

# City Beat: Fresno Bee drone is mentioned in WSJ

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/03/17/3828293/fresno-bee-drone-is-mentioned.html>

Posted by George Hostetter on March 17, 2014

Monday's edition of The Wall Street Journal mentioned The Fresno Bee's recent purchase of a drone.

L. Gordon Crovitz's "Information Age" column in Monday's Wall Street Journal is titled "Drones Cleared for Takeoff."

The Federal Aviation Administration is messing things up with its obsessive effort to hamstring commercial use of drones, Crovitz says.

"Regulators have managed to block the development of drones in the U.S. even as this new technology has quickly taken to the skies overseas," he says.

Crovitz writes about the skeptical views of Judge Patrick Geraghty of the National Transportation Safety Board.

Geraghty "ridiculed the FAA's broad assertion of power to regulate drones by saying the agency could use the same argument arbitrarily to block 'a flight in the air of paper aircraft, or a toy balsa wood glider,'" Crovitz writes.

That's when Crovitz gets to The Bee.

"While bureaucrats dither, many U.S. businesses are engaging in regulatory civil disobedience," Crovitz says. "The Fresno Bee recently acquired a drone for gathering news, although other news organizations have received cease-and-desist orders. Director Martin Scorsese used a drone to film a scene in 'The Wolf of Wall Street,' though the FAA has gone after other film companies. Real-estate companies use drones to make videos about properties for sale. Baseball teams including the Washington Nationals use drones to monitor the performance of players during spring training."

Crovitz ends his excellent column with praise for human ingenuity. People are born to tinker and experiment. The results aren't always pretty. But, for the most part, progress can't be stopped.

"Washington's refusal to allow drones to take off is a reminder that most industries in the U.S. remain hostage to slow-moving, risk-averse regulators," Crovitz says. "The freedom to innovate without asking permission should become the rule for all U.S. industries, not the rare exception."

I showed Crovitz's column to Bee Executive Editor Jim Boren on Monday morning. Jim dropped by my desk a few minutes later. His only beef: The Bee with its drone is not engaged in civil disobedience, he said.

The Bee is obeying the law and will continue to do so, Jim said. The Bee is in the experimental stage with its drone, he said. News-gathering technology is constantly evolving and The Bee will stay on top of the changes, he said.

Jim recently had a four-minute interview on Southern California public radio station KPCC.

The drone, he said, "gives us one more opportunity" to cover the news.

He said the drone might be used to cover accidents, fires or effects of the drought. The drone would give Bee consumers the news "from a different angle....It would just be one more camera that our photographers would have."

He said Bee reporters don't go speeding after law-enforcement car chases now and wouldn't use the drone in that way.

It's impossible to say where news-gathering technology will go in the next few years, Jim said.

"We've got to sort all that out," he said. "We will do that in a responsible way."

The Bee's drone is a DJI Phantom 1, I'm told. Total cost for the drone and camera was about \$1,000.

George Hostetter, a Fresno Bee reporter since 1987, knows Fresno and the trappings of its government from the top of his hat to the tip of his shoes, which he wears out with round trips between the office and City Hall.