



Office of Civil Rights

Veteran Soars in Civilian Life with Drone Business That's Changing the Game

In honor of National Disability Employment Month, Caltrans is spotlighting Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise Cardinal Aerial Photography to showcase subcontractor diversity.

For Tony Parker, a U.S. Army veteran and seasoned aviation professional, life after military service didn't mean grounding his passion for flight — it just meant changing the vehicle. Today, Parker is flying high as the founder of Cardinal Aerial Photography, a certified Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise (DVBE) that uses drones to provide 3D imaging of hard-to-reach infrastructure.

"I'm having the time of my life," Parker said. "Drones can be used in so many facets, but lately I have been focusing on cell tower inspections."

Traditional cell tower inspections typically require two to three technicians, multiple vehicles, and several days of work. This costs around \$5,000. But Parker says he can do the job in 20 minutes with one drone — for half the price, and with better data.



"It's a different size vehicle, but the rules are pretty much the same," said Parker, whose aviation credentials include working for NASA and a 20-year stint as a lead aircraft mechanic for a large commercial airline.

Parker's path to entrepreneurship began in St. Louis, Missouri, where he was born and raised. After initially pursuing a career in education, he joined the Army at age 26, serving as a helicopter crew chief. After a foot injury, his enlistment ended, but he continued his aviation career in the civilian sector.

In August 2019, Parker launched Cardinal Aerial Photography in Sacramento, leveraging both his mechanical expertise and his military training. The business also provides real estate photography and live

streaming of 3D infrastructure models. Drones are also used to provide aerial mapping and disaster relief.

“Drones can give a real-time 3D model of a structure or accident scene,” Parker said. “It’s information delivered instantly via live stream, when seconds count.”

As a veteran and small business owner, Parker’s advice to other disabled veterans interested in entrepreneurship is simple but heartfelt: “Follow your dreams and don’t quit. Eventually, it will come around.”

For Parker, that dream is now reality — one drone flight at a time.

Visit Caltrans’ Civil Rights program webpage to get certified as a [Disadvantaged Business Enterprise](#), or visit the Department of General Services [Cal eProcure](#) website for information on [Disabled Veteran Business Enterprise or Small Business Certification](#).