have to respect,” Harman said. “Whether you plan on flying drones recreationally or professionally, you need to know how to handle your equipment correctly.”

To register for the course can go online to hcc.edu/bce or call 413-552-2324. Space is limited.