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Direction Correction

by JOSH RITTENBERRY



Ben Olsem didn't grow up with plans to become an ag pilot. This all changed as an adult when his cousin, a flight instructor from Mankato, Minnesota, invited him for a test flight. What was meant to be a one-time ride turned out to be the flight that changed the direction of his life forever.

With the goal to become an air traffic controller, Ben was deep in the FAA hiring process in 2012 when a hiring freeze stopped him in his tracks. He and wife Megan had been browsing adverts for airplanes just for fun when Megan came across a grouping of ag planes. The ever-wise Megan suggested purchasing an ag plane and running their own operation would not only satisfy Ben's new goal of becoming a pilot, it would also give them an opportunity to get back to their farming roots. This idea became a seed which saw Ben then fully commit to ag aviation as a career.



Ben had a brief stint in a fisheries and wildlife management training program before he began flight training. "Oh man, I could never be brave enough to do that," he recalls, looking back at local ag pilot Jim Arnt flying over the fields when he was a kid. He was going



to have to muster some bravery as he found himself in line for training at Ag Flight in Bainbridge, Georgia. Ben breezed through the course and along the way developed friendships with a few experienced mentor pilots. Those relationships were invaluable as he grew into the ag aviation Industry.

“When I finished training, I spoke with Jim Arnt about working for him as he was looking toward retirement,” Ben remembers. “Jim suggested that if I was really serious about getting into the industry, I should start my own business, especially since there was a strong need for aerial application in the area. This

encouragement provided the spark which put me on a path to establishing my own operation, Olsem Aerial Application Services.”

Like many startups, The Olsem’s operation began with just Ben and Megan at the helm. With time, their business has grown significantly to include at least two dozen employees made up of pilots, ground crew, and managers.

“A big leap occurred when the business transitioned from operating a Pawnee to acquiring Ag Cats and Turbine Thrush aircraft,” Ben says. “This shift involved significant investment and marked a step forward in capability. 2025 has also been a major milestone year, with the purchase of Hoppe Airspray.”

Since his early days in business, Ben had known Dan Tonner largely because they used the same maintenance shop. Over time, Dan became a mentor and friend, and in Dan’s mind, Ben was always the guy he saw taking over Hoppe Airspray. Ben didn’t realize it until the offer was made real.

“I saw the challenge and felt ready for it and wanted to take on the Hoppe Airspray legacy.”

As a first generation ag pilot, Ben runs the family businesses alongside wife Megan. True to the tightknit nature of the ag aviation Industry, The Olsem’s have made friends who are like family while working in the business. Olsem Aerial Application Services and Hoppe Airspray continue to serve large swaths of Minnesota and Iowa, using a trusted team of seasonal ground crew and pilots. While the business operates in multiple locations, its still keep the focus on relationships and reliability. It is for that reason and more that their slogan is, “Built for the field, backed by family.”

The future of ag aviation can sometimes appear uncertain, but Ben believes aerial application isn’t going anywhere.

“It will always be an essential tool for farmers. While there’s a lot of hype around drone technology, it’s not quite there yet. Operators will have to adopt new technology. Traditional aerial application remains crucial, and I don’t see that changing anytime soon.”

Looking back on his success thus far, Ben sees the importance of humility and listening to mentors.

“I wouldn’t be where I am today without people like Dan Tonner and others who helped guide me. There are plenty of people interested in business, but it’s important to be willing to listen and learn from those who have been around and have experience in the industry. I am beyond grateful for those who have helped me along the way.”



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- Reabe Hoppe Gauge
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- Rudder Wrap
- Custom Paint Stripe
- Dual Cockpit

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- Bantam
- Flow Control
- Smoker
- Leading Edge Lights
- Garmin G5
- Load Hawg
- VGs
- SS Booms

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2021 THRUSH S2R-T34 N919PB

2,414 A/F TT, 2,414 Engine TT, 750 HP, 4 Blade, Bantam, Flow Control, MCAC Single Point Fuel, Kayak Throttle, Leading Edge Lights, Garmin G5, Load Hawk, VGs, Smoker, SS Booms

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1975 CESSNA A188B N9482R

4,219.9 A/F TT, Engine 0 SMOH, 900 SPOH, AG-PILOT-X GPS, SMOKER, VGS, SPREADER

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2023 THRUSH S2R-T660 N2427C

696 A/F TT, Dual Cockpit w/Seat, Hopper Rinse, Leading Edge Lights, 7.5" Electrical Gate, Reabe Hopper Packer, Level Indicator, Smoker, Lane Electrical Brake, Kayak Throttle Quadrant, Falcon Satlock, Radio-Parr-200 Com, Garmin G-5 Attitude Indicator, Smoker, CP-11 Nozzles, Intelliflow, Bottom Load Fuel, Spreader, Garmin-3325, Transponder with ADS-B Out



2021 THRUSH S2R-510P N534PW

875 Engine TT, 750 HP, Left Wing Landing Light, Tall Stick, Hatfield Bottom Load Fuel, Load Hawk, Standard Booms with CP-11 Nozzles, Reabe Hopper Quantity Gauge, Hopper Rinse, Smoker, Storm Shield Windshield, Ag Pilot X, Garmin G5, Garmin GTR-22f Comm Radio with ADS-B Out, Flow Control

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2011 THRUSH S2R-T34 N986MM

7,269.65 A/F TT, 750 HP, Leading Edge Lights, Cascade, Micro Vortex Generators, SS Booms, New Tailspring, Smoker, Single Point Fuel, Bantam GPS w Intelliflow, MVP-50T Glass Panel

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2017 THRUSH CASCADE-140 CONVERSION N813MC

4,500 A/F TT, 1,654.2 TSMOH, 4 blade Hartzell Prop 561.07 SNEW, Converted 2022, Cascade 140 Conversion with Lights, Hydraulic Gate, VGs, Smoker, Electric Brake, Leading Edge Lights, Load Hawk, Hopper Rinse, SS Booms, CP Nozzles, G4 & FC, MVP50, Fast Start, Side Load Fuel

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2021 THRUSH 510P2+ N912MC

1,670 A/F TT, 867 HP, MVP50, G4 & FC, Reabe Gate (Electric), Load Hawk, VGs, Hopper Rinse, Smoker, Electric Brake, Leading Edge Lights, Reabe Hopper



2025 THRUSH 510P2 N877MC

NEW, Smoker, Leading Edge Armor



2021 THRUSH S2R-T660 N701NW

1,439 A/F TT, AG Pilot X GPS, AG Laser Altimeter, CP11 Nozzles, Lane Brake and Fan, Stainless Steps, AFS CCheck Valves, Fast Start, Garmin

Gauge, SS Booms, CPII Nozzles,
Side Load Fuel

Comm Radio, AFS Booms,
Reabe Hopper Gauge, Garmin
Transponder, ADS-B Out,
Swathmaster Spreader

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**1964 CESSNA 172/180
CONVERSION
N7834U**

5499.15 A/F TT, 624 SMOH,
Bush Stol Kit, Flap gap seals,
AVCOM Lycoming 180 HP
Engine Conversion, Grime
Strobe, Flasing Tail Beacon,
Vertical Card Compass, Landing
& Taxi Lights, Pilot and Co-Pilot
Articulating Seats, Narco MK 12
D Nav/Com, Narco AT-150
Transponder and Encoder, Two-
Place Intercom, Garmin 560 GPS

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**1970 CESSNA 182N
SKYLANE
N9051G**

3,462 AF TT, Continental 0470,
134 SMOH, 239 SPOH,
PMA60000B 4-place intercom
with Three Light Markers, Garmin
GNS 430 WAAS w/ Glide Slope,
King KX-155 Nav/Com with Glide
Slope, KN62-DME, GARMIN
GTX 345 Transponder with
Encoder and ADSB in-out, King
KFC 200 Autopilot with Flight
Director, HSI, GPS Slaving,
Control Wheel Stearing and AP
Disconnect, Electric Trim, Dual
PTP Switches, Wingtip Strobes,
Flashing Tail Beacon, Ridder
Trim, Pilot and Co-pilot
Articulating Seats, Shoulder
harness, Insight Graphic Engine
Monitor 610, Vented Fuel Caps,
Precise Flight Standby Vacuum
System

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**2019 THRUSH S2R-T660
N5119C**

1771.59 A/F TT, 1,350 HP,
Falcon GPS/Flow Control, Reabe
Hopper Quantity Spray Boom
Pressure, Aire Repair Fast Start,
Transland 7.5 Reabe Electric
Gate, Kawak Throttle Quadrant,
New Battery Plate Assembly,
Load Hawg, Garmin G5 Flight
Instrument, Garmin GTR-225
Comm, Garmin GTX345 TXP

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**2012 AIR TRACTOR AT-402B
N402Z**

4,602.3 A/F TT, 4,602.3 TT
Engine, 750 HP, Smoker, Bottom
Load Fuel, Bantam w/ Intelliflow,
Nav Lights & Strobe, Garmin
Comm, Garmin TXP, Garmin
Audio Panel, Nose Lights, AC &
Heat, 4 Bladed Pump,
Windshield Wiper & Washer

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**2022 THRUSH S2R-T660
N549LG**

1,159 AF TT, 1,159 Engine TT
SNEW, 1,300 HP, 5-Blade
Hartzell Prop, Satloc G4/IF3,
Electric Fan Brake, Smoker,
Reabe Hopper Gauge, Load
Hawg, 2" Spray System w/
Agrinautics Pump, Rudder Wrap,
Custom Paint Stripe, Dual
Cockpit

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**2022 THRUSH S2R-T660
N710NW**

Duel Cockpit/Single Control,
Single Point Fuel, MVP-50T, A/C
& Heat, Garmin G5, 3-inch Side
Load System, 2-inch Spray
System, Streamlined Aluminum
Booms, Hopper Rinse System,
HSBO Half Boom Shut
Off/RBSO, GTX-327 w/ GDL82
(ADS-B Out), GTR 225, Large
Lane Brake, 6 Blade Fans, CP-
11 TT Nozzles, K10-65P1 AFS
Check Valves, CP-06 Swivel

Night Working Lights & Taxi,
Leading Edge Lights, Smoker,
Reabe Hopper Gauge, Aglaser
Altimeter, Transland Spreader,
LAD Valve Dry Brake, SS Steps,
Fast Start, Tinted Windows, USB
Charge Point, Move Hopper
Rinse Fill, Cascade Pressure
Cowl

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2025 THRUSH 510P2+
N359MC
NEW, Dual Cockpit

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1976 PIPER PAWNEE
N312MM
6,067 A/F TT, Lycoming O-540-
132C5, 9,335.48 TTE, 540.0
TSMOS, Salto Lite Star 3 Boom,
CP-3 Nozzle

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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.

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