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MID-CONTINENT

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A Sunshine State of Mind

by JOSH RITTENBERRY



South along the Atlantic coast of Florida, just off Route 1, Aerial Crop Protection is abuzz in Belle Glade, near the ancient Everglades that stretch the tip of the peninsula, continuing a family tradition of aerial application that started more than 50 years ago in the Sunshine State.

In the region known as “The Heartland of Florida” Belle Glade is nicknamed “Muck City,” named so for prevalent muck in the area. Despite the jarring moniker, it is from out of that waterlogged soil, the oh-so-sweet sugarcane grows. With an opportunity to treat sugarcane and other crops, Willie Lee established Lee Aviation there in 1969.

“I actually just happened to fall into it,” Willie says. “My dad had cattle all over the Everglades and in the 1950s when I was 16 years old, I decided it would be easier to check on the cattle in a J-3 Cub. People then started to ask me to chase birds with the Cub. I eventually was asked if I could fly a Stearman and spray for



Mr. Harry Hunter at Glades Dusting Service. That's how it all started."



Before and after WWII Stearmans had become a common trainer for ag pilots. Our own Dick Reade famously trained in a Stearman, and Mid-Continent was later known for modifying Stearmans for many pilots, including the late actor Steve McQueen.

"There were Wacos and Super Cubs, but a Stearman was the first Ag airplane I flew," Willie recalls.

With few options to choose from in an industry that was still young, there were no prominent ag schools, so Willie—like so many pilots of the era—learned as he went, relying on the valuable knowledge of more experienced operators.

"I was mentored by some great pilots: Ted Roman, Harry Hunter, and Earl Davidson. I was 18 when I started dusting, but I had been 14 or 15 when I helped load for those guys."

After 20 years of fruitful business and expansion with the acquisition of Glades Dusting Service, Willie had every intention to retire, so he sold Lee Aviation in 1989. But there was a void in the lives of the family where the business once was. Filling that void in 2000, Willie and his family established Aerial Crop Protection, Inc. with the help of son-in-law and partner Bart Perryman. The fledgling operation began service with just one AT502. Now, the business has two AT502s and a brand new 710 Turbine Thrush, purchased from Mid-Continent.

In addition to sugarcane, Aerial Crop Protection regularly treats sweetcorn, beans and rice from around Naples to Stuart and as far north as Keenansville.

With a skeleton crew to start, the operation now consists of six employees, including mixer and loader Yule and Slim, pilots Dustin Gray and Tito DeLeon, partner Bart Perryman, Willie's daughter and Bart's wife Deena, granddaughter Piper and Willie, himself. "You could definitely say it's a family business through and through," Willie declares.

With business continuing to go strong, the operation is involved in key organizations within the industry: the National Agricultural Aviation Association and the Florida Aerial Applicators Association.



Similar to our friends the Richters on the west coast, Florida operators enjoy work all year round, owing to the favorable climate. But even in this region, there are downsides.



"Many would say that the unpredictable weather would be a con but I believe you have to take what God gives you when it comes to the weather," says Willie.

Many successful businesses are built with the hard work and understanding of loved ones. Aerial Crop Protection is no different. "I have been married to a very understanding and patient woman, Cathy Lee, for 59 years," Willie says proudly. "Cathy and I share two children, four grandchildren, and soon-to-be three great-grandchildren, most of which work in the ag industry."

Honesty and integrity are two important values Aerial Crop Protection holds dear, or as Willie puts it, "if you give someone your word, live up to it."

With the future of the ag industry strong and also changing, Willie is looking forward to what is to come next.

“Ag aviation has drastically changed since I started in terms of new technology. I’m excited for the future of men and women of ag aviation and all the tools they now have to succeed.”



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Congratulations to Bob Peniston of Chillicothe, Missouri (pictured right) for coming out on top as the winner of the Mid-Continent propeller clock silent auction at the Missouri Aerial Applicators Association convention. All proceeds from the auction were donated directly to the association.

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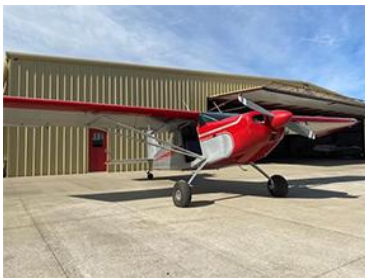
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90.0 A/F TT, Aerosport IO375
210 HP, PMA-8000B Switching
Panel with 4 Place Intercom and
Three Light Markers, Garmin SL-
40 Com, Garmin 430 GPS,
Garmin GTX-330 Transponder,
Garmin 496 GPS (Panel
Mounted),
Digiflight II Autopilot w/ Altitude
Hold, PFD/MFD

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1978 AYRES S2R-600 N4001X

13,066.9 A/F TT, 6365 TT
Engine, 2679.8 TSOH, 750 HP,
Bantam GPS, Smoker, Bottom
Load Fuel, Vortex Generators
(Micro), 190 Gallon Fuel, Wing
Extension Installed, Weatherly
Tail, Zee A/C & Heat

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1989 AIR TRACTOR AT- 402

N1012B

13,025 A/F TT, Left & Right
Bottom Load Fuel, Left & Right
Loader Valve, Flow Control,
Vortex Generator, Heat & A/C,
Aluminum Boom, Satloc GPS

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2008 AIR TRACTOR AT- 602

N132JW

G-4 w/Intelliflow, Smoker, 10"
Hydraulic Gate, Single Pt Fuel,
218 Gallon, Fast Start, Fresh
Annual

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1978 AYRES S2R-T34 N4009J

19,811.85 A/F TT, 750 HP,
Smoker, Vortex Generators,
Single Point Fuel, Aileron Servo,
Winglet, Zee A/C, 500 Gallon
Hopper, 190 Gallon Fuel,
12,173.9 TT Wing Spars
Replaced

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1978 PIPER PAWNEE BRAVE

N3787E

45,950 A/F TT, Lycoming TIO-
540, 1851.0 TT Engine, 446 Hrs
on New Carbine, Cylinders Top
OH, Spreader, Boom & Nozzles,
86 Gal Fuel, Satlock GPS, 3656
Hrs Left on Wing Spars

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1996 THRUSH S2R-G1 N2237D

9688.0.0 A/F TT, Hatfield Bottom
Load Fuel, A/C, Vortex
Generators, New Satlock
Bantam, Flow Control, Stainless
Steel Spray System, AFS Check
Valves, CP Nozzles, Agrinautics
Pump, Lane Electric Brake,
Aircraft Radios, Fresh Eddie
Current, Spar Caps 3220 of



2013 THRUSH S2R-H80 N3046N

3,600 A/F TT, 800 HP, Load
Hawg, VGs, Bottom Fuel/Dual
Load, Intelliflow with Smart
Pump, Leading Edge Lights,
Stainless Steel Booms, Hopper
Rinse, Bantam, Smoker,
Spreader with Kicker Plate, CPs,
MVP 50T Glass Panel



1981 CESSNA A185F N61955

7300 A/F TT, 770 SFRM,
Continental IO520, 285 HP,
Audio Panel w/ 3 Light Markers,
Garmin 430 WAAS, Garmin 255
Com, Garmin GTX 345 w/ ADSM
In and Out, Glide Slope,
Stormscope, S-TEC-50 Auto Pilot
with Altitude Hold, Rosen Sun
Visors, VG Kit, Horton STOL Kit,

6,200 Hour Life

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Float Kit, Cessna Turbo Vents for Cabin Cooling, Backup Altimeter, Backup Artificial Horizon

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**1998 Air Tractor AT-802A
N5094H**

12,152.6 A/F TT, 1230 HP, 2000 SPOH, Reabe Digital Hopper, Quantity & Spray Boom Pressure, E-TEC Inc Fast Start System, Comm Radio, Hemisphere G4 GPS, RT Side Boom Shut Off, Smoker, Hydraulic Gate, Air Conditioner, Wipaire Vortex Generators, Wingman Wing Due at 15,823.2, Gear Due at 12,798.2, Eyebolt Stabilizer Due at 14,798.2, 4479.7 Hobbs

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**1988 AIR TRACTOR AT-
301
N69WN**

8,900 A/F TT, 600 HP, 530.0 SPOH, 320 Gallong Hopper, Ag Pilot X GPS, Flow Control, Smoker, Stainless Steel Boom, Air Conditioner, VGs, Lane Electric Brake, Botton Load Fuel, 25-Inch Gate, 2 Each Spreaders

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**1983 AIR TRACTOR AT-
301
N31580**

9679.2 A/F TT, 600 HP, 550 Engine TT, 350 Gallon Hopper, Bantam GPS W/ G4, Light Bar, Intelliflow, Stainless Steel Boom, Nozzles CP-03, Smoker, A/C, Bottom Load Fuel, New Side Windows

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Tony Curry
February 6



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Mid-Continent Aircraft Corp. is located in Hayti, Missouri, 80 miles north of Memphis, Tennessee. Although Hayti is not the geographical center of our nation, Mid-Continent is the center for all ag aviation needs. With excellent daily truck freight lines, air freight, Federal Express, and UPS delivery capability, MID-CONTINENT has and will continue to cover the world.