

The sky's the limit:

Taking flight with Pro Aire Aerial Photography

BY BRANDI SMITH

If a picture is worth a thousand words, the images captured by Pearland, Texas-based Pro Aire Aerial Photography are virtually priceless. However, they don't come with the price tag you're probably expecting.



"A lot of people don't realize how inexpensive it is," says owner Deana Waddell.

A couple times a week, she's up in a plane, photographing properties all over the greater Houston area from an average height of 1,500 feet, though flying even higher is an option for larger properties.

"It's really as simple as opening up the window," Waddell explains. "We use our high-resolution cameras and telephoto lens to capture all angles to enhance a property."

While Pro Aire covers Brenham to Beaumont, everywhere in between and other parts of Texas, Waddell admits she has a favorite.

"I love doing skyscrapers and downtown projects. The pictures are very cool and intriguing," she laughs. "We've done a couple downtown Houston shots in the past month and were able to fly around it. You can see all of Houston when you're right in the middle of the Central Business District."

The company has been offering traditional aerial photography for decades, but now it has a new tool up its sleeve: a pool of Part 107 licensed drone pilots ready to capture lower-altitude photos and videos. Each approach can offer a different vantage point for a piece of property.

"From a plane, you are able to get more perspective. You can see where the property relates to highways, downtown or certain neighborhoods," says Waddell.

She adds Pro Aire's clients fall into two categories: those who are selling a property and those who are building a project. The view out the plane's window can be beneficial for both.

"Sellers want to be able to show 'You're this close to the Med Center' or 'You're this close to downtown. Our photos can do that," Waddell says. "We also do bi-weekly or monthly shots for construction projects to show what kind of progress has been made."

Those perspective shots are available on a smaller scale with drones, which can only go 400 feet up. They are better for showing the personality of a property.

"Both serve their purpose in this world. A lot of our clients use both because they want the closer-in

perspective and some video, but they also need to see and show potential buyers all of the higher-altitude stuff," says Waddell.

The two approaches don't just offer a different view of a project. One is considerably easier to facilitate than the other.

"It's simpler for us to get approval to take a plane up. With an airplane, we're in constant communication with the towers. They know who we are, where we are and what we're doing," explains Waddell. "You don't have that kind of communication with drones, which is why they have a lot of restrictions."

She tells the story of a recent project in College Station, where it would have taken three to six months to get approval to fly.

"Our clients can't wait three to six months for us to get these photos. That's when flying is a better option," Waddell says, adding that many airports are working on a process that will allow for instant approval of drones in airspaces during certain times and in certain altitudes.

In addition to the preparation time required, operating a drone also demands different logistics. Getting up in a plane is more efficient since Waddell says she can knock out more than a dozen projects each trip. Drones require dedicated setup and operation for each individual shoot.

"As a result, the cost to do drone jobs is often more expensive. You might think being in an airplane is more expensive, but it's really not, because we're able to accomplish the shoot a whole lot faster than we can with a drone," says Waddell.

Now to those cheaper-than-you-thought prices: airplane services for construction projects start around \$200, while real estate jobs are closer to \$350. The cost of taking the drone up is variable depending on the location and scope of the site.

No matter whether you need photos from high altitude, low altitude or both, Pro Aire has expanded its capabilities and can work closely with clients to meet all their needs in the aspects of aerial photography. For more information, visit the company's website at proaire.com. ■